

Know Your Bible Better

(With a Section for Common Questions and Their
Biblical Answers)

Wilson N. Macharia

Know Your Bible Better

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Introduction

One early morning of December, 1999, I left my home in Gĩkoe, Mũrang'a County, on foot to go and take a vehicle at a place called Maĩira to bring me to Nairobi. The area was awash with the annual tea bonus and people were doing what they had not afforded to do for the whole year: drink until they blacked out.

On my way I reached a place where I saw a young man, probably in his late twenties, lying in a drainage ditch on the side of the road. Not knowing whether he was dead or alive, I drew close and stood about a metre away, wondering how to help.

Just then, a lady coming from the opposite direction arrived, and upon seeing surprise on my face told me, even without touching the man, "This one is still alive. People do not die clenching their fists. They must show that they have not carried anything physical from this side of the world." Indeed when the man was poked with a stick, he woke up and, embarrassed to see himself lying in a ditch surrounded people, left for home without uttering a word.

This lady's words reminded me of the Bible, the book that shows one how to make the most of this life and also what to do to have something to carry to the next world. Unfortunately, though the desire to study and understand the message of this unique book exists in almost everybody, most people upon buying the Bible put it in the bookshelf to gather dust there because of not knowing where to start in studying it.

But the Bible is simple and anybody can understand it. And despite its simplicity, it is the only book that satisfactorily explains the truth about creation and God's plans for people. Unlike the evolutionists and their guess work, the Bible explains with unmatched consistency and authority how the world came into existence, where we came from, where we are going, etc. By not reading the Bible, you will

have missed the wisdom of the most insightful book on earth. Even worse, you may deny yourself the most important gift that God gives, the everlasting life through Christ Jesus.

In this small book that I have excerpted from my bigger one entitled *Jesus Christ the Key to Knowledge*, I seek to give you an overview of the message of the Bible so that you can have an easier time when you start to study God's Word in texts.

In this world, you have an enemy called the devil. He is actually your real enemy, not fellow men. And the Bible in Isaiah 14:17 says that this enemy has made this world *as a wilderness*. And like Jesus in the wilderness, as recorded in Matthew chapter 4, we are to use the Word of God to deal with the devil. The devil is tricky to the extent where many who rely on their human knowledge are serving him while thinking that they are fighting him. (Not so long ago, BBC reported about a community in Australia where more than a third of the population smokes, as a result of which their life expectancy is comparatively very low. And they do so because they believe smoke wards off evil spirits while the truth is that it actually destroys tissues of their vital organs.) As we see in Psalm 119:105, God's Word ought to be the lamp to guide your feet as you go through this life. False teachers encourage potential victims and those whom they have won to focus on the unknowns that the Bible is silent on while avoiding what God's Word clearly teaches. And the devil's underlying aim in all this is to introduce theological confusion so that people become blinded so as not to know Jesus, the only way of Salvation. Read 2 Corinthians 4:4. In Hosea 4:6 God says that His people are destroyed—by the devil and his agents, of course—for lack of knowledge. And this is the knowledge that comes from reading and understanding the Bible.

If your faith is based on the opinions of men, you will keep being moved to and fro by every wind of doctrine. But if your faith is based on what God's Word says, you will have stability in your walk with God because God's Word doesn't change. The other reason for studying God's Word and obeying it is that when we die, we will

stand before the Lord who inspired the Bible for judgment. We shall not stand before those people who are so passionate to influence us by their opinions.

There is nothing wrong with physical developments of the church, but the local church is not a building; it is the body of born-again believers, and its main mandate is to preach Christ, Matthew 28:19,20. It is highly commendable that some of us are not only preaching Christ but also giving out free Bibles. But if we do not want these Bibles remain in shelves or be studied selectively, we ought to accompany them with Bible study literature as a way of promoting the culture of discipling in the church.

You may have heard people say that Kenyans do not like Kiswahili Bible study materials or resources written in languages other than English. But that is not true. It is just that those who need Bible study resources that are written in languages other than English do not know that they exist, or they lack money to buy them. Such include people in slums and prisoners. It is the high time we started buying Bible study resources and giving them to those who need them as part of witnessing to them and grounding them in the faith. Cults give their resources freely all the time, yet they not more endowed financially than Bible-believers. It is just that our priorities are upset.

Apart from the believers increasing in number, the growth of the church is when the Christians are grounded in the faith through biblical teaching so that members are able to use God's Word to explain what they believe and why they believe what they believe. In these days that are characterized by a proliferation of false teachers, the way to guard believers from error is to ensure that they understand the Bible. God's Word is the truth, John 17:17. It is not possible for you to know when false teachers are seeking to draw you into error if you have not known the truth in the first place.

Jesus Christ in Matthew 13:22 warned about people who would hear the Word but become unfruitful as a result of the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. And we are all too familiar

with this today. Believers have forsaken Christ's Great Commission as churches become like clubs where people meet to socialize and make business contacts but make no time to study the Word of God so as to become effective witnesses of the Gospel. It is not possible to do that effectively if you have not known the Bible. To be an effective servant of the Lord, the command in 2 Timothy 2:15 is, *Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing [interpreting] the word of truth.* In fact it should be your goal that if practicable, you make sure that everyone whom you win to Christ has at least a functional understanding of the Bible, for instance, who God's Word says Jesus is and who the believers are in Him. This is the way to fulfil the second part of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20 by equipping those you win to Christ to become winners of souls also. We have Christians who stick with whatever they learn from God's Word for their benefit alone. But that is not what God wants. According to 2 Timothy 2:2, we are to commit what we learn to faithful men (believers) who shall in turn be able to teach others also. That is how to effectively spread the kingdom of God.

Reading 1 Timothy 2:2 and 4 reveals that the purpose of praying for kings and those in authority is to live a peaceable life that facilitates the preaching of the Gospel so that people may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Unfortunately in Kenya when we pray—especially during the time of elections—and peace follows, we then squander it by not using the harmonious environment to witness Christ to those who have never heard a clear presentation of the redemption story while at the same time grounding those who already know Christ in the faith through Bible study. As exhorted in Ephesians 1:18, we ought to pray that the eyes of our people's understanding be opened so that they get to know the riches of glory that await believers in heaven and re-order their priorities. Christ is about to return, and the church needs to redeem the time as it strives to reach the unreached with the Gospel. We cannot afford drama and politics at the pulpit at this late hour.

Part One

THE REDEMPTION STORY

Chapter One

Creation of Heaven and Earth

Behind every creation is the creator, and behind heaven and earth and all that is there is the Creator, whom we call God. God is the self-existent One who was there before the beginning of all things. He is greater than all His creation combined. As we establish from Jeremiah 23:24, He fills heaven and earth. God's creation may change, but He remains the same. Actually by calling Himself I AM THAT I AM in Exodus 3:14, it shows that His existence does not depend on anyone or anything—including time!

God is a spirit and therefore cannot be seen with our physical eyes. Neither can we know the plan He has for His creation unless He reveals it to us. And He has done this in His Word, the Bible.

The fact that the Bible is the message of the true God is evident from the very first verse which reads: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.* This verse teaches us that the God of the Scriptures is the one who existed before all the things He created. This verse also highlights the key difference between the true God and idols, that is, creating heaven and earth. The difference between the true God and idols is that the true God created heaven and earth and everything that is there; in fact idols are referred to in Jeremiah 10:11 *as the gods that did not make the heavens and the earth.*

(There is a group that teaches that the true God has only one Name, Jehovah. But really, Jehovah is but one of God's Names. Moreover, what matters is not the name you use to address God

but to know that the One whom you are speaking to or about is the Maker of heaven and earth and everything that therein is, the One in whom, according to Acts 17:28, we live, and move, and have being. All creation derives its existence from God.)

God's creation reveals His majesty and power. We see the invisible things of God, including His greatness, through the things that He has created, Romans 1:20. Psalm 19 opens with these words: *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament [sky] sheweth his handiwork.* And in Psalm 145:3 the same Psalmist says: *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable.* God is so great that His greatness is incomprehensible. It actually inspires awe and reverence.

God is all-knowing. There is nothing that is hidden from Him. Even when God is asking a question, He does not do so to get information but to make people aware of their sinful condition. Proverbs 21:30 says that there is no wisdom, nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord. God is the source of wisdom and knowledge. Psalm 147:5 says that His understanding is infinite. And so in James 1:5 we are advised that if we lack wisdom, we should ask of it from God, through prayer, of course.

The other thing to know is that God is everywhere. Temples and tabernacles were just symbols of His presence. The Psalmist in Psalm 139 beginning verse 7 acknowledged that he could not flee from God's presence.

When it comes to power and might, the Bible says that with God nothing is impossible. We would be limiting God by imagining that He can only do what our minds can comprehend. He is actually able to do exceedingly above all that we ask or think.

With the God behind the Bible, nothing is impossible, Luke 1:37. Also, nothing is hidden from Him. He knows everything, *declaring the end from the beginning*, Isaiah 46:10. God is the One who makes whatever happens to happen so as to serve His purpose. The Bible sets forth the truth about what happened in the past, what was prophesied to happen today—like the increase of knowledge,

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Daniel 12:4, and people becoming lovers of pleasure, 2 Timothy 3:4—and what will certainly happen in future, for example what is recorded in the book of Revelation. So, do not look for philosophers to interpret the Bible for you. You understand God's Word by allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture.

God is the One who created time, but He does not change with it. This is evident from Malachi 3:6 and Psalm 90 verse 2.

God is the standard of holiness as we see in 1 Samuel 2:2. Everything that He does is right and the trademark of all that He does is love. (You should never entertain any doubt about what the Bible says concerning God's holiness, His faithfulness, His goodness, or His ability. If you did so, you would hurt Him like the Jews in Numbers 14:11.)

God is the ultimate expression of goodness, kindness and mercy. He is the One who gives life and sustains it. We come into this world with nothing, and He gives us food, clothes and shelter and all other necessities of life. Actually in 1 Corinthians 4:7 NKJV we are asked, *And what do you have that you did not receive?* It is even worth mentioning that God created this world with the ability to support many more people and animals than it does today. It is the devil who has inspired greed, making a few hoard or misdirect resources to support unnecessary wars, etc., giving the impression that there isn't enough to support everyone and everything.

In view of the fact that all creation derives its existence from God, the Bible is clear concerning who should be given all spiritual worship—THE LORD YOUR GOD. Jesus in Luke 4:8 told the devil, *Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.*

The next question that we will ask now is, why did God create heaven and earth and all that there is, including us people? The answer is that God is sovereign, and He created everything that He created for His pleasure. This we see in Revelation 4:11. This is also to say that God does not owe anybody an explanation for whatever He decides to do with His creation.

Chapter Two

How the Bible Is Structured

Let us now see how the Bible as a book is structured. Although the Bible was written by people using pen and ink, the message in it is from God. And God did not just inspire the thoughts, He inspired the very words. The Bible is God's message to man as communicated through His Holy Spirit; prophets merely conveyed what God said. This is what the Bible says in 2 Peter 1:21: *For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man:* but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. And the fact that they kept repeating the words "Thus saith the Lord" is additional proof that what they said did not originate with them; it was from the Lord God.

The Bible is not one of many sacred writings. The Bible alone is the Word of God. Actually no other book makes this claim. It is not even enough to say the Bible contains the Word of God. The whole Bible is the Word of God. God did not inspire a section of the Bible; He inspired the whole of it. We read in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God. Even the Old Testament books that are described as Minor Prophets are not less inspired compared to those that are called Major Prophets. They are thus categorized because of their size.

No book in this world compares with the Bible. Someone has said that if all the books ever written were to be put next to the Bible, it would be like placing a candle next to the sun. The Bible is the book that tells about God's plan for man. It is also the book that tells truthfully about the devil and his kingdom, the way of salvation, and how to avoid sin and how to live a victorious Christian life. The Bible is the one that shows people how to live a holy life, whether people are young or old, Psalm 119:9 and 2 Timothy 3:15.

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The Bible is the biggest book with a running theme that has ever been written. It contains 66 books with a total of 1189 chapters. There are many books that some regard to be on par with the Bible but upon carefully scrutinizing them, one realizes they have no central message; what they contain are disjointed sayings of men.

The Bible has a central character, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is mentioned directly or alluded to in prophecy in every one of the 66 books that make up God's Word.

The Bible has a central message or thesis statement which is recorded in John 20:31. Here, we see that the aim of God's Word is to make the reader know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life through His Name. God never does anything without a purpose, even when inspiring His Word. You see, God will never cease to be a mystery, so do not feel bothered by the fact that you cannot answer questions like "Where did God come from?" In Deuteronomy 29:29 we read that the hidden things belong unto God. In fact what He reveals about Himself in the Bible is just what facilitates knowing the Way of salvation, serving Him and fellowshiping with Him.

There are many ways to prove that the Bible is not man's literature. According to well-researched history, it was written by about 40 different writers for a period of about 1600 years. And though these writers lived in different times and places, there are no contradictions in the Bible. The Bible has a unity of thought that proves that it was inspired by one mind, the mind of God.

Moreover as you relate prophecy to history, you realize that man's literature could not foretell the future with the detail and accuracy that we see in the Bible. Even today's technological advancement is foretold in the Bible, for instance in Daniel 12:4, where we see prophecy to the effect that in the last days knowledge shall increase, with many running to and fro. And despite the fact that scientists were still working hard in ages past, the present technological advancement had to wait until its time, since Scripture had to be fulfilled. God is still the one who opens people's minds to make what

we consider major discoveries. And He does it when the fullness of His time comes because even technology must serve His purpose.

There are things that modern science is discovering today that the Bible had revealed ages ago. For instance, Galileo discovered that the earth is round about 14 centuries after Christ, yet as early as 700 years before Christ, Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 40:22 had revealed that the earth is round when he referred to the Lord as the One who sits on the circle of the earth. Earlier, still, the Bible in Job 26:7 had revealed that God hangs the earth upon nothing. And the reason why the Scriptures when they were being written contained information that was not known to people and that took long to verify is because the Bible is authored of God who knows everything.

The best method to study the Bible is to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. As we see in 2 Peter 1:20, we should not give the Bible private interpretation. When we read a Scripture, we ought to look into the same Bible for the place where God has inspired its interpretation. That is how we get its intended meaning.

The Bible is the book that tells about God, how God created heaven and earth and everything that is there and His plan concerning people. The Bible is one unfolding story that is divided into two main parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. God relates to people by means of covenants, also called testaments.

There are some people who claim to believe the New Testament and disbelieve the Old or vice versa. But they do so out of ignorance. The two testaments are inextricably linked. Jesus and the apostles believed the Old Testament as evident from the fact that they quoted it. Jesus Christ is the central character in God's Word. In the Old Testament, Jesus is referred to in prophecy. Jesus in Luke 24:25 wanted people to believe all that the prophets in the Old Testament had spoken about Him. The New Testament is about Jesus revealed.

Events in the Bible are not necessarily recorded in the order in which they occurred. Although the book of Job, for instance, is close to the middle of the Old Testament, events recorded in it appear to have occurred before the Law of Moses was given. Nehemiah,

one of the last Old Testament books is positioned in the middle, even before Job.

The Old Testament, with a total of 39 books, tells of creation, beginning of sin in heaven through Lucifer and its entry into the world through the Fall or sinning of the first man. It also gives a detailed account of God's dealing with the Jews as He set the stage for the coming of Jesus through them so as to deal with the sin of the world.

The New Testament comprises 27 books and tells of the coming of Jesus, His earthly ministry, death and resurrection. It then tells of Christ's return to heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the beginning and the growth of the New Testament church and how to live a victorious Christian life.

As mentioned earlier, the central character in the Word of God is Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, He is referred to in prophecy, whereas the New Testament is about Christ revealed. In the Old Testament books like the Major and Minor prophets, the prophet would start by addressing the issues of the Children of Israel of his day. Then at some point he would speak about a time when the Messiah would come—referring to Him using veiled terms, like the BRANCH in Jeremiah 23:5 and Zechariah 3:8—and the Gentiles, who were “without God”, see the light, being reconciled to God by the blood of Christ.

Both testaments also contain prophecy on the last things in God's plan. These include the rapture of the church, appearance of the believers at the judgement seat of Christ for rewards and the marriage supper of the Lamb, revelation of the Beast here on earth and the tribulation that will follow, the second coming of Jesus and His 1000-year reign from Jerusalem, the white throne judgement and the coming of the new heaven and new earth. With the devil and his cohorts out of the scene by being thrown into the lake of fire, the sinless state that existed at the beginning will have been restored.

The Bible got complete with the revelation that John received at the island of Patmos, and no so-called prophetic revelation that comes later qualifies to be added to the lines of Scripture.

Chapter Three

Sin Starts in Heaven

The things the Bible speaks about have happened, and those that are yet to happen must happen without failure, whether they sound hard to comprehend or not. With God all things are possible, Matthew 19:26.

God is unlike us in that His word has creative power, calling into being things that did not exist. God created all things out of nothing; He created them just by His Word. All He needed to say was “Let there be”, and there was. This may sound hard for our minds to imagine, yet this inability to comprehend how God created what He created is actually a confirmation that God’s power is beyond what we can conceive. If we expected to understand how God does everything that He does, we would be limiting His ability to ours, yet we are not God ourselves. We should believe what God’s Word says about Him without demanding for verification.

There are people who try to discredit the biblical account of creation that God is One who created heaven and earth. Such people reason that the universe came about when a particle exploded, and that evolution has taken place ever since, producing whatever we see. But this world is too orderly to be the product of random, unguided change in the name of evolution. Furthermore, evolutionists have never explained where that initial particle that supposedly evolved into the world and the things in it came from. Besides, if people evolved from monkeys, why do we still have monkeys? Even if we were to believe that living things came from stones, why do we still have stones and living things today? Wouldn’t everything be in the same phase of evolution? The truth is that people did not evolve from lower life form. Contrary to the teaching that the Western media so passionately propagates, we did not come from trees. God created people as distinct from animals and even different types of animals as distinct, from the beginning (Genesis 1:24), and when

they reproduce, every creature produces after its own kind. As we continue with our study, we realize that it is the Evil One who inspires false teaching that people evolved from animals with the motive of making his followers to ignore God's Word when they are thinking about creation. Evolution is like creating self because no one else is involved in the supposed changing process. But the Bible in Psalm 100:3 emphasizes that it is God who made us, not we ourselves. We people, who are visible, were created by God who is a Spirit (John 4:24) and hence invisible. This is the same fact that is being communicated in Hebrews 11:3b where the Bible says that the things which are seen were not made of (or created by) things which do appear (are visible).

God is still the one who created the unseen beings called angels. This we see in Psalm 148:2-5. In heaven are millions of angels who minister to Him.

Initially, all the angels that God created were loyal to Him, worshipping and serving Him. Chief among those angels was Lucifer who, according to Ezekiel 28 verse 12, was full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. Prophets did not only speak about things happening during their time. God would sometimes make them see the future or take them back in time to get a glimpse of events that took place before them. In Isaiah chapter 14, for instance, we see Prophet Isaiah taken back in time and shown what caused the downfall of Lucifer. According to Isaiah 14 beginning verse 13 Lucifer had said in his heart, *I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High.* This was the first time that one of God's creation failed to give Him the glory due to His Name and thus committed the first sin ever.

The effect of this sin that Lucifer committed in heaven is recorded in the Bible also. We see in Ezekiel 28:16 that he was cast *as profane* [having no respect for God or holy things] *out of the mountain of God.* That is how Lucifer became Satan, meaning, the enemy of

God. The Bible in Revelation 12:4 makes us aware that about 1/3 of all angels in heaven, referred to as *stars*, followed Lucifer in rebellion and were cast out also. (Unlike God, Satan cannot be in many places at the same time. What he has are many workers, the host of angels that fell with him and became demons.) According to Matthew 25:41, an everlasting fire is reserved for Satan, the angels who followed him in disobedience and the people who do not obey God.

Today, Satan still has access to heaven where he goes to accuse people who believe in God as we see in Revelation 12:10. But he is not allowed access to the mountain of God which, apparently, is a more exalted place in heaven. In Job 1:6 is reference to Satan following the sons of God, whom we assume are the royal angels, as they went to present themselves before the Lord. Another evidence of his going up there is Luke 10:18 where Jesus saw Satan falling as lightning from heaven. However, we read in Revelation 12:12 that a time is coming when he will be fought out of heaven, never to go back there.

The beginning of sin brought about the existence of another kingdom. Since the beginning, there had been only one spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of God. The other spiritual kingdom that came into existence with the onset of sin is the kingdom of the devil, also called the kingdom of darkness. Those in this kingdom are Satan, the angels who fell with him and, after the fall of man, those people who live in disobedience to the will of God.

Chapter Four

Entry of Sin into the World

Once God created heaven and earth and everything that is there, He then made a very important creation—MAN. Unlike the way He created other things, God did not just say “Let there be” when it came to creating man. According to Genesis 2:7, God formed man out of the dust of the ground, breathed into man’s nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. Zechariah 12:1 reminds us of 2 major things that the Lord did: stretching forth the heavens and laying the foundation of the earth and forming the spirit of man within him. Genesis 1:26 tells us about how God made the decision to create man. Genesis chapter 2 reveals how God went about creating man. In Psalm 119:73 the Psalmist acknowledges having been made and fashioned by the hands of God.

Man is made up of body, soul and spirit. According to 1 Corinthians 2:11 the spirit that God breathed into man is the source of man’s intellect—and of course will and emotions. Animals like cows and goats also have a body. But the reason they don’t think is because God did not breathe anything into them at creation. The spirit which God breathed into man is what makes us to be said to be created in the image of God and gives us the capacity to relate with God, for example through prayer. It is what goes out of a person when he or she dies and goes back to God *who gave it*. This we learn from Ecclesiastes 12:7. Indeed according to James 2:26, the body without the spirit is dead. Dust of the earth represents the physical body that is buried when a person dies, and scientists have found that the human body is made up of the same elements found in the soil, again supporting the biblical account of the creation of man.

Before God, man is more important than animals that God created. Man is the crown of God’s creation and was created to

have dominion over God's other creation. God has even given man honour over the angels. We read in Hebrews 2:5 that God has not put in subjection to angels the world to come. People are the ones who will rule with Christ. According to the same book of Hebrews, angels are ministering spirits, ministering to partakers of salvation. Even the human being's physical features are beautiful to look at. In Psalm 139:14, the Psalmist observes that he is fearfully and wonderfully made.

In Genesis 2:8 the Bible makes us aware of a garden in Eden where God put the man He had created. Verses 21 onwards describe how God made the woman out of the rib of the man. And all was well until tragedy struck, as recorded in Genesis chapter 3.

Going back to Genesis chapter 2 beginning verse 16, we see that God had allowed man to eat of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had warned in verse 17: *for [because] in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

But as we see in Genesis chapter 3, Lucifer, who had committed the first sin in heaven, becoming Satan or *serpent* as we see in Revelation 12:9, tempted man in the Garden of Eden. Man yielded to the serpent's temptation by eating of the tree that God had commanded him not to eat of. At that point, sin, which had started in heaven, entered into the world.

The fall of Adam and Eve was not an isolated event without consequences today. Since that time to this day, all people, being descendants of Adam, are born in sin. The Bible in Romans 5:12 says that *as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.* The sinning of Adam made us, his offspring, sinners too. The origin of all the problems that are in this world is the devil, the thief referred to in John 10:10, who comes to steal, to kill and to destroy.

There are people who try to justify what Adam and Eve did, arguing that sin was necessary in order to provide parentage. But the first sin could not have been sexual sin. Neither is celibacy

necessarily holiness. Adam and Eve were man and wife and, as we read in Hebrews 13:4, marriage is honourable in all and the bed undefiled. Indeed as early as in Genesis 1:28, the Lord wanted the people He created to multiply, yet sin took place in Genesis chapter 3.

But God was not caught unprepared by the entry of sin. The Bible in Acts 15:18 says He knows all His works (plans) from the beginning of the world. Immediately Adam sinned, God cursed the ground for Adam's sake, saying that Adam would eat from the sweat of his face until he returned to the ground from where he had been taken. God also cursed the serpent and put enmity between the serpent's *seed* and that of the woman. But apart from that, God in Genesis 3:15 made the greatest promise ever: He promised that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head and that the serpent would bruise His heel. This is to say that a Person in the family line of man would bruise the devil's head, thus dealing a blow to sin. This is the first promise of the Saviour; actually this Scripture has come to be known as the first gospel.

Just as Lucifer sinned in heaven and became God's enemy, sin (iniquity) brought a separation or enmity between God and man, Isaiah 59:2. From then on, God started a family line through which Jesus, who is the seed of the woman promised by God as clarified in Galatians 4:4, would be born to bruise the head of the serpent by His death on the cross and reconcile man to God. Key persons in the genealogy of our Lord are listed in Luke chapter 3 beginning verse 23, and actually that lineage goes back to Adam, who was *the son of God* by creation.

The Children of Israel and Coming of Christ

Generally, history that is recorded in the Bible focuses on people, places and events within God's plan of reconciling people to Himself. After Adam sinned and was chased out of the Garden of Eden, he and his wife Eve bore children. The first one was Cain and the second one Abel. Apparently God intended the lineage of the Saviour to follow Abel. As recorded in Genesis 4:4, the Lord respected Abel and his offering. Out of jealousy, however, Cain killed Abel. But nobody can frustrate God's plan. The Lord made Eve to give birth to another son called Seth to perpetuate the lineage of the Messiah.

Apparently Eve was aware that one of her children was going to be in the lineage of the promised Messiah and that it was not going to be Cain. As a result she acknowledged in Genesis 4:25 that God had appointed her another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.

From here, we see in Genesis chapter 5 righteous people like Enoch, who walked with God until God took him. Enoch was the grandfather of Lamech, and Lamech was the father of Noah. Noah's children were Shem, Ham and Japheth.

As people multiplied on earth, the sons of God married the daughters of men. This culminated in collective judgment when the Lord sent the flood. (There are people who think *the sons of God* mentioned in Genesis 6:22 are angels. But though we have a case of angels being referred to as sons of God—Job 1:6—we also have evidence in Mark 12:25 that angels do not marry. This leaves us to assume that the evil action referred to here was marriage that unequally yoked the godly line of Seth with the ungodly people.)

Noah, who was righteous in God's eyes, his wife, his sons and

their wives were saved from the flood that drowned the rest of the people. And as we see in Genesis 9 beginning verse 18, these are the people God used to populate the world again.

As we continue studying the Bible, we see that Ham who saw the nakedness of his father Noah and did not do something about it was cursed, whereas Shem was blessed. And so the lineage of the Saviour followed Shem. It is in the family of Shem that Terah was born. Terah was the father of Abraham (at the beginning called Abram) as we see in Genesis 11:26. The Bible in John 8:53 refers to Abraham as the father of the children of Israel (the Jews), through whom Jesus Christ, the “Genesis 3:15” seed of the woman, came, Romans 9:5 and Galatians 4:4-5.

There is a race of people that the devil through his servants has tried to wipe out from the face of the earth since time immemorial. That is the race of the Jews. As early as in Psalm 83:4 is the record of people saying, *Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.*

As recently as 1940s during the Second World War, as many as 6 million Jews were killed in Europe alone through the hand of Hitler. But despite the fact that the history of the Jews has been characterized by pogroms or mass killings, they have not been wiped out, the only explanation being that God is in control of their history and that prophecy concerning them must come to pass. The first leader of the modern state of Israel, by the name David Ben-Gurion, said that it is not practical to live in Israel without believing in miracles. Seemingly with this awareness, their flag has the traditional colours of the prayer shawl. The preservation of the Scriptures, the existence of the Jews after so much effort to wipe them out, their language Hebrew, which is the oldest language in use today, and Jerusalem their city which recently celebrated 3000 years of existence are a living testimony of a people behind whom is the Almighty God. And the reason the devil is so eager to wipe out the Jews is because of their role in God’s plan of redemption.

What, then, is the role of the Jews in God's plan of redemption? There are a number of reasons to this question. According to Isaiah 43:10 and 12, they are the Lord's witnesses that the Lord alone is God. It is to them that God committed His oracles (or Scriptures), Romans 3:2. According to Romans chapter 9, it is to them that the Law of Moses concerned and, concerning the flesh, it is through them that Jesus came.

It is not possible to ignore the history of the Jews when studying what went into setting the stage for the coming of Jesus. One may get the impression that God has forsaken them because they did not receive Jesus when He came, but we see in Romans chapter 11 that God allowed blindness in part upon the children of Israel so that He can direct His mercy to the non-Jews or Gentiles. But a time is coming when this blindness will end because God's promises to them are still there. That time they will acknowledge Jesus, saying, *Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord*, Matthew 23:39.

Reading the Bible beginning Genesis 11:31, you see that Abraham, who was then called Abram, left Ur of the Chaldees with his father Terah and Abraham's nephew, Lot. When they reached a place called Haran, Abraham's father died. (Coincidentally, Lot's father who had died by the time they left Ur was also called Haran.)

As recorded at the beginning of Genesis chapter 12 God then told Abraham to leave his country and his kindred and go to a place that the Lord would show him. The Lord also promised to make out of Abraham a great nation, that the Lord would bless those who would bless Abraham, and that in Abraham would all the families of the earth be blessed. Abraham obeyed God and departed from Haran headed for the land of Canaan.

Abraham got 2 sons, Ishmael and Isaac. The Messianic line passed to Isaac, the child of the promise. According to Romans 9:8, the children of the promise are counted for the seed. Isaac had 2 sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob, who was also called Israel, had 12 children, by whom the tribes of Israel are named. Read about them at the beginning of the book of Exodus.

When the descendants of Jacob multiplied, they left Canaan and went to Egypt through Joseph and settled in Goshen as we read in Genesis 45:10. And all the things concerning the children of Israel continued well until there arose a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph, by whom they had gone to Egypt. Read this in Exodus 1:8. From that time on, the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve them with rigour and made their lives bitter with bondage. Yet this was in fulfilment of prophecy in Genesis 15:13 that Abram's seed would be a stranger in a foreign land and serve them for 400 years. As a result, the children of Israel cried to God by reason of the bondage.

The Word of God then makes us aware of the Exodus as the children of Israel left Egypt under Moses headed for the land that God had promised them. To trace the progress of the journey of the children of Israel from Goshen in Egypt, one must keep referring to the book of Exodus, the book of Numbers and finally the book of Joshua.

Three months after the children of Israel left Egypt, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped near the mountain, Exodus 19:1. Here at Sinai, which is also called Horeb, is where the Law was given under Moses, the tabernacle built and a sacrificial system of worship started in the wilderness. It is also while at this place that the Ten Commandments that are recorded in Exodus chapter 20 were given.

When the children of Israel were at a place called Kadesh Barnea in the wilderness of Paran, as we read in Numbers chapter 13, Moses sent twelve spies to see the Land of Promise. But the children of Israel refused to go and take it for fear after listening to a negative report of some ten spies that the inhabitants of that land were stronger than they. This demonstrated a lack of faith in God. As a result, God made the children of Israel wander in the wilderness until those who had left Egypt died. Actually out of those who had left Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who encouraged people to go forth and take the land and thus demonstrated faith in God, reached the Promised Land. The rest were children of those who fell (died) in

the wilderness, Numbers 14:28-33. God is not moved by numbers; He is moved by faithfulness.

When the children of Israel came to the plains of Moab, Moses died at 120 years, Deuteronomy 31 beginning verse 1, after seeing the Promised Land from Mount Nebo in the land of Moab. After Moses died, God gave the leadership of the children of Israel to Joshua, and they crossed Jordan after 40 years in the wilderness.

What follows in the history of the children of Israel is the period called the times of the judges. During that period, God ruled the children of Israel through people of His own choice. During the time of Samuel, the last judge, the children of Israel refused God to reign over them through His appointed men, 1 Samuel 8:7. As a result, God gave them Saul as king and after Saul came David and after David his son Solomon.

When the children of Israel reached the Promised Land, the tabernacle was first set up in Shiloh. Read Joshua 18:1. After David wrestled Jerusalem out of the control of the Jebusites, the tabernacle was moved to Jerusalem. During Solomon's reign, the first Temple was built at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, 2 Chronicles chapter 3. (In the days of King David Mount Moriah was known as Mount Zion. Today it is known as Temple Mount.) The Temple was a permanent tabernacle, now that the children of Israel had reached the Promised Land.

Though Solomon's rule was famous, he married many heathen wives who brought idolatry to Jerusalem, 1 Kings 11:3-13. This idolatry brought about the beginning of the downfall of the Jewish nation.

When Solomon died, the kingdom was split into two: Judah and Israel. (The tribes of Judah and Benjamin started to be called Judah, and the remaining ten tribes, Israel.) Judah, under Rehoboam the son of Solomon, is where Jerusalem and the Temple were, 1 Kings 12:27. Israel set up their capital in Samaria. Read 1 Kings 11:26-31 about how God gave Jeroboam the 10 tribes. The Messianic line continued with Judah.

Even after the Jewish nation was split, idolatry in both Judah and Israel continued. During Hosea's reign, God gave Israel up to the king of Assyria who carried them into captivity, 2 Kings 17:6. Not long after, Judah was taken captivity in Babylon, *save [except] the poorest sort of the people of the land*, 2 Kings 24:10-16. (By the way, contrary to the propaganda of the enemies of the Children of Israel, there was always a Jewish remnant in Palestine, even after they were later scattered in AD 70. So these people were not foreigners who came to occupy other people's land in 1948 when the state of Israel was formed.) The Temple was also destroyed and useful treasures taken.

When the appointed years of captivity spoken of by the Lord through Prophet Jeremiah ended, God stirred Cyrus the king of Persia to set Judah free to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. Read 2 Chronicles 36 beginning verse 22 and the book of Ezra chapter one. Nehemiah also returned from captivity to manage the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. Read the book of Nehemiah.

Between the time of the last Old Testament prophet and John the Baptist is about 400 years, generally known as the Period of Silence. During that time, no prophet spoke or wrote.

After Judah was taken captive and the Temple destroyed, certain changes took place in the area of religion. The Jews began to congregate in local meeting places called synagogues, where they were taught things of God. During that time, the office of the Scribe began. Scribes were the ones who copied and preserved manuscripts of the Word of God, the work that was previously done by the priests in the Temple.

Aware that the captivity was the result of disobeying God, many people separated themselves with the intention of living in accordance with the Law. But though these people who were called Pharisees started off with a noble intention, over time they added their own rules to the law of God, thus becoming harsh and legalistic.

In 63 BC, Palestine came under the control of Rome, and when the fullness of God's time was come as we read in Galatians 4:4, Jesus was born.

Christ's Earthly Ministry, Death and Resurrection

All the things regarding the first coming of Christ and His earthly ministry took place just as prophesied in the Old Testament. Jesus was born of a virgin as prophesied by Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 7:14; He was born in Bethlehem of Judah as prophesied by Prophet Micah in Micah 5:2; His mother, Mary, and Joseph fled to Egypt for the safety of the child Jesus, thus fulfilling the prophecy in Hosea 11:1 that out of Egypt have I called my son. Jesus' parents performed for Him all things according to the Law and Jesus grew up in Nazareth.

At age 30, Jesus went to River Jordan, was baptized by John the Baptist and entered His public ministry, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. After acquiring disciples and teaching them for 3 years—deduced from the fact that He celebrated three Passovers after starting His ministry—Jesus was betrayed, killed and buried. After 3 days, He rose again as David had prophesied in Psalm 16:10.

After He resurrected, Jesus according to Matthew 28 beginning verse 19 gave His disciples the Great Commission to go to all nations and preach the Gospel, beginning at Jerusalem, baptizing those who believe in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and teaching those who believe the things that Jesus had commanded them. And the disciples did obey the command of Jesus because as we see in Acts 8:4, they were scattered and went everywhere preaching the Word. Actually it is because of their obedience that the gospel has reached you and me today.

Today, Jesus is in heaven on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him (1 Peter 3:22). It is from here that He will come back to the earth (Acts 1:11) as KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS, Revelation 19:16.

PART TWO

OUR COMPLETENESS IN CHRIST

Chapter Six

How to Be Born Again

From Adam to Abraham, the Bible tells about the history of the human race. From Abraham onwards, God's Word focuses on the history of the Jews through whom, concerning the flesh, Jesus Christ came, Romans 9:5. The Bible continues its focus on God's redemptive purpose even when it comes to the earthly ministry of Christ. According to John 20:30 and 31, there are many things that Jesus did in the presence of His disciples that are not written in the Bible. But the purpose of those things that are written is to prove that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that by believing, the Bible reader or anyone listening to God's Word being preached might have eternal life.

The Bible teaches two kinds of things: things to know, like the creation, the fall of man, the promise of the Saviour, and His coming; and things to do so as to benefit from God's plan of salvation. Knowing what the Bible says alone will not benefit you. In James 1:22 we are required to be doers of God's Word. God starts by making people aware of certain things before He tells them what to do in view of that awareness. The most important thing that God through the Bible wants people to know is that Jesus is the Christ ("Messiah" in Hebrew), the Son of God and therefore God manifested in the flesh, and by believing and trusting Jesus for their sins become beneficiaries of everlasting life, the greatest gift ever.

The best gifts come from God. According to James 1:17, every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights (the Lord), with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. And not just that. God's gifts are free. These include our very life, the air we breathe and everything that we use. Remember, we brought nothing into this world, 1 Timothy 6:7. While in this world, there is nothing that people look for as joy, peace. But even these things are available in their true form only in the Lord, not in the material things that we labour for so hard. This is not to downplay the importance of working, but the things we get from physical work alone will not bring one true joy and peace. We have heard of celebrities and millionnaires getting depressed or even committing suicide after experiencing emptiness in life. Indeed Christ in Luke 12:15 shows that there is more to life than abundance of substance. In Isaiah 26:3 we see that God keeps in perfect peace the one whose mind is stayed on Him. According to Psalm 16:11, it is in God's presence that there is fulness of joy. In this world, there are many things that we think we need, but what we actually need is Christ. The greatest of God's gifts to people is salvation through His Son Jesus. Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:15 refers to the everlasting life found in Jesus alone as God's unspeakable gift. And in 1 Corinthians 2:9 he tells us that the eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things God has prepared for them that love Him.

In Matthew 11:13, we see that all the Old Testament prophets and the Law prophesied until John the Baptist. In John 1:17, the Bible says that the Law came by Moses and that grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. These 2 Scriptures show that through the Law of Moses whose purpose lasted until the time of John the Baptist, God was seeking to accomplish something. What then was God's purpose in giving the Law of Moses?

Even the Law of Moses had redemptive purpose: to prove that before God all people are sinners, Romans 3:20, so as to prepare them for the grace of God that Jesus would bring. The second part of this

Scripture reads: *for by the law is the knowledge of sin*. In Galatians 4:4 and 5 we see that God's Son Jesus came to redeem those under the Law as well. And the fact that people who were under the Law needed redemption is additional proof that the Law served another purpose other than justifying people before God. From Acts 7:53, we have confirmation that no one of its dispensation was able to fulfil the Law. By saying in Matthew 5:17 that He came to fulfil the Law and the prophets, Jesus meant that He was the fulfillment of the purpose that God had in giving the Law and speaking through the Old Testament prophets. Through the Law and the prophets, God prepared people for the grace that was to come by Jesus.

The theme of the Bible is salvation in Christ Jesus. The Bible is about a God who loves us and about a Jesus Christ who died to reconcile us to that God. The most important thing to do after becoming aware of all that is to repent toward God and trust Jesus for salvation. In James 1:22 we are advised to be not only hearers of the Word but doers also. That is the only way to benefit from reading the Bible. (Many people, including the unbelievers, know about Jesus, having read about Him somewhere. But believing in Jesus has to do with acting on what He commands in the Bible. Our Lord, according to John 8:31, told those who believed in Him, *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed*.) We benefit from God's Word by acting on what it says.

The first step towards salvation is to acknowledge having sinned because God in His Word has concluded all people under sin, Romans 3:23. When the Spirit of God is working on us, He does not begin by making us feel good about ourselves. There is nothing of our own that can make us deserving before God. Jesus begins the beatitudes by teaching in Matthew 5:3 that blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. In 1 Timothy 1:15 Apostle Paul teaches us the kind of attitude of meekness with which to approach God for salvation: *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief*.

Involving yourself in good works is good, but if that were meant to earn you salvation, it is like putting faith in yourself, yet salvation comes by putting one's faith in Christ. Cornelius of Acts chapter 10 was rich in good deeds, but even he needed to know about Jesus Christ from Apostle Peter so that he could believe Him and get saved. Then there was one who did not have good works but still got saved: the second criminal who was crucified with Jesus. Actually it is because of bad works that he was being killed. But as we see from what he told the other criminal and what he told Christ, he acknowledged his sinfulness, justified Jesus by saying He was without sin, and then pleaded with Jesus to remember him, which was an expression of faith in Jesus. All that is in Luke 23: 41 and 42. And as see in verse 43, Jesus said he would be with him in Paradise that very day.

If salvation were by works, all that Jesus Christ would have done while on earth would be teach people to do good things and then go back to heaven; He would not have needed to die. But He did 2 things: He taught people how to live right and then died on the cross to provide the only blood that takes away sin. The Bible in Hebrews 9:22 says that *without shedding of blood is no remission* [cancellation of punishment]. (Jesus did not mean that loving your neighbour or engaging in any other form of good work could earn anyone salvation. In the gospels, our Lord was teaching how people were to live after salvation, and being faithful by so doing would earn them crowns in heaven. This explains why teaching the things Jesus had commanded or taught in the gospels was to follow making disciples, Matthew 28:19-20.)

After acknowledging in your heart that you have sinned and asking God to forgive you because of Jesus' death on the cross, the Bible says that *if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*, Romans 10:9. What you are being asked to do in this Scripture is to believe that Jesus the Son of God is the Christ or Messiah promised in the Old Testament and that He came in the flesh and that all the things prophesied about Him,

including His dying on the cross and resurrecting were fulfilled. After believing this in your heart, you are then supposed to confess faith in Jesus openly before the people. As we read in Romans 10:10, *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

Salvation, being by faith and not by works (Eph. 2:8, 9), does not take a process. Justification (God declaring a guilty sinner righteous) is an act, not a process. Immediately upon trusting on the Lord for salvation, one receives forgiveness of sins and is translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Colossians 1:13. Right there and then, the new believer becomes a saint. (There are those who teach that one must first die in order to become a saint, but Apostle Paul could not have been writing to dead people when he addressed his letters to the saints in Corinth, Achaia, etc. as we see in earlier Bible versions.)

When your inner man or spirit is washed by the blood of Jesus, you become a new creation. Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. This is what being born again is about. In Luke 17:20, Jesus said that *the kingdom of God cometh not with observation*. When one gets saved, no external change takes place. Yet due to the Holy Spirit who comes to indwell the believer at the point of salvation, the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature, 2 Peter 1:4.

A person's first birth involves the flesh. Indeed everybody in this world was once born somewhere some day. According to Hebrews 9:13, the Old Testament sacrifices symbolically cleaned the flesh. But sin affects the inner man or the spirit that God breathed into man at the time of creation, and cleaning or purging one's spirit or conscience by the blood of Jesus, Hebrews 9:14 and Revelation 1:5, is what being born again is about. And with your spirit cleaned, we see in Romans 8:16 that the Lord gives you of His Holy Spirit to bear witness with your spirit that you are a (spiritual) child of God.

Upon repenting toward God and placing your faith in Jesus, you become an inheritor of everlasting life, John 6:47.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The work of man's redemption involved all the 3 Persons of the Godhead. It is God the Father who foreordained salvation, and it is the Son, Jesus, who was to pay for it by His blood. But it is God the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets to speak and write about God's plan for people, 2 Peter 1:21. It is also the Holy Ghost who conceived Jesus on earth, Luke 1:35, and anointed and guided Him in His ministry on earth. After Jesus died on the cross, it is the Holy Spirit who resurrected Him, Romans 8:11.

The church is guided by the Holy Spirit, John 16:13, who also endows the believers with power to do the work Jesus left to the church, Acts 1:8. That is why we should pray for more of His control over our lives, Luke 11:13. The Gospels tell us what Jesus did when He came on earth for the first time, whereas Acts of the Apostles and other books that follow it are accounts of what Jesus continued to do by the Holy Spirit through the believers.

What you need to serve God is God Himself by His Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who moves the believers to go preaching, and it is He who convicts those who are witnessed to of sin and the need to get saved. Actually the Bible shows in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that no one can acknowledge Jesus as Lord—and mean it from the heart—without the help of the Holy Ghost. It is also by the same Holy Spirit that we believers are sealed, Ephesians 4:30, in readiness for resurrection on the day of redemption. At the time of resurrection, people will not wake up because of having a cross on their grave, though there is nothing wrong with planting a cross on one's grave. People will resurrect because they died in the Lord and therefore they had the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. The Spirit is still the One who will change the bodies of those who will be alive at the time of the Rapture of the church.

Our Completeness in Christ

The salvation we get by repenting toward God and placing our faith in Jesus Christ is a great salvation. Apostle Paul in Romans 8:37 says that we are more than conquerors through Him (Jesus) that loved us, adding in the following verses that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, not any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Salvation through Jesus was not an afterthought. God had foreseen the fall of man and planned how to deal with it through Jesus before the foundation of the world, 1 Peter 1:20. By accepting Christ, you are allowing yourself to fit in God's plan and are thus justified by none other than God Himself, Romans 3:26. In Romans 8:31 the Bible asks, *If God be for us, who can be against us?* In Hebrews 2:3 salvation in Jesus is described as great salvation and the writer of this book even wonders how people will escape if they neglect it.

In this section, we will seek to explore the Scriptures to find out what makes salvation in Jesus Christ great. After salvation, the believer should invest time on prayers for more grace and hence power to do the will of God and seek to know what the Bible says about Jesus. What we deduce from 2 John verse 9 is that we are supposed to study the doctrine of Christ and abide in it. Apostle Paul himself did just that. According to Philippians 3:10, he wanted to know Him (Christ), and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.

Apostle Peter, according to 2 Peter 3:18, wanted the believers to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus

Christ so that as cautioned in the preceding verse they do not fall from their steadfastness in the Lord. But besides guarding us from the error of the wicked, knowledge of our Lord has the other benefit of introducing joy in our Christian life. In this world there is no joy that can compare with the joy of knowing the greatness of our Saviour and who we are in Him. Such was the joy radiated by those who got saved during the East Africa Revival as they sang their signature song, “Tukutendereza, Yesu” (“We Praise You, Jesus”). Believers sang this song with deep conviction, waving their hands in joy.

The depth of our worship is proportional to our view of our Saviour. The more we study the Bible and discover Jesus’ greatness, the more our worship of Him is deepened. And even today revival could break if we taught the believers what the Bible says about Jesus and who they are in Him. As He said in John 12:32, *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

The reason the devil through cults discourages Bible Study is because he is unable to ensnare or retain in the kingdom of darkness anyone who studies God’s Word and gets to know what it says about Jesus. Jesus is the truth, John 14:6, and in John 8:32 He told those Jews who believed in Him that they would know the truth, and the truth would set them free. In fact according to 2 Corinthians 4:4, the main strategy that the devil, who is also called the god of this world, uses to hold people in spiritual darkness is that of hindering them from accessing *the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God*. Sound Bible teachings point people to Jesus, but the teachings of cults point people away from Jesus of the Bible.

To understand any book, you must first get to know its central character. In the same way, understanding the Bible comes with knowing Jesus, its central character, and His (Jesus’) role in God’s plan for reconciling people to Himself. The devil would like people to see as if Jesus is a mere human being like you and me so that they do not see the need to trust Him wholly for salvation. That way the devil scores by holding those people in his kingdom of darkness.

The devil through false teachers has come up with his teachings about Jesus, and the Bible refers to the Jesus who is taught by false teachers as *another* Jesus, 2 Corinthians 11:4. Foreseeing this, Jesus according to John 5:39 advised people to consult the Scriptures—that is, the Bible—so as to know the truth about Himself.

There is a song that says: *Yesu, unastahili kuabudiwa* (Kiswahili for “Jesus, You Are Worthy to Be Praised”). According to the Bible, who is this Person who makes the world pause on Christmas day to remember His birth, and why does He qualify to be worshipped and to forgive sins?

Knowledge of Jesus is what gives those who believe the assurance of salvation in Him and buffers them from the error that Satan propagates in an effort to move the believers from their steadfastness. Jesus of the Bible is a person of incomparable greatness. Though born in the meanest of circumstances, no one person has changed the course of history as the man Christ Jesus. In this world, there is no name that has ignited more controversy than the name of Jesus. Even non-Christians realize that Jesus is a figure they are simply unable to ignore. And to accommodate Him in what they teach, they come up with the view of Jesus that fits their erroneous teachings. This is the other (false) Jesus whom Apostle Paul warned believers about in 2 Corinthians 11:4. This other Jesus does not have the attributes of Jesus of the Bible. We are also warned about the gospel by which he is preached in Galatians 1:8. Such are the gospels of cults and are inspired by Satan. In 1 Timothy 4:1 they are called *doctrines of devils*.

People in false faiths are aware that if they acknowledge Jesus for who the Bible says He is, He breaks loose and becomes impossible to contain without eclipsing their founders. Hence their need for a manageable view of Jesus, a Jesus who does not bear all the attributes of Christ of the Bible. Actually the reason the devil doesn’t want people to know who Jesus of the Bible really is, is because if they do, they will place their faith in Him for salvation and thus escape from the snare of the devil.

What, then, does God's Word say about Jesus of the Bible? If any material of human authorship contradicts the Bible, God's Word should prevail. Christ did not save us and then left us to use our creativity to come up with what to believe or to guide us in our walk of faith. He wanted us to be guided by the Scriptures. The Scriptures were inspired by the Holy Spirit, 2 Timothy 3:16, who, after Christ went back to heaven, was to guide the believers into all truth, John 16:13. The same Bible that shows the way of salvation contains the full package of what we are to believe and practise. Also, every teaching or spirit ought to be tried (tested), 1 John 4:1, and it is tested using the Scriptures. According to Acts 17:11, Apostle Paul was happy with the church of Berea because they searched the Scriptures to see whether the things they were taught were so.

Secular humanists go to great lengths to make Jesus look like any other person who has walked on earth. But Jesus of the Bible is a Person of unmatched greatness. His coming split history into two – BC and AD – such that time is reckoned against His first appearance on earth. Charles Spurgeon, a renowned evangelist, said that “Christ is the great central fact in the world's history. To Him everything looks forward or backward. All lines of history converge upon Him.” There are efforts to downplay the supremacy of Jesus by replacing BC and AD with BCE, for Before Common Era, and CE, for Common Era, the underlying objective being to expunge “Christ” from the dating system. Other people are zealously promoting the idea of calling Christmas “Xmas”. There are yet others who prefer to wish people “Happy holidays” to avoid saying, “Merry Christmas”. But even this will not disengage Jesus Christ of the Bible from the flow of history or make our Lord any less who He is in God's plan.

There was nothing unforeseen in the coming of Jesus. Redemption was worked out exactly “as it was written” in the Old Testament. When on earth, Jesus in John 5:39 challenged the people thus: *Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think [understand] ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*

All the Old Testament prophecies pointed to Jesus. In John 1:45, we see that it is Him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote. Disbelieving Jesus therefore translates into disbelieving Moses and the other prophets who wrote about Him. Jesus personally expounded to the 2 who were headed for Emmaus, Luke 24:27, the things concerning Himself as written by Moses and all the prophets. Apostle Peter reiterated this fact in the house of Cornelius, saying of Jesus in Acts 10:43 that to Him [Jesus] *give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission* [cancellation of punishment] *of sins*.

The Old Testament is a progressive revelation of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Immediately Adam and Eve sinned, we see God's promise of the coming of the Saviour – the seed of the woman, according to Genesis 3:15 – who would come to bruise the head of Satan (the *old serpent* of Rev. 12:9). This is followed by the formation of the Hebrew nation through Abraham in whom all families of the earth would be blessed, Genesis 12:3. Henceforth we begin to come across vague hints (followed by specific predictions) of a Person who would come through the Jews to accomplish the above task. In Genesis 49:10 this Person is referred to as *Shiloh* who was to rise in the tribe of Judah. Then He is referred to as the Star who would come out of Jacob, Numbers 24:17. In Deuteronomy 18 beginning verse 15 He is referred to as a Prophet like Moses, through whom God would speak to people.

In Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5, and Zechariah 6:12, this Person is referred to as the Branch. In Isaiah 32:1, He is also referred to as a King, and, in Isaiah 9:6, Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Isaiah had also said this Person would be born of a virgin. This was to take place in Bethlehem, according to Prophet Micah. Part of this person's childhood would be spent in Egypt, according to Hosea. In preparation for His ministry, He would be introduced by an Elijah-like forerunner (John the Baptist), according to Malachi chapters 3 and 4. He would teach in parables as foretold in Psalm 78:2.

He would be rejected by the leaders of Israel, the reason for which Paul explains in Romans chapter 11 and suffer as foretold in Isaiah chapter 53. In preparation for His crucifixion He would be betrayed by a friend, according to Psalm 41:9. He would die the wicked death of crucifixion and be given vinegar for food and drink as prophesied in Psalm 69:21. After that He would die and be buried in the tomb for 3 days and then rise as predicted in Psalm 16:10. All the above predictions and many others were fulfilled to the letter in the Person of Jesus, being proof that He is the Messiah (“Christ” in Greek), whose coming the Jews looked forward to as prophesied in the Old Testament.

But despite being a historical character who appeared on earth in human form, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, John 20:31, and hence God in the tabernacle of flesh. He is the second Person in the Trinity, 1 John 5:7 KJV, where He is referred to as the Word.

The deity of Jesus is also clear from John 1:1 where the Bible refers to Him as the Word of God and hence God. Being God, He existed before the world was but in the Spirit (since God is a Spirit) and in the fullness of God’s time, Galatians 4:4, manifested to destroy the works of the devil, 1 John 3:8.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. – John 1:1, 14

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. – 1 Timothy 3:16

Jesus’ own testimony about Himself as recorded in John 10:30 is: *I and my Father are one.* To be said to have faith in Jesus, we must believe that He is exactly what He claimed to be and not seek to accept Him on our own terms like people in cults (Cumbey 1985).

Prophet Micah who foretold that He Jesus would be born in Bethlehem of Judah spoke of one who was more than a mere mortal, saying in Micah 5:2, *But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.* By saying that His goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting, Prophet Micah proved that the child to be born in Bethlehem pre-existed His birth. Historically, John the Baptist was born here on earth before Jesus, being Jesus' forerunner. Yet John has this to say about Jesus in John 1:15: *He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me.* Being God, Jesus pre-existed even Abraham, the father (patriarch) of the children of Israel. In John 8:58 Jesus said: *Before Abraham was, I am.* Describing Himself as "I am" is consistent with what we learn in Hebrews 13:8 that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever. Being God, Jesus never changes.

When foretelling that the Messiah would be born of a virgin (not just a "young woman" as in some modern Bible versions), Isaiah added that His name would be called Immanuel, which in Hebrew tongue means God with us, Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23.

Jesus came from God the Father, and that is where He went back when He left this world, John 16:28. In a discussion that took place in heaven before He came to earth, Jesus told God the Father in part as recorded in Hebrews 10:5, *".... a body hast thou prepared for me."* Of course a spirit could not die on the cross. That is why Jesus, being God, took flesh and by suppressing His deity went through the ordinary stages of human development so as to deal with the sin of mankind. Moreover, Apostle Paul in Colossians 2:9 shows that despite coming in the flesh, all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him (Jesus) bodily. Jesus was fully God and fully man, and being God and man, Jesus is our Kinsman Redeemer. He became like us to save us.

To some, the fact that the message of the Bible came through different people is a demerit. But really, that is what strengthens the

case of the Bible. After all, in the mouth of two or three witnesses is a matter established, 2 Corinthians 13:1. In telling about the story of the life and ministry of our Lord, the different people who have written the gospels do not contradict whatsoever. Through them, the Holy Spirit has revealed the different offices of Christ, a task that would not be possible to achieve in one continuous narrative.

In telling the story of Jesus, Matthew emphasizes the fact that Christ is the King of the Jews, the Son of David. The Gospel of Mark portrays Jesus as servant. Luke emphasizes Jesus as the perfect man as evidenced by His communion with God through prayer. The 3 gospels are classified as synoptic due to their similarities. But it is mainly to John in his gospel that the Holy Spirit gave the task of revealing the other important office of our Saviour – Jesus as the Son of God and hence God manifested in the flesh (Dr. Mears 1983). It is only in Jesus that those four offices rested in one person perfectly. As Apostle Paul sums it up for us in Colossians 1:19, *it pleased the Father that in Him [Christ] should all fullness dwell*.

Jesus was without sin or fault, Hebrews 4:15 and 1 John 3:5 and John 19:6. Being God, whatever Jesus did, even when He whipped those who sold merchandise in the Temple, was all just. God is just in everything He does, Romans 3:26. Actually obeying what He says is what justice is about. Being sinless and hence needing no redemption Himself, Jesus on the cross died, not for His sins but for the sins of others. Even Prophet Daniel had foretold the death of Jesus Christ, not for His sins but for the sins of the others. That is what he meant by the Messiah being *cut off, but not for Himself*, Daniel 9:26. Prophet Isaiah had made similar prophecy, saying in Isaiah 53:5 that He (the Messiah) *was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities....and with His stripes we are healed*. According to 2 Corinthians 5:21, Jesus, who knew no sin, was made sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Jesus Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree, 1 Peter 2:24, and actually that is why the Father forsook Him while at the cross as recorded in Matthew 27:46 because God does not look favourably

upon sin. According to Romans 4:25, Jesus was *delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification*.

When He walked on earth, Jesus wanted people to know who He really is, starting with His disciples. To do so, He began by asking them who men said that He is. In response He was told that some thought that He was John the Baptist, others thought He was Elias, some thought He was Jeremiah, or just one of the prophets. Another time as recorded in Matthew 22:42 He asked the Pharisees whose Son Christ is, and they answered, “The Son of David.” Wanting to prove to them that Christ was more than just the Son of David, He reminded them that David while prophesying about Christ had referred to Christ as his (David’s) Lord. And so Jesus according to verse 45 proceeded with His question: *If David then call Him [Christ] Lord, how is He his Son?*

The truth is that according to the flesh, Christ was the Son of David, having been born in that lineage as we see in Romans 1:3. But Jesus was more than the Son of David and the Holy Spirit in Matthew 16:16 gave the correct revelation to Simon Peter: Jesus is *the Christ, the Son of the living God*. That means He is God. And just as Jesus Himself indicated in verse 17, it is blessed for our Father in heaven to reveal this truth to anyone, me and you included. What makes Jesus worthy of worship is because He is God, and we are also to worship Him for having redeemed us, Revelation 5:9 and 12.

Jesus came from God the Father and even the wonders that He did convinced sincere observers of that fact. Nicodemus, according to John 3:2, told Jesus:...*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him*. Actually Jesus is the central character in God’s Word, and the thesis statement or central message of the Bible is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing, people have everlasting life through His name, John 20:31. Old Testament saints like Job who according to Job 19:25 believed that His Redeemer liveth trusted in a Christ (Redeemer) whose coming

was yet future. We of the New Testament get saved by trusting a Christ whose appearance on earth we look back to.

In the Bible, mysteries are those things that were not understood in the Old Testament prophecy but became clear in the New Testament with the revelation of the greatest of all mysteries—Jesus Christ as God manifested in the flesh, 1 Timothy 3:16. For instance as we see in Ephesians 3:1-6, the Children of Israel in the Old Testament did not understand how a time would come when the Jews and the Gentiles would become fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of God's promise. But this did happen through the New Testament church with the coming of Jesus Christ and the preaching of the Gospel.

The Bible in Hebrews 1:3 and in Colossians 1:15 shows that Jesus is the express image of the invisible God. This is to say that everything of God (like holiness, power and goodness, etc.) is expressed in Jesus.

The truth of any spiritual teaching is judged by its view of Jesus. False teachers, who guide cults, do not teach that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That is why the Bible refers to them as liars, asking in 1 John 2:22, *Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ?* And the answer to this question is in the same Scripture: *He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.* According to 1 John 4 beginning verse 2, every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ did come in the flesh is of God, but every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ (being God) has come in the flesh is not of God. It is the spirit of Antichrist or of the devil. People in cults are the ones who are said to have a form of godliness but denying the power thereof, 2 Timothy 3:5. This is because they do not believe Jesus of the Bible, who is the Son of God, the power of God and the wisdom of God, 1 Corinthians 1:24.

According to John 4:26, Jesus is that Messiah, or Christ, whose coming people in the Old Testament looked forward to. Believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that He came into this world, died and rose again is the prerequisite for salvation. According

to Romans 1:4, resurrecting Jesus from the dead was God's ultimate declaration of Jesus as His Son; therefore, believing that Jesus died and rose is believing that He is the Son of God.

There are cultic groups that misinterpret Colossians 1:15 to mean that Jesus was created just like us. But when the Bible in this Scripture refers to Jesus as the firstborn of every creature, it just shows that He existed before all things so as to be in a position to create them. After all, the same Scripture also refers to Jesus as the image of the invisible God and God was not created. Really, the word "firstborn" here denotes pre-eminence rather than chronology. It is used in the same way we talk of *the hand of the Lord*, yet we know God is a spirit and has no physical hand. Jesus according to John 17:5 was there before the world was. This is consistent with the fact communicated in John 1:10 that all the world was made by Him. God the Father used Jesus, the Word of God, in creation. In John 1:3 the Bible says that all things were made by Him (Jesus) and without Him was not anything made that was made.

According to Acts 7:53, no one who lived during the dispensation of the Law—until the time of John the Baptist, Matthew 11:13—was able to keep it. Actually according to Romans 3:20, God's purpose for the Law was to prove all people under sin. And Jesus Christ, according to Matthew 5:17, is the fulfilment of the Law in that God sees anyone who has put his or her faith in Jesus Christ as one who has fulfilled the Law and thus attained the righteousness that God demands.

It was not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin, Hebrews 10:4. Taking away sin required the perfect sacrifice offered by Jesus on the cross because Jesus was without sin, Hebrews 4:15 and 1 John 3:5. Unlike the blood of animals in the Old Testament that only covered sin, Romans 4:7, the blood of Christ on the cross had power to take away sin, John 1:29 and Hebrews 9:26b. That is why unlike the sacrifice of animals that had to be done daily, Christ *offered one sacrifice for sins for ever*, Hebrews 10:12. Moreover, since Jesus is God and God is valuable

than all His creation combined, the blood that Jesus shed on Calvary is valuable enough for the salvation of all people, if all were to avail themselves for redemption. In Hebrews 2:9 we see that Jesus tasted death for every man (person).

In summary, the Bible presents a Jesus who has pre-eminence in all things, Colossians 1:18. Jesus is greater than His mother, who according to John 2:5 told the servants in the wedding in Cana of Galilee to do whatever He told them to do, being evidence that she herself trusted Him for salvation. Jesus is the sole source of grace, not her, John 1:17 and Romans 5:15. Jesus is superior to the angels, Hebrews chapter one. Also, the Bible presents a Jesus who is superior to Moses, Hebrews chapter 3; in fact according to Acts 10:43, it is about Jesus that all prophets gave witness. Jesus is greater than the wise Solomon, Luke 11:31; in fact according to Colossians 2:3, in Jesus is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and in 1 Corinthians 1:24, Jesus is referred to as the wisdom of God.

According to Matthew 12:8, Jesus is Lord even of the Sabbath day. The Bible presents a Jesus who is greater than the earthly Temple in Jerusalem, Matthew 12:6; in fact the sacrifices offered in that Temple were a shadow of good things to come, Hebrews 10:1, the real thing being Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary. In Hebrews 4:14 we see that Jesus is the great High Priest who has taken the sacrifice for sin into the heavens. Hebrews 8:6 shows that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant, one that is established on better promises than the covenant under the Law of Moses.

Jesus serves in the heavenly sanctuary that is superior to the Temple that was in Jerusalem. So, His priesthood is superior to that of the high priests of the days of the Law of Moses. In Jesus we have a High Priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, *a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man*, Hebrews 8:1 and 2. (In Christ, the kingship and the priesthood are united. And not just that: He is the true Temple or tabernacle. In the Old Testament, it was the work of the king to build the Temple and the

responsibility of the priests to serve therein. But Prophet Zechariah according to Zechariah 6:12-13 had prophesied of the coming of One whom he referred to as the BRANCH and who would be King in that He is portrayed as building the Temple. He would also be the Priest and even the Temple itself. This is none other than our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This fact corroborated by John 2:21 where Jesus talked about His body being the Temple. Hebrews 9:11 is the other Scripture that shows that Jesus today is the High Priest in the perfect tabernacle that is not made with hands.)

Those of us who have believed in Jesus and have therefore the Holy Spirit dwelling in us are said to be a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people who should show forth praises of Him who has called them out from darkness into His marvellous light, 1 Peter 2:9.

Jesus purchased the church with His own blood, Acts 20:28. According to Matthew 26:28, He is the one who provided the blood of the New Testament that was shed for the remission of sins. Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone of the church, according to Ephesians 2:20.

The church is not united in a denomination or in an organization. Even during the time of the apostles there were different churches like the church of Corinth, the church of the Colossians, and others. The church is united in a Person, and that Person is Jesus Christ. Irrespective of where people fellowship, all those who have repented toward God and put their faith in Jesus have been baptized (or added by the Holy Spirit) into the one invisible body of Christ. This is clear from 1 Corinthians 12:13. You do not become a member of the body of Christ by registration; registration in the church is for administrative purposes. It is Jesus the Lord who, by the Holy Spirit, adds to the church (body of Christ) as many as are saved, Acts 2:47.

Perhaps you have heard some people arguing that the church has come to focus too much on Jesus while paying too little attention on the Holy Spirit. But they argue that way because of not knowing the Scriptures. As we see in John 16:13, the Holy Spirit was not coming to speak of Himself. The next verse (verse 14) says that

the Holy Spirit was coming to uplift or glorify Jesus. This is to say that the way to know how a church is yielded to the Holy Spirit is by how much that church uplifts Jesus in word and deed. God the Father by a voice from heaven required that we listen to (obey) Jesus, Matthew 17:5. The kind of sacrifices offered during the Old Testament are no longer necessary. Jesus is the centre of worship in the church, and by glorifying Jesus, we glorify God the Father in Him (Jesus), John 13:31.

True preaching is preaching Christ. This is what the apostles did daily in the Temple and in every house, according to Acts 5:42. There are preachers today who spend the whole of their pulpit time regaling the congregation with their experiences and giving their takes on political issues for fear of boring their listeners. But salvation is in believing Christ alone, and though there is nothing wrong with using stories to illustrate points, they should have the ultimate objective of underscoring the main point that all people have sinned and that Jesus is the only way by which they can obtain forgiveness and be reconciled to God.

Salvation is not in joining a certain denomination, wedding in church or in a philosophy; salvation is in a Person, and that Person is Jesus Christ. He is the way to realize one's desire for holy living. The Bible is unequivocal that people's reconciliation to God is by Jesus alone. In John 14:6 Jesus Himself said that He is the way, the truth and the life such that no one comes (is reconciled) to the Father except by Him (Jesus). By the way, even the unbelievers do understand this Scripture to set Jesus apart from any so-called founders of faith and in some places it is regarded as hate speech. But that does not make it less true. In Acts 4:12, this message is reiterated using different words: *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.* Apostle Paul writing to Timothy tells him in 1 Timothy 2:5 that there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. In Romans 5:15 is the record that grace is by one man alone, Jesus Christ. Throughout the

Bible, the grace that brings salvation is referred to as the grace of Jesus. He is the sole source of it. Distilled into a single sentence, what cults teach is this: There is only one way to God, and **we** are that way. But this is what Bible believers teach because it is what is supported by the Scripture: There is only one way to God, and that way is **Jesus Christ**.

Those who have repented toward God and placed their faith in Jesus are not lacking or deficient in any way. When you repent toward God and trust Jesus Christ for salvation, you become one of God's elect, having been justified by God Himself, the highest authority in heaven and in earth. And according to Romans 8:33, no one *shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect*. The Book of Hebrews is about the supremacy of Jesus. Hebrews 7:26 describes Jesus as a High Priest who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and higher than the heavens. According to Ephesians 1 beginning verse 20, God the Father has set our Saviour Jesus Christ at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.

The scope of any salvation depends on the Saviour behind it, and because of the supremacy of Jesus, Hebrews 7:25 says that He (Jesus) is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God by Christ. Using different words to say the same thing, Apostle Paul in Colossians 2:10 says that we are complete in Jesus Christ, since He is head of all principality and power. After getting born again through the common way of salvation which is by faith in Christ Jesus (Jude 3), we are to earnestly or zealously continue trusting in Him. In the book of Hebrews, the writer's aim was to help Christians not to be moved from their steadfastness in Jesus. He wanted them to continue trusting Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, Hebrews 12:2. At the end of our life, all of us believers like Apostle Paul should be able to say: I have fought the good fight; I have kept the faith, 2 Timothy 4:7.

Salvation in Jesus is complete such that even when we go for the memorial service of one who has died in Christ, we do not do so to pray for him or her to get unstuck from some place between hell and heaven. In Luke 23:43 we see our Lord telling with certainty the thief who justified Him (Jesus) on the cross and thus received salvation, *Today, shalt thou [shall you] be with me in Paradise.* Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 required the believers not to sorrow for departed brethren the way non-Christians do, being without hope.

The Bible in Acts 17:31 and Acts 10:42 says that God will judge the world with Jesus. This world is rocked in a war between good and evil, and looking at things with the physical eye, the church may seem to be losing the battle. But the opposite is true. The central message of the Book of Revelation is that Jesus, the Lamb of God, will emerge victorious over the devil and his helpers, whose end is in the lake of fire as we see in Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10.

After the rapture of the church that is referred to in 1 Thessalonians 4 beginning verse 16, believers will then appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:10, to get rewards for the work of spiritual value they have done after getting saved. Following the Rapture will be the tribulation here on earth for seven years and then Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, will come for the second time to rule the nations with a rod of iron, Revelation 19 beginning verse 11. This is the so-called Jesus' millennium rule that will take 1000 years. After the Millennium will be the White Throne spoken of beginning Revelation 20:11 where all the unbelievers (even the dead ones, including those cremated and their ashes thrown into the sea, will resurrect) will appear before Jesus to be judged and cast into the lake of fire.

According to 1 Corinthians 15 beginning verse 25, Jesus must reign until He puts all enemies of God under His feet, the last enemy to be destroyed being death through the resurrection of all people. Then death and hell will be thrown into the Lake of fire, Revelation 20:14. Thereafter as we see in 1 Corinthians 15:28, Jesus, who is God's Agent for restoration of all things, will subject Himself to God the Father so that He (the Father) may be all in all.

PART THREE

LIVING FOR GOD

Chapter Eight

Living for God

Complete faith is expressed in two ways. First, by believing all that the Bible teaches about God, the creation, the fall of man, the plan of salvation through Jesus, Jesus' deity, His death, His resurrection, His going to heaven, His second coming, etc. According to Jude verse 3, we are to contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. Second, faith is expressed by acting on those things that God's Word commands believers to do, for example, worshipping God of the Bible alone, living righteously, facilitating outreach and personally reaching out to others with the Gospel, etc. These are the *fruits meet for* [worthy of] *repentance*, Matthew 3:8. According to James 2:19, believing that there is one God is good but not enough. That awareness ought to make you do something, like worshipping that God alone. Verse 22 says that faith is made perfect (complete) by works. Acting on what you have learned from God's Word is what completes faith. Elsewhere the Book of James shows that faith without works is dead. Jesus in Luke 6:46 showed that it is not enough to call Him Lord, Lord, if you do not do the things He says. And in Luke 11:28 He reiterated that blessed are those people who hear the word of God and keep (obey) it.

Upon getting saved, the Holy Spirit comes to abide in you, and you are supposed to yield to Him so that He may fill (control) all aspects of your life, Ephesians 5:18. Henceforth, your value system should have God at the centre. The Scriptures were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21) who moved God's people to write His message. Living in obedience to the Word

of God is what is referred to as yielding to the Holy Spirit or doing the will of God. It is what demonstrates our love for God.

After salvation, you should be baptized, Acts 2:41. In this Scripture, *they that gladly received the Word* means those who got saved. For fellowship, you should join a church whose practices are guided by the Bible, where God's Word is the authority of faith and practice and every spiritual teaching and tradition supported by the Scripture (Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 4:1). Moreover, you should not forsake the fellowship of God's people, Hebrews 10:25, by missing Sunday services.

There are some sisters- and brothers-in-the-Lord who find "intolerable" weaknesses in the believers in every church, but this is no reason to remain at home on Sunday. You too have weaknesses and you should tolerate others just as they tolerate you, unless they are telling you to engage in what is contrary to God's Word. We should strive to bear with others; after all, even Jesus loved us and died for us while we were yet in sin, Romans 5:8.

New birth in Christ ought to change the believer's attitude towards life. After salvation, God should have the first and last word on everything. Henceforth, your desire should be to please God in whatever you do. Repentance has to do with turning around so that one who has been living in sin starts living a life of obedience to God. Obedience to God is what demonstrates love for God, and Jesus told the believers in Matthew 22 beginning verse 37: "*....Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*"

We demonstrate our love for God by identifying with Him before people; worshipping Him alone; deliberately avoiding sin, whether through thought or action; relating well with other people, especially the believers; and by seeking to expand the kingdom of God through witnessing Christ and teaching those who believe as a way of grounding them in the faith so that they are not vulnerable to the error of the wicked. These are the good works that should follow

salvation. Though we are not saved by works, Ephesians 2:8, 9, the following verse shows that we are saved *unto* [for] *good works*. The fact that we are to be zealous of good works after salvation is corroborated in Titus 2:14. In fact one reason for studying God's Word is to be equipped for good works, 2 Timothy 3:17. According to Hebrews 13:16, doing good and communicating or sharing are sacrifices that please God. Apostle Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 6 beginning verse 17 to charge believers who are rich in things of this world not to trust in uncertain riches but to trust in the living God and be rich in good works.

By living right and doing good in the Name of God, you glorify Him and make others want to do so. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*. Even if you do not get into full-time ministry, upon getting saved you should dedicate the rest of your life to glorifying God in whatever you do. That way you will not only get to heaven but you will also qualify for a crown in heaven when the believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ that is spoken of in 2 Corinthians 5:10. When Apostle Paul urges believers on the need to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, Philippians 2:12, he is not contradicting Ephesians 2:9 that salvation is not of works. He is speaking to people who are already saved, urging them to live fruitful or obedient lives so as to qualify for rewards at the judgement seat of Christ.

Worship God of the Bible Alone

Hearing the Gospel and getting saved is the beginning of knowing God, and Jesus Christ wants His followers to grow deeper in the knowledge of God as He prayed for them in John 17:3. This is emphasized in 2 Peter 3:18.

Moreover, knowing God has responsibilities, chief among them being to glorify and thank God and also strive to live a life of holiness and purity. Beginning Romans 1:21, we are introduced to a people who knew God but did not glorify Him as God or be thankful to Him, choosing instead to engage in sin, like worshipping idols, and

worshipping their own ideas—the way some cling to the theory of evolution today, despite the Bible disproving it. But we believers ought to strive to be continually in a worshipful and thankful mood, ascribing holiness, honour, righteousness, goodness, greatness and power to the Lord.

Dr. David Jeremiah in his book, *Is This the End?* says that whatever comes first in your life is your idol. And the devil, not wanting people to worship God, is making millions to serve the god of money, possessions and accumulation of wealth. We should not even make our families our idols. Jesus in Matthew 10 beginning verse 37 showed that whoever loves his father, mother, son or daughter more than Him (Jesus) is not worthy of Him. We could even become our own idols by loving ourselves more than Christ, which is also wrong. As we see from Matthew 22:37, the heart, soul, and mind of a believer should be reserved for God.

We begin demonstrating our love for God by identifying with Him openly. As the Bible says in Romans 10:10, it is with the heart that a person believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

The Bible has many examples of people who were not ashamed of identifying with the Lord irrespective of their status in society. For example, in 2 Samuel 6 beginning 14, we see David dancing before the Lord until he got uncovered. And when challenged by his wife Michal, who thought it un-kingly for her husband to uncover himself in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, David answered her, according to verse 21... *It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel: therefore will I play before the Lord.* We should be equally bold in standing for God who has given us so great a salvation in Jesus Christ. Apostle Paul in Romans 1:16 said, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.* In fact whether he was before Governor Felix, as see from Acts 24:25, Paul never changed his

topic to seem “trendy”; he continued reasoning *of righteousness, temperance* [self-control] *and judgment to come*.

Believers know from Isaiah 45:21 and 22 that there is no other God besides the LORD and should therefore have no other object of worship, Exodus 20: 5. Worship is the occupation of the soul with God in acknowledgement of who He is. The Jews in the Old Testament used to worship. Actually the book of Psalms was their prayerbook and songbook. And even us as God’s children through faith in Christ Jesus, worshipping and praising Him are our highest duty, and we can never praise Him enough. God is our Creator. He is the One who gives us everything that sustains this life. He is also the One who has given us everlasting life through Christ Jesus. As implied in Romans 1:21, knowing God comes with the responsibility of glorifying Him and being thankful to Him.

Through the church, the Lord wanted to make a peculiar people that showed forth the praises of Him who called them out of spiritual darkness into His marvellous light, 1 Peter 2:9. After salvation, one’s time should be spent thanking God and doing things that bring glory to God. The Psalmist in Psalm 118:17 said, *I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord*. He was determined to spend the time he was going to be alive declaring the works of God or praising Him. Let us be like Habbakuk according to Habbakuk 3:17-18.

Unfortunately, believers today are more preoccupied with complaining than worshipping and thanking God. We ought to find something for which to worship God even when we are going through difficult times or even bereavement. These days whenever you go to commiserate with people who have lost a loved one, you find preachers who, using humanistic approach to dealing with sorrow, telling the grieving family things like, “Cry. Tell God that you feel bad about what He has done as a way of dealing with pent-up frustration.”

To me, there is nothing wrong with crying under such circumstances, but some of those things that people are encouraged to tell God border on grieving like those who are without hope, contrary

to what is required of us in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 or presuming on a God whose Name we are to hold in awe and reverence.

Job had done the right thing when he worshipped God after losing his worldly possessions. Then at some point he started complaining as if doubting God's goodness and God, according to Job 38:4, asked him, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" In the same way when we grieve the way we are encouraged to grieve by bitterly complaining to God, we can imagine Him asking us, "What contribution did you make in creating that person and in his or her being alive when they were alive?"

Whenever we lose a person, the first thing should be to thank God for the life—whether short or long—that He had given that person and the ability He had given us to serve that person when he or she was alive. Then we should plead with God for the comfort of the Holy Spirit in facing the future without that person. The comfort of the Holy Spirit can bring about greater healing than the temporary satisfaction of complaining bitterly to God.

The devil is the enemy of worship of God. He does not like it when people worship the Lord or thank Him for His goodness to them. To do so:

- The devil encourages people to compare themselves with those whom they suppose are more blessed than they so that they feel like they have nothing for which to thank God. But God has blessed people differently. The one who has not been given one thing has been given another thing. We believers are advised in 1 Timothy 6:6 that godliness with contentment is great gain.
- The devil encourages people to worship angels. Yet not even angels are worthy of worship, as we see in Revelation 22:8, 9.
- The devil encourages self worship or worship of fellow men, yet as much as we are made in the image of God, we are not God.

Know Your Bible Better

- The devil encourages people to worship images (idols) contrary to the commandment in Exodus 20:4 and 5.
- The devil encourages some to worship the creation rather than the Creator. But people ought to worship the Creator and thank Him for what He created.
- The devil encourages people to pray to the dead. But we believers are to make our petitions to God in the Name of the living Jesus Christ, John 15:16.
- The devil encourages people to seek help from fortune tellers, magicians, astrologers, stargazers, and prognosticators instead of going to God who made heaven and earth for help. In the end, as we see in Isaiah 47:14, the likes of fortunetellers, magicians and astrologers will burn as stubble, in the lake of fire of course, where the devil and the rest of his workers are headed as we see in Revelation 20:10.

By not understanding the right approach and purpose of worship, some churches have reduced singing into competitive performances of a select few. But while choirs have their place in churches, congregational singing is no less important because it is through it that all those who attend the church service get the opportunity to worship God. Worship is for all believers, not just a chosen few. We all have reason to thank God, the foremost reason for doing it being that He created us, Revelation 4:11. We are also to worship Jesus Christ for having redeemed us, Revelation 5:9.

As evidence that praise and worship are for people of all ages, we read in Hebrews 11:21 that Jacob did it while leaning upon the top of his staff, and this gives us reason to believe that he was an aged man by then. Psalm 90 is Moses' song of praise, and he was not young when he sang it. According to Luke 24:53, the disciples were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. The book of Psalms ends with this exhortation: *Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.*

Worshipping God is also thanking God, and according to 1 Thessalonians 5:18 we are to give thanks in everything, for this is

the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us. In Psalm 100:4 we are exhorted to thank God and bless His Name. By so doing, we shall be emulating what is happening in heaven where, according to Revelations 4:8-10, there are beasts and elders giving glory and honour and thanks to the Lord God Almighty.

God's Names reveal that He is the Lord our Healer, the Lord our Peace and even the Lord our Provider. In other words He is everything to us. The Psalmist in Psalm 68:19 exhorts, *Blessed by the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.* Everything that we have (including our salvation and peace) we owe it to God. Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:7 asks the rhetorical question...*what hast thou that thou didst not receive?* In other words, what do you have that you did not receive? You came into the world naked, and God has been giving you air to breathe, food to eat, water to drink, clothes to wear, name it. Clearly the Lord deserves more than a token respect from you. He is worthy of your adoration and praise.

True worship is from the heart. Good as it is, kneeling down and raising hands alone does not help if your heart is not honouring God. In Psalm 103 the Psalmist sings, *Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name.* Jesus taught that God should be worshipped in spirit and in truth. According to John 17:17, God's Word is the *truth*. So, worshipping God in truth is worshipping the God of the Bible and doing so as instructed in His Word. Worshipping in spirit has to do with worshipping from the heart, adoring One whom you do not see but acknowledge as having created heaven and earth and all that is there.

The depth of our worship is proportional to our view of God. The greatest mistake we can make is to allow our minds to trivialize God. This is sin and it leads to shallow worship or presuming on God. Really, the God of the Bible is great and powerful beyond imagination. He transcends our understanding, even to inspire awe and worship. Moreover, when our view of God is right, no situation will overwhelm to the extent of losing focus in prayer and worship.

It is said that whenever the Scribes were copying manuscripts of the Scriptures for the synagogues and reached the Name “LORD” (“Yahweh” in Hebrew), they would destroy the pen they were using, wash their hands, get a new pen, write the Name, break that pen and get another one to continue writing. The Name of God was held in great reverence. And even today, most Jews will not mention the Name “Yahweh” casually.

Like any other service to the Lord, worship should be characterized by humility toward God. Really, the more unworthy you feel before God, the more He is uplifted in your heart. In his worship, the Psalmist, according to Psalm 115:1, approached God acknowledging, *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.*

We ought to worship God at all times, even when things are not going well with us. Job worshipped God even after losing everything, Job 1:20. Despite being in prison for preaching Christ, Paul and Silas sang praises to God, Acts 16:25. The disciples, as recorded in Acts 5:41, were caned for preaching Christ but departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were found worthy to suffer shame for His Name. Actually, greater victory is expressed when people of God continue to serve Him even in adversity.

The believers should continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, doing it out of choice and not out of obligation. Worship is service to God, and according to Psalm 100:2, God's people are to serve the Lord with gladness. It is an honour to serve the Lord, and we should be glad for the opportunity to do it. God hates complaining, Numbers 11:1. We may find ourselves suffering despite being in the will of God. Even then, as we see in 1 Peter 4:19, we should continue doing right while committing our souls to God, aware that He is a faithful, loving Creator. Life is never easy and it never will be before Jesus returns. But God is up to any challenges that the devil may bring our way so long as we commit our souls to Him.

We are to glorify God—and make others do so by our example—by living right and doing good in His Name. Jesus said in Matthew

5:16, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* We also thank God by giving to His work because God, on His part, gives us power to get (make) wealth, Deuteronomy 8:18.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Bible-believing Christians have no shrines and can worship anywhere. Jesus in His discussion with the Samaritan woman indicated that a time had come when true worshippers needed not go to a particular place or even mountain for worship. So Christians do not need to wait until Sunday so as to go to church to worship. They can worship and pray anywhere, anytime. This, however, does not excuse forsaking the assembling together of the believers. See Hebrews 10:25. Every effort should be made not to miss the services of the church.

Walk in Righteousness

At the point of salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in your life and He bears witness with your spirit that you are a child of God, Romans 8:16. And as required in 2 Timothy 2:19, we who name the Name of the Lord should depart from iniquity. When God revealed Himself to Abraham, He required Abraham to walk before Him and be blameless, Genesis 17:1-2. In the same way when we get to know the Lord and get saved, we should walk in righteousness. Purging ourselves from sin (2 Timothy 2:21) is what will make us worthy of being used of God. In Proverbs 8:13 the Bible says that the fear of the Lord is to hate evil. Living right is what honouring God is about.

Many, even in some parts of the world today, have paid the ultimate price for becoming Christians or while resisting sin. And of course there is a crown of righteousness awaiting them in heaven like the one Apostle Paul looked forward to, according to 2 Timothy 4:8. But it seems there are Christians who will get to heaven but when the work they did after salvation is tried with fire, it will burn, so they will have no crowns. According to 1 Corinthians 3:15, such a person will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as by fire. It seems they will start their life in heaven with nothing to show, which will lead to deep regrets.

Avoid Sinning with the Mind

All sins start in the heart (mind). One must first sow a thought to reap an act. Actually where your mind goes when it wanders is a pointer to the level of your spirituality. The Bible in Proverbs 23:7 tells us that as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. Moreover, it is not possible to hide thoughts from God who, according to Jeremiah 11:20, *triest the reins and the heart*. God is able to read one's mind and the heart to know their plans.

God takes the thoughts of His creation very seriously. To become Satan (adversary of God), we see in Isaiah 14:14 that it is in the heart that Lucifer said, among other things that smack of pride, *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High*. Besides the physical evil that they did, the other reason God judged the people of Noah's time is because the imagination of their thoughts was evil continually, Genesis 6:5-6. Our Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:28 implied that a sin as grave as adultery could be committed by looking at a woman to lust after her. To love God as required in Matthew 22:37 (with the heart and soul and mind), therefore, you are advised in 2 Corinthians 10:5 to cast imaginations and every high thing (thought of pride) that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. God desires truth in the inward parts, Psalm 51:6. According to 1 Thessalonians 5:23, the Lord desires that the believer's *whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*. As the coming of the Lord draws near, we are admonished to pray and watch so that we do not succumb to temptations or embrace the error of the wicked.

Salvation does not require human effort, Eph. 2:8, 9. But holy living that should follow requires effort. Your mind and body are susceptible to sin. Christian discipline is about subordinating your body and its physical appetites to the service of a mind that has been brought to the obedience of the Lord. According to 1 Timothy 3:9, we are to hold the mystery of faith in pure in pure conscience.

Thoughts to be shunned include those related to adultery,

fornication, murder, theft, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride and spiritual foolishness (like those ideas behind the teaching that there is no God).

We live in a world that glamorizes criminal and other evil activities through the media. We should therefore be careful the things we watch and listen to because of their influence on our minds. Enjoying satanic entertainment can be compared to warming oneself with the enemy fire, the way Apostle Peter did according to John 18 beginning verse 25. If you continue therein, before long you are sure to deny the Lord—as Peter did—in word or deed.

A story is told of an old man who told his grandson, “Son of my son, there is a war raging inside each one of us.” The boy, finding it funny, asked, “And which side will win?” The grandfather answered, “The side you feed.” Righteous people deliberately guarded what their eyes looked at. According to Job 31:1, we see that this man of God had made a covenant with his eyes not to look at the wrong thing. He was well aware that the battle against sin is won or lost at the mind level where planning takes place. The body has direct connection with the soul and it (the body) responds to what it receives from the soul. The advice in Proverbs 4:23 is, *Keep [guard] thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*

It is Satan who injects bad thoughts and emotions into your mind as he encourages you to do evil, and you should actively shun them. You should also avoid promiscuous reading. In place of entertaining sinful thoughts, you should continually seek to commune with God in the spirit. Like the Psalmist, you should seek to have the meditation of your heart acceptable in God’s sight, Psalm 19:14. As Apostle Paul advises in Philippians 4:8, one ought to exercise control over their mind so as to think on whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, spiritually lovely, things of good report where there is virtue and praise.

Salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is the beginning of a new relationship with a holy God. And as we see in Isaiah 43:24, the Lord does not want us to serve Him with our sins or make Him weary with our iniquities. The Lord had this to tell His people of old and had it reiterated for us in the New Testament: *Be ye holy;*

for I am holy, 1 Peter 1:16. We can never acquire God's natural attributes like power to create, but once we get saved, He requires that we strive for His moral attributes like holiness, love, kindness, etc. Our lives as Christians ought to be marked by hunger and thirst for righteousness as Jesus taught in the beatitudes. The *old man* (our life before salvation) was characterised by sin, but new life in Christ Jesus should be characterised by the fruit of the Spirit, which is joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance, having crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. *Flesh*, as the word is used in the Scriptures, stands for the carnal nature.

Satan's ultimate desire is to fill this world with sin, and the way to play your part in fighting Satan or frustrating his work is by living a life that is set apart for God and teaching others to do so. We may not have the opportunity of serving God in so many ways, but just by living a Godly life, we read in Romans 12:1 that we will have given God our reasonable service.

Before getting saved, people indulge in all manner of sins. These works of the flesh include adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders, drunkenness, revelling, etc., Galatians 5:19. The Bible refers to this condition as the *old man*. But after salvation, we become a new creation, 2 Corinthians 5:17. We are henceforth called upon to yield ourselves as instruments of righteousness, ridding ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, 2 Corinthians 7:1. Cultivating our salvation has to do with making deliberate effort to walk in holiness.

Sin in a believer's life affects the joy of salvation. Psalm 51 is David's psalm of repentance after he sinned with Uriah's wife, and in verse 12 he beseeches the Lord to restore to him the joy of salvation. We too ought to constantly examine ourselves in the light of the Scriptures and deal with sin by confessing and abandoning it so that we can continue rejoicing in the Lord.

Besides injecting evil thoughts and emotions to draw us into sin, Satan also uses evil instruments like alcohol and drugs to erode

self-control and make people susceptible to sinning. In Isaiah 28:7 the Bible speaks of the priest – and believers are priests unto God, Revelation 1:5 – and the prophet having erred in vision and stumbled in judgment through strong drink. Alcohol, drugs and other worldly amusements have the ability to dim the view of heaven by giving colour to short-lived vanity, driving one deep into sin. In Proverbs 20:1 the Bible says that wine is a mocker and cautions that whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

The believer should also avoid very close association with the ungodly that may force him or her to embrace worldly values or find themselves justifying sin so as not to hurt their unbelieving friends. Instead, they should cultivate closer fellowship with fellow Christians. Sermons avail little if one chooses to cling to ungodly friends. Human beings are creatures of imitation, and though precept may teach us, it is example that draws us. More often than not, the unbelievers will suggest sinful leisure, and giving in to their pressure will lead to sin. The book of Psalms opens by cautioning against bad company, saying, *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night.* Apostle Paul also warned the believers against being deceived, saying in 1 Corinthians 15:33 that evil communications (company) corrupt good manners (habits).

Avoid Sinning with the Tongue

One of the Ten Commandments is that you will not bear false witness against your neighbour. The book of James has much to say about the destructive power of the tongue. It says that if a man claims to be holy and does not take care of his tongue, this man's religion is vain. Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:29 requires that we let not corrupt communication proceed out of our mouths but that which is good to the use of edifying so that it may minister grace to the hearers. To be perfect before God/demonstrate faith, we should avoid offending in word, James 3:2. This means avoiding abusive language, mudslinging, speaking ill of others and lying about them.

Through evil speaking, some have destroyed fellowship of the brethren and thus given Christianity a bad name, putting off prospective followers of Christ. Others have misused the tongue, destroying marriages and putting asunder what God has brought together. Proverbs 26:20 says that where there is no tale bearer, the strife ceases.

In the book of Numbers, we read about how Miriam, the sister of Moses, with Aaron spoke against their brother Moses because of his Ethiopian wife. The Lord's reaction in making Miriam leprous and commanding that she be sent out of the camp of the children of Israel shows how seriously God views misuse of the tongue.

Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:10 says that whoever wants to see good days and love life, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile (deceit). In Psalm 50:23, the Lord promises to show His salvation to the one who orders his conversation aright. *Salvation*, as the word is used to here, has to do with the Lord heeding to one's prayer in their hour of need. And since we all need God in our situations, it is important to guard our tongues. This is consistent with what Jesus promised in Matthew 5:8: the pure in heart will see God, in their situations of course.

In view of the foregoing, we should learn to speak the truth about others. Even in rebuking fellow believers, care should be taken not to focus exclusively on people's weaknesses, as this may lead to discouraging them. When speaking to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, our Lord started by commending them for the good that they had done before rebuking them for the wrong. Unfortunately, we tend to say so much that can destroy others, only to masquerade our gossip in some pious language in the end.

The kind of love that the Bible requires us to practise is not blind; it sees where others go wrong. But it does not undertake to focus exclusively on the flaws of others and broadcast them. As the Bible says in the book of Peter, charity (love) covers a multitude of sins. Sins, as the word is used here, has to do with individual weaknesses related to human nature as well. Godly rebuke if done openly is proper and beneficial. But it should be done out of love, not malice.

Avoid Sinning with the Body

When we get saved, our bodies cease to be our own and become the temple of the Holy Ghost, 1 Corinthians 6:19. Henceforth we are called upon to yield all parts of the body as instruments of righteousness, ridding ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, 2 Corinthians 7:1. And according to Proverbs 8:13, the fear of the Lord is to hate evil.

Apostle Paul refers to the sins of *the old man* as works of darkness and in Colossians 3:12 exhorts us to replace them with bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man has a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave us.

Apostle Peter also reminds us about the kind of life the unsaved people live. According to 1 Peter 4 beginning verse 3, that life is characterised by lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings and abominable idolatries. But he admonishes saved people to no longer live the rest of their life in the flesh to the lusts of men but to the will of God.

The record in 1 John 1:6 is that if we say we have fellowship with God and yet walk in darkness (sin), we lie. So, the Bible in 1 John 2:6 requires the person who says he abides in Christ to walk blamelessly as Christ did. Getting saved is also compared to beginning a race for a crown in heaven. And to run effectively, we are advised in Hebrews 12:1, *Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*

However, devout life does not happen effortlessly. Jesus in Mark 14:38 showed that even when the spirit was willing (ready to obey God), the flesh could be weak. The exemplary Apostle Paul also found righteous living difficult. According to Romans 7:15, he found himself doing those things that he hated to do and not doing those things that he should do. Righteous living demands that you consciously put the body and soul in subjection to the will of God.

And that is just what Paul did as we see in 1 Corinthians 9:27. A life of purity is only possible through self-control. We too ought to crucify the flesh and its affections and lusts, Galatians 5:24. Emotions may not immediately obey the will, but actions must. And in due course, by the grace of God, even emotions will follow one's decisive stand to overcome temptations.

But difficult as righteous living may seem, we can always count on God's Holy Spirit to empower us in our determination to live right. However, we need also to know that the Holy Spirit does not eradicate our carnal nature or force people to obey God against their will. Neither does He obey God on behalf of the believers. You could be a Christian and still ignore the voice of the Holy Spirit, preferring to live like the believers in Corinth before Apostle Paul rebuked them. The choice to obey God is yours.

The Holy Spirit does not fight spiritual battles on our behalf; He empowers us to fight them. But the fact that the Holy Spirit is always available to help us as we make conscious efforts to obey God means that righteous living is within the ability of any willing believer.

We read in 2 Peter 1:3 that God's *divine power* [Holy Spirit] *hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue*. Speaking of Jesus who dwells in us by the Holy Spirit and the victory He gives us, Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:13 writes, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*.

Love for the Neighbour

There are people who see nothing good in others. In describing others, nouns and adjectives like “thieves”, “useless” keep cropping up. There are even Christians who keep moving from church to church because they cannot stand fellow brethren. Other believers cannot even witness to certain people because of the way they hate them.

But that is not how God sees people. People are God's creation, and like everything else that He created, God sees them as good.

What God hates in people is sin, and that is why He provided Jesus Christ to die for their sins and open a way to reconcile them to Himself (God). In John 3:16 we read that God so loved the world (people) that He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever believes in Jesus does not perish but have everlasting life. Jesus too loved people. In fact in John 15:13 we see that there is no greater love than the one Jesus showed by dying for us, his friends. To Jesus, people are His friends.

We too ought to love God and love other people, Matthew 22:37-39. In fact according to 1 John 4:20, anyone who claims to love God and hateth his brother is a liar.

There is no such a thing as useless people; we are all fearfully and wonderfully made, Psalm 139:14. We should therefore strive not to hurt others in any way but, instead, seek to do good to them. When we hurt others, it is God whom we hurt, first and foremost. This we establish from David's prayer of repentance after he sinned with Uriah's wife and had him killed. In Psalm 51:4, David acknowledges that it is to God that he had committed that grave sin. In the same way when we do good to others, the Lord compares that to doing good to Him. In Matthew 25:40 we see that when you feed or clothe a naked or hungry person, it is to the Lord that you do it.

Unlike Cain of old, we are our brother's keeper. Love restrains us from doing what hurts others, like deceiving them or bearing false testimony against them. Unfortunately the craving to seem more successful than others tends to make people to portray others in bad light. If we love the other people, we will not engage in false reports about them to get them into trouble, either. Also, we will not fight them, steal from them or have them killed. According to Romans 12:10, we are to be kindly affectioned one to another. Apostle Paul concludes by requiring in Romans 12:18 that *if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*

The kind of love that the Lord requires is more than natural affection. It is the agape love that is demonstrated by good deeds towards others. By requiring that you love your neighbour, Christ is

calling upon you to do something by way of helping anyone needing your help, like the person who fell among thieves, Luke 10:30, and the Good Samaritan came to his rescue. Moreover, in 1 John 3:18 we are exhorted not to love in word or in tongue but in deed and in truth. Love should be without dissimulation (hypocrisy or pretence), Romans 12:9. Also, such love reaches to all, including those to whom we are not naturally attracted. We may not have control over our feelings, but we have control over our actions. This kind of love influences our attitude towards others, making us sensitive to their needs and feelings. This kind of love is self-sacrificing and asks nothing in return. It is the kind of love that makes you love your enemies or lend, hoping for nothing again, Luke 6:35. It is an echo of God's love, who loved us when we were unlovable, Romans 5:8.

Loving the Brethren

Jesus in John 13:34 gave His followers a new commandment, that they love one another as He loved them. Love is the trademark of all that the Lord does, and it ought to be the trademark of our service to Him. Speaking to the church in Corinth, Apostle Paul required that all things be done with charity (love). Love ought to be the motivating factor for any service to God. Love for the brethren is demonstrated by, among other things, contributing to their necessities or needs like food, if they happen to be hungry, Romans 12:13.

Towards the end of Jesus' ministry here on earth, He prayed for His disciples and all those who would believe on Him through their testimony that they be one, John 17:21. In requiring that we be one, the Lord did not mean bringing different churches and denominations under one umbrella. Any church with a pastor and deacons can manage its affairs freely. Being in one accord signifies believers who have dealt with any differences through forgiveness so that love reigns among them. Jesus knew the importance of forgiveness for oneness to exist in the body of believers. When asked by Peter how often one should forgive his or her brother He answered in Matthew 18:22...*Until seventy times seven.*

According to 1 John 1:3, it is when believers are in fellowship

with one another that they are in fellowship with God the Father and with His Son Jesus. So, if you wish to be in fellowship with God, enhance your fellowship with the brethren. Giving to God is a form of worship. But God does not want our worship when we are not in right relationship with the brethren. In Matthew 5:23 you are told that if you bring your gift to the altar and remember you have something against a brother (or sister), you go and reconcile with that brother first before you give the gift. Oneness in the body of believers suggests an environment where love and understanding reigns. And we can see that the disciples of Jesus themselves obeyed what the Master required of them because as we read in Acts 2:1, they were in one accord on the Day of Pentecost.

But how do you love people who are themselves imperfect and will step on your toes from time to time? We should do all we can to enhance oneness among the brethren by not walking in strife and envying, Romans 13:13, and even avoid those who cause strife among the brethren. We should also labour for each other fervently in prayer so that we may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, Colossians 4:12.

The brethren need not be perfect for you to love them. You are not perfect, either. God loved us when we were unlovable, Romans 5:8, so we too must learn to overlook other people's faults and love them just as they are.

There is no single believer in whom all gifts rest. It is in Christ alone that the Bible in Colossians 1:19 says all fullness dwells. And it is like God did that deliberately, wanting the brethren to learn to work together for the interplay of the different gifts for the perfection (equipping) of the body of Christ, Ephesians 4:11 and 12. Think of your body. Every part of it has special work that it does to help the body. In the same way, every believer has a purpose in the body of Christ, the church.

In 1 Peter 4:8 we see that charity covers (tolerates) a multitude of sins (weaknesses or shortcomings). This is what those Christians who keep moving from church to church looking for a perfect

congregation with loveable brethren should know. There is no such a thing as a perfect church. What there is are brethren who have learned to be patient with each other for Christ's sake.

When people hurt us, we are to forgive them, just as God, for Christ's sake, forgave us, Ephesians 4:32. In Proverbs 24:29 NKJV the Bible says, Do not say, *"I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work."* As someone has said, an eye for an eye only makes the world blind.

When people hurt each other, they run away (avoid) each other. But we ought to be like God who when people hurt Him goes after them for reconciliation. When Adam and Eve sinned, they hid themselves but God went looking for them. Bringing Jesus here on earth was also God's way of reaching out to fallen man for reconciliation. We read in Luke 19:10 that the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. Apostle Paul reminds us this fact in 2 Corinthians 5:19 where he says that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

Loving the Unbelievers

What the Bible refers to as your neighbour includes the unbelievers. Just as the Lord commands us to love fellow believers, He requires that we love unbelievers, too. This is by dealing with them honestly (1 Thessalonians 4:12) and assisting them where we can. It would be wrong to hurt or hate someone just because he or she is not a Christian. Jesus, according to Luke 6 beginning verse 32, does not consider us as good enough if we only do good to those who love us.

There are some Christians who equate relating well with the unbelievers with becoming unequally yoked to them. But that is not always the case. You become unequally yoked to the unbelievers when you begin to embrace their unbiblical teachings and practices for fear of hurting them by refusing. But so long as your relationship with them does not lead you to sin, you ought to live peaceably with them as well, Romans 12:18.

But apart from getting along well with the unbelievers and helping them when they are in need, we are supposed to go to the

other step of demonstrating our love for them by sharing with them the gospel of Christ. According to 2 Corinthians 5:18, two things happened when we placed our faith in Christ and got saved: we were reconciled to God and also given the ministry of reconciliation. From that moment on, the Lord required us to be witnessing Christ wherever we are so that other people may also get the opportunity to be reconciled to God. The Great Commission of Matthew 28 beginning verse 19 was given to all believers.

People are looking for all manner of causes to live for, but turning to God souls that are destined for eternal damnation is the most important work. The importance of any work is measured by the status of the one who gives it. Before Jesus commissioned the disciples to go and preach the gospel, He showed the importance of the work that He was giving by indicating in what capacity He was giving it, saying in Matthew 28:18: *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.* The fact that the work of witnessing Christ was given by One who has authority in heaven and in earth means it is the most important work ever given.

The devil's desire is to take as many people to hell as possible. So, he may trick you into only seeing the bad side of people so that you do not see the need to witness Christ to them. But what you need to remember is that all people are created by God, and everything that God has created is good, Genesis 1:31. What God hates in people is sin. Actually God loves people so much that according to John 3:16 He gave His best, Jesus Christ, to deal with that thing that He hates in people. I and you were equally bad before God sent preachers our way to tell us about Jesus, and there would be no better way of showing our appreciation to God than reaching out to others with the Gospel.

The world's view of the church is to reform society. (Actually the CRE curriculum in schools is developed with that in mind.) But if that happens, it should be as a by the way. The church's main obligation is to reach the lost souls for Christ. Actually once the issue of sin is dealt with, everything else that is good, like peace,

comes in. Moreover, the world is far from being evangelized. Even in Kenya, which ranks as one of the better evangelized countries, preaching is concentrated in towns. According to 1 Timothy chapter 2, the reason we pray for kings and those in authority is so that there may be opportunity to accomplish the will of God which, according to verse 4, is for all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, through evangelization and teaching Bible to those who believe of course. Unfortunately after praying during the elections and peace prevailing, we then squander that peace by not using it to reach out to the unbelievers and teaching the Word.

Jesus is the only way for one to be reconciled to God. He is the only mediator between God and people, John 14:6; Acts 4:12; and 1 Timothy 2:5. Unfortunately, it seems like many professing Christians no longer have the conviction that Jesus is the only way of salvation; therefore they do not see the need to go and preach to others. They have, as it were, been won to the unbiblical line of thinking that different faiths are different ways to God. Such are the people who when someone dies say, “May God rest his (or her) soul in eternal peace”, yet people determine their destiny while they are alive, and no prayer or wishing by those who are alive can change their destiny after they die, as we learn from the rich man of Luke 16 beginning verse 19.

Nor does God’s Word teach about any mediator between people and Jesus. The Lord alone is the source of grace and we ought to go direct to Him for it through prayer. Those who portray Mary as mediator need to know that the relationship between Jesus and Mary is unlike that of any other child and the mother. Jesus, according to Genesis 1:26 and John 1:3, participated in the decision and actual creation of people, including Mary. That is why He was even justified to refer to her as *woman* (John 2:4). Indeed when those in Cana of Galilee tried to go through her to speak to the Son after they ran out of wine, she told them, according to verse 5, to do whatever He told them, being evidence that she herself had faith in Him and therefore trusted Him as her Saviour.

Millions, especially among the down and out living in slums and their children, have never heard these truths about the great riches of the grace of Christ Jesus and would wish to hear the Word of God at their level, yet they feel intimidated and therefore hesitate to attend big churches that are generally made up of rich members.

Of significance to add is the fact that the Great Commission was not given to the church as a corporate body but to individual believers. And they will be rewarded as individuals for their faithfulness. We may not be all pastors, but all of us are to be evangelists, reaching others for Christ and grounding in the faith those who believe. We can never claim to love other people if we never shared the Gospel with them. God's sending of His only begotten Son is what defines His kind of love. By the great suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross, God demonstrated two things: how much He hates sin and how much He loves the sinner. And this love that operated vertically in bringing Jesus Christ to this world is the same love that operates horizontally to send us to those lost in sin. Witnessing and grounding people in the faith is really the greatest act of mercy. According to James 5:20, he who converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death.

In the Old Testament, God poured His Spirit upon anyone whom He wanted to use for a particular purpose. For example Samson, according to Judges 13:25. But after Jesus came, all those who believed in Him, both the Jews and the Gentiles, men and women, were given the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:17. That is how the prophecy in Joel 2:28 was fulfilled, that God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh. (It is worth mentioning that what the Bible refers to as the last days began with the first coming of Christ, Hebrews 1:2.)

The pouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh prepared all believers to carry out the Great Commission of witnessing Christ. In Joel 2:28, a Scripture cited in Acts 2:17, preaching or witnessing Christ is also called prophesying, and the Bible had shown that after the coming of the Holy Spirit upon all believers, all of them – sons and daughters, young men, old men, servants and hand maidens –

would prophesy or preach Christ. This is additional evidence that witnessing Christ is the responsibility of all believers.

To be equipped to serve God well even in witnessing requires that you invest time and effort in studying the Scriptures, 2 Timothy 2:15. That is how you become a well-equipped workman for God. Moreover, do not assume that other people know the Bible as well as you do when witnessing Christ to them. Preachers think that they have taught their congregations all that they need to know, but a credible survey would prove them wrong. In your witnessing, do not think that you are boring your listener by repeating to them the “well-known” story of Jesus. This assumption has made many look for what is entertaining in the name of preaching, yet no philosophy or religious talk can save somebody from their sins. As already mentioned, it is not everyone who has had a clear presentation of the Gospel. Salvation is in Jesus alone, so in your preaching, just keep repeating to your listeners the old, old story of Jesus and His love.

If your listener believes the Gospel and puts their faith in Christ, the next thing to do is to invest time and effort to teaching them God’s Word, Matthew 28:20, so that they become grounded in the faith. Grounding a new believer in the faith through Bible study results in chain reaction evangelism because he or she becomes a soul winner too. Knowing the Scriptures also guards the new believer from being drawn into error through false teachings. It is not enough to tell members of your flock to steer clear of those in cults; after all they may be office mates at the place of work. The sure way to guard believers from the error of the wicked is to make sure they know and can defend with the Scriptures what they believe and why they believe what they believe.

We do not study the Bible just to feel informed or just to know how we can access God’s blessings for our individual benefit. We do so to know the will of God and fulfil it by, among other things, witnessing to others and equipping those who believe so that they, in turn, can win to Christ and teach others. Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2 told Timothy, *And the things that thou hast heard of me*

among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Those whom we win to Christ are our spiritual children, and like Apostle John in 3 John verse 4, we should have no greater joy than to hear that those children walk in truth. And this will only happens if you invest time to ground in the faith those whom you win to Christ or guide them to a Bible-teaching church.

The Right Attitude in Serving God

A saved person should align his or her goals to the will of God. He or she should not seek to do his or her will but the will of God. Nobody, whether you yourself, your wife, your husband, or a parent or any other authority should be allowed to come between you and doing the will of God. Job refused his wife's suggestion to curse God and die, Job 2:9 and 10. When told by the council to stop preaching in the Name of Jesus or be punished, the apostles answered, *We ought to obey God rather than men*, Acts 5:29.

Jesus said in Luke 14:26, *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.* Here, you are not being asked to stop loving your relatives and friends, but if they ask you to do what is against the will of God, you ought to refuse and obey God instead. According to this Scripture, you are also to hate your life as well. This means that you are to refuse to obey the desires of your flesh in order to obey the will of God.

Actually the Lord expects us to resist sin, if possible *unto blood*, Hebrews 12:4. But if you fall into sin, in Jesus Christ we have a High Priest who is touched by the feelings of our infirmity (weaknesses), Hebrews 4:15. He is our Advocate with the Father, 1 John 2:1, to whom we should go for forgiveness and continue in our walk of faith. You should not deny yourself of everlasting life by not getting saved for fear of falling into sin. Though you should not sin deliberately, you need to know that your weakness is God's opportunity to demonstrate His strength. When Apostle Paul prayed over his weaknesses, the Lord according to 2 Corinthians 12:9 told

him that His grace was sufficient for him, Since His (God's) strength is made perfect in weakness (Paul's weakness).

Strictly speaking, serving God is whatever a believer does in submission to the Holy Spirit, beginning with salvation. It is at the time of salvation that a person becomes a servant of God, thus qualifying to do God's work. In John 6:29, Jesus speaking to those who wanted to know what constitutes doing God's work told them, *This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him [Jesus] whom He [God] hath sent*. There are many things that people conceive in their minds and do in the name of working for God. But we see from Apostle Paul's testimony in Romans 1:9 that he (Paul) served God in the gospel of God's Son.

It is service to God to worship Him and live a life of purity. It is service to God to attend church and do those things that make worship possible and enhance the fellowship of the brethren. It is service to God to witness Christ or to do those things that facilitate witnessing to the unbelievers and to teach new converts with the aim of grounding them in the faith. The Lord has given different gifts to the believers, not for us to show off with these God-given abilities but for the perfecting (equipping of) the saints and to enhance the work of the ministry and for edifying the body of Christ, Ephesians 4:12.

Service to God should be prompted by love for God and people. Charity ought to be the motivating factor for anything that we do for God. According to 1 Corinthians 16:14, *let all things be done with charity*. Cultists avail their resources to help the poor. But the Lord will not reward them since what they do is done as a bait to draw beneficiaries to spiritual error through false teachings. Even sharing the gospel is to be done out a compassion for souls. You should not approach witnessing Christ with the spirit or attitude like that of the disciples in Luke 9:54 who wanted fire called from heaven to consume those who did not receive them. There is nothing as dangerous as religion that is devoid of love for people. It is what fuels all the killings that people have ever done in the Name of God.

The success in one's service to God does not depend on one's natural abilities. It depends on how much the Lord moves through the servant, and the prerequisite is humility that is characterized by a life yielded to the Holy Spirit. Moses was the humblest man in the world, Numbers 12:3, and though he was not eloquent but slow of speech, the Lord still used him to take the children of Israel out of Egypt. It is worth mentioning that what the Bible calls humility is willingness to obey what God says.

Even when it comes to witnessing Christ to the unbelievers, we are to do it with meekness, 1 Peter 3:15, and also out of love, unlike people in false faiths who employ deception and sometimes coercion to get people into their groups. Apostle Paul supports this, saying in 2 Timothy 2 beginning verse 24, *And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure [perhaps] will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.*

According to Psalm 100:2, we are to serve God with gladness. The reason people who are saved put on their Sunday best is not to show off but because of being aware of the greatness of the One whom they serve and meet in church every Sunday. We do not go to church to meet just the pastor and friends. We go to church to meet, first and foremost, the Lord who has promised to be where 2 or 3 are gathered in His name. When people are going to meet earthly leaders, they clean their clothes or buy new ones and prepare themselves in other ways. How much more should we prepare and be excited to meet and serve the Maker of heaven and earth!

Our desire to serve God should come from the heart; not by constraint, but willingly, meaning with enthusiasm, 1 Peter 5:2. We do not do God a favour by serving Him; He could get other people to do what He wants done if we were not available. We do not even give to God's work to make Him richer but as an expression of devotion to Him. It is a favour God does to give us an opportunity to serve Him, and we ought to be thankful for it. When the Lord in

Revelation 2:4 complained that the church of Ephesus had left its first love, this may have been expressed through waning enthusiasm in His service. The Lord is greatly moved by enthusiasm in His service. When Israel sinned, the Bible shows in Numbers 25:11 that the Lord turned away His wrath because of Phinehas' zeal for God.

As we have already seen, serving God is an honour and we should be meek and zealous as we serve Him. Moreover, like John the Baptist according to John 3:30, we should seek to decrease and Jesus to increase. Christ said that after doing all that we are commanded in God's Word, we should acknowledge being but *unprofitable servants*, Luke 17:10, aware that whatever we do for the Lord is our duty to do. This is humility, and if we humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, He will lift us up, James 4:10, for instance by blessing the ministries He has given us.

Satan is not happy with people who are seeking to expand the kingdom of God. In serving God, more often than not you will find yourself experiencing hindrances or even persecution. Jesus in John 16:33 warned the disciples that in the world they would have tribulation. In 2 Timothy 3:12 the Bible says that all those who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. This fact is reiterated in Matthew 11:12 where we read that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and that the violent take it by force. Serving God is not without resistance; it therefore requires people who are spiritually violent, that is, people who will strive to live right and do God's will against the demands of the flesh and devilish hindrances. But Jesus (by His Spirit, of course) promised to be with us always, Matthew 28:20, and we are encouraged in 2 Corinthians 1:4 that God comforts us in all our tribulation so that we may be able to comfort others who are in any trouble. When we suffer according to the will of God, we read in 1 Peter 4:19 that we should commit the keeping of our souls to God in well doing as unto a faithful Creator. Even when we are going through persecutions, we should, like the apostles according to Acts 5:41, thank God for counting us worthy to suffer for the Name of Jesus.

The Importance of Prayer

After salvation, one should live to serve God in whatever they do. Unbelievers live to satisfy their urges, but the believer lives to do the will of God. He or she lives to serve the Lord. Apostle Paul said in Philippians 1:21, For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Moreover, just as it takes the grace of God to get saved, it takes the same grace to live a victorious Christian life that is characterized by purity and exploits for God. Jesus in John 15:5 said that without Him, one can do nothing. The writer of the Book of Hebrews in Hebrews 12:28 exhorts us to have (seek) grace by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. And that grace comes through prayer. To show how willing God is to help us in His service when we pray, in Hebrews 4:16 we read, *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

To remain in victory, we are therefore urged in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray without ceasing. It is God who, by His grace, enhances the operation of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we can be fruitful in His service.

Prayer is what makes God give us grace for spiritual victory, and that is why we ought to involve Him through prayer in all our decisions. Unfortunately very often we tell everybody about our problems and go to God as a last resort. Prayer should not be made after we feel that the situation is hopeless so that we say, “There is nothing we can do but pray.” Prayer ought to come first, not after other avenues fail. Before taking action on issues, godly people like David, for example in 1 Samuel 30:8, would inquire of the Lord. We too ought to learn to involve the Lord in all our affairs.

Wanting to show us how blessed we are to have God as our heavenly Father, Jesus in Luke 11:11 asks, *If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone?* And in verse 13 He continues, *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts*

unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?

Life is challenging, both to the Christians and to the unbelievers. But the Christians are blessed in that they have a God to run to because they have been reconciled to the Creator by Jesus Christ. When we confront challenges, let us not fret or start bombarding God with questions; let us pray. God does not answer questions; He answers prayers. Moreover, God is up to any challenge or need. With Him nothing is impossible. As they say, worry about nothing; pray about everything.

Some believers assume that since they are Christians, God will come into their situations without their calling Him through prayer. But that is not the case. God knows everything that is happening at every moment of our life, but as we see in Philippians 4:6, He still wants us to make our requests known to Him. Prayer keeps fellowship with Him alive; that is why God wants His people to pray continually. Also, prayer is a demonstration of total dependence in God and hence faith in God, so it pleases God. In Hebrews 11: 6 we see that without faith it is impossible to please the Lord.

Jesus advised us to knock and seek (through prayer, of course) and we shall find. Underscoring the same message, James 4:2 shows that the reason we have not is because we ask not. (This of course does not mean that God is obligated to give us what is not within His will, just because we have asked for it.)

Satan knows the power of prayer in fighting his kingdom and sometimes he may imbue you with overconfidence or pride, making you feel like you can deal with your issues without the help of God through prayer. But pride comes before a fall and Satan's aim is to bring us down. Therefore, the advice in Proverbs 3 beginning verse 5 is: *Trust the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.* The Lord alone knows the devil's plans against you in advance and He alone has the ability to guide you and protect you until you get victory.

Prayer has rightly been described as the lifeline of the believer. When the going gets tough in our walk of faith, therefore, let us *come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*, Hebrews 4:16. Moreover, God is more than willing to listen to our prayers and answer them. In Jeremiah 33:3 He challenges us, *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not*.

Involvement in the things of the church is important, but even more important is the individual fellowship with the Lord through prayer. God speaks to us by His word, and we speak to Him through prayer.

As we see in Matthew 21:13, more than anything else, God's house is a place of prayer. The importance of prayer in the success of the church in its mission can never be overemphasized. The reason the first deacons were chosen as we see in Acts 6:4 was to free the apostles to devote themselves to prayer and ministry of the Word.

In John 15:7 we see that if we abide in the Lord by obeying His words, we shall ask what we will and it will be done for us. This means that if we are going to be effective in our prayers, then we need to be good students of God's Word so as to know His will and do it. The blind man whose sight Jesus restored was right in saying in John 9:31 that God does not listen to sinners but those who worship Him and do His will. This is the same thing that is said in James 5:16 where the Bible says that the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man (or woman) availeth much. So we should strive to live righteous lives and repent of our sins and ask God for forgiveness—just as forgive others of course!—when we come to Him in prayer. According to 1 Timothy 2:8, God hates people approaching Him with wrath or bitterness, slander and malice. The most important thing when going to God in prayer is preparing your heart. God reads the heart, not the lips. You could fast for days, but if you are still holding grudges, God sees that as a hunger strike. Even if you sing a thousand songs of praise and you are not living right, God can tune you out and say as He said to the people of

Judah according to Jeremiah 6:20: “Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet to me.”

The other thing that we need so as to be effective in prayer is persistence like that of the widow and the meekness of the publican, both of Luke chapter 18. Both persistence and meekness are expressions of faith in God. When you keep going to God over an issue, you are indirectly saying that you have decided not to consider selfish or devilish options. Meekness before God is also an expression of faith as you sincerely acknowledge the greatness of God and your unworthiness in His presence like the publican of Luke 18:13 who acknowledged that he was a sinner before God.

God does not heed to our prayers because we are good but because He Himself is good. Feeling worthy before God is a deception from Satan, intended to deny you God’s mercy. Feeling unworthy or humbling yourself before God, on the other hand, glorifies Him. Indeed the reason why fasting reinforces prayer is because it is an expression of deep humility before God. God moves in our situations after we acknowledge our inadequacy or helplessness before Him. Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15 shows us the attitude of humility with which to approach salvation: *...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.* This is the same humble attitude that should rule the rest of your spiritual life. Being a child of God does not give you authority over the Lord. You still need to humble yourself before Him. Even after what you might think is successful service to God, we see in Luke 17:10 that you should acknowledge being but an unprofitable servant, who has done that which was your duty to do.

First, praying as taught in the Scriptures gives one the opportunity to worship God. Although your prayer needs not be in the exact words of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew chapter 6 and Luke chapter 11, it should begin by worshipping *our Father which art in heaven.*

The first thing that you should do when you come to God in prayer is to believe that He is there, that He is hearing you no matter how softly you are speaking and that He is so good that He rewards those who diligently seek Him, like yourself, Hebrews 11:6.

But praying according to the Bible should not have the underlying purpose of seeking the glory of the praying person. You probably have heard someone praying, “Lord, bless me with this or that so that my enemies see and acknowledge....” That is not the right approach to prayer. Concerning such prayers the Bible says in James 4:3, *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss* [for the wrong reason], *that ye may consume it upon your lusts*.

Biblical prayer should seek the glory of God, with the praying person pleading that God’s kingdom come (or expand) and that God’s will be done on earth. Praying that God’s will be done is also an expression of humility before God, with the praying person subjugating his or her will to the will of God. And as we see in James 4:10, once you humble yourself before the Lord, He will lift you up. Praying that way makes God move to fulfil the desire of the praying person in their service to God or in doing His will. God’s interests should precede our interests.

The Bible in 1 John 5:14 says in part:....*If we ask anything according to his* [the Lord’s] *will, he heareth us*. God is sovereign. He has the right to answer your prayer immediately, require you to wait or say No to what you are asking for. But irrespective of what He decides, He remains God and hence worthy of worship. Even after God allowed Satan to have access to what Job had, as a result of which the devil destroyed Job’s property and children, Job still worshipped God, Job 1:20.

After that, you can then beseech God for personal needs and other needs. Moreover, in making your request known to God, you ought to be clear like the blind man who when asked by the Lord what he wanted done to him replied, as recorded in Mark 10:51, *Lord, that I might receive my sight*. That way when the prayer is answered, you will know and thank God for the answer.

If God means to you what He should mean to a Christian, you should not mind your affairs before you take care of His. And once you mind His affairs, He is faithful to mind yours. In Matthew 6:33 we are told to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and the rest of the things will be added unto us. And since God’s will

according to 1 Timothy 2:4 is that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, we should not forget to pray that people in spiritual darkness come to know the Lord and get the opportunity to learn God's Word, which is the truth. This is besides us ourselves going out there to witness Christ and giving for missions.

The other thing to know is that the Christian life is a battle with the devil who, according to 1 Peter 5:8, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. We therefore need God's intervention through prayer so that God steer us clear of temptations and, if we fall into temptations and sin, deliver us. So the other thing we need to be praying for is God's guidance in our walk of faith and deliverance from evil. We believers are discouraged from sinning, 1 John 2:1, but if we fall into sin, we should not remain there or count ourselves done. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, whose grace we can plead for forgiveness.

Just as biblical prayer starts by uplifting God, it should end with uplifting and thanking God, whose *is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever*. In fact the most important thing that happens when people pray or worship is that God is honoured.

Moreover, after prayer you leave God to answer you at His own time. God is sovereign and we cannot force Him to do things the way we want or follow our own timeline in answering prayer. This brings us to the other topic of waiting upon the Lord.

By going to God in prayer instead of considering sinful options is an expression of faith, and waiting upon the Lord to answer the prayer in His time is an expression of continued faith. So wait upon God while avoiding sin or complaining. The way you live has a bearing on the outcome of your prayer.

There are people who "prophesy" things over themselves or over each other out of wishful thinking, and so nothing happens no matter how long they wait. But when it is God who has promised something, He is not slack in His promise, 2 Peter 3:9, and with Him nothing is impossible, Luke 1:37. Being who He is, He is able to fulfil anything He promises when the fullness of His time is come.

Our God, the Best Employer

In this world people dedicate their lives to different causes only to die and the effort is eventually forgotten. But besides wisdom and the help the believer gets from God to live a purposeful life in this world, he or she dies to receive a reward for his or her service to God. Those who have interacted with people who are on their death bed say that a time comes when all that matters to the dying person is what they did for God.

God is the Hirer or Employer par excellence in that there is nothing that you do for Him is lost. It is all recorded in heaven in the account alluded to in Luke 10:20 where neither moth nor rust can corrupt your treasure, and where thieves do not break in to steal, Matthew 6:20. According to Revelation 14:13, death is just but resting from one's labour, followed by the work you have done for rewards. With this awareness, we are exhorted in 1 Corinthians 15:58 to be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord in that we know that our labour in the Lord is not in vain. Upon finishing the good fight of faith and finishing his course, Apostle Paul when he knew he was about to be killed wrote in 2 Timothy 4 beginning verse 7, *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* The fact that even we have the opportunity to get crowns in heaven is evident from 2 Corinthians 5:10 where the Bible says that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that every believer may receive the things done in his body, whether it be good or bad. (The judgment seat of Christ will be for believers only as they receive rewards for work done after salvation. It will take

place in heaven after the rapture of the church. The unbelievers will be judged at the White Throne 1000 years later so as to be thrown into the lake of fire, Revelation 20 beginning verse 11.)

By the things you see in this world, you may think that you are familiar with glory and fun. But fun that comes from drinking fermented beverages, executing worldly dances or even engaging in sexual sin is short lived and may lead to stress, sickness or even death. But we learn from 1 Corinthians 2:9 that the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, neither has it entered the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for people who love Him. Social agents make it look like the purpose of religion is nothing more than promoting societal justice and harmony. Yet if the benefits of believing in Jesus were just to get what this life offers, then we would be of all people most miserable (1 Corinthians 15:9). But by the grace of God that is not the case: there is everlasting life waiting for us. Jesus in Matthew 16:26 asked, *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* From this Scripture, it is clear that even if the whole world with all its wealth were to become yours as an individual, it would not compare in value with the everlasting life. And so as we struggle to serve God in a generally unfriendly environment as warned by our Lord in John 16:33, we are reminded in Romans 8:18 that the sufferings of this present time are not comparable to the glory that shall be revealed in us.

Common Questions and Their Biblical Answers

Why do we call Jesus the Son of God yet God is a spirit and hence above having a family?

In the Bible, the title “Son of God” is used in the sense of “having the characteristics of God”. Jesus came from God (John 1:1; John 3:2) and that is where He went back, John 16:28. In a discussion that took place in heaven before He came to earth, Jesus told God the Father in part as recorded in Hebrews 10:5 “....*a body hast thou prepared for me.*” Of course a spirit could not die on the cross. So Jesus, being God, took flesh, suppressed His deity and went through human development to deal with the sin of mankind. The title “Son of man” calls attention to the fact that when on earth, Jesus possessed real humanity. But even while in the flesh, we see from Colossians 2:9 that all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily.

Jesus in John 14:9 and John 12:45 says that having seen Him you have seen the Father. In Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:3 we see that He is the image of God. And just as Jesus is the express image of God, everything of God (holiness, goodness, power, etc.) is expressed in Jesus.

How do I answer those who say that Jesus is not God because He said the Father is greater than He?

It is true that Jesus in John 14:28 said...*for my Father is greater than I.* But as we see in Philippians chapter 2, Jesus had always been in the form of God and only took the lowly form of a servant (verse 7), assuming *the likeness of men*, so as to die on the cross for our sins. There is really no one who is as humble as Jesus. Saying that the Father is greater than He is a reflection of the lowly position that Jesus had assumed to be in the flesh compared to how He was before leaving heaven, and where He went back. It is even worth mentioning that the 30 pieces of silver paid to Judas for betraying Jesus was the value of a slave, according to Exodus 21:32.

Can I become a Christian just by attending church and becoming friends with the believers?

No. It is very good to attend church even when you are not a Christian because by so doing you avail yourself to hear the Word of God preached and thus get to know His will. It is also good to be friendly to Christians just like you should be friendly to everybody else. But Christianity is about making friends with God through Christ who, according to Ephesians 2:15, abolished or dealt with our enmity with God on the cross when He came into this world in the flesh.

We are born in sin, Psalm 51:5 and Romans 3:23, and therefore at enmity with God, and it is Jesus who reconciles with God those who believe Him, 2 Corinthians 5:18. And just as there is a day in history when Jesus died to reconcile us to God, there is a day when one acknowledges their sinfulness, repents towards God and appropriates the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross by faith for forgiveness. That is how one gets saved from the wrath of God and inherits eternal life. Nobody, not even a church leader or a Christian friend, can forgive your sins and give you everlasting life. It is only Jesus who has power on earth to forgive sins, Matthew 9:6.

Must I feel something to know that I am saved?

Never doubt or belittle what is accomplished through faith just because you do not see it with your eyes, since it is God, with whom nothing is impossible, who does it. At the time of creation, we see in Hebrews 11:3 that the unseen God used His unseen word to create the worlds that we marvel at. In the same way when you appropriate the sacrifice of Christ in your life by faith, that faith moves the unseen God to forgive your sins and makes you an inheritor of the everlasting life. This is something that the physical sacrifices that individuals offered for themselves under the law of Moses could not accomplish.

Some imagine that one ought to feel something special to know that they are saved. But salvation is not a matter of feelings; you know you are saved because the Bible so says concerning anyone who has repented toward God and placed their faith on the Lord Jesus.

Christianity is based on what the Bible says; it is not an experiential religion. In Luke 17:20 Jesus said that the *kingdom of God cometh not with observation*. Even our spiritual walk is by faith, not by sight, 2 Corinthians 5:7. The fact that those who repent of their sins and believe on Jesus are saved – feelings or no feelings! – is evident from 1 John 5:13 where the Bible says, *These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God*. Salvation has to do with standing on the promises of God; the above Scripture emphasizes “knowing”, not “feeling”. Your faith should not be based on your own ideas, feelings, or what you think is right; it should be based on God’s Word.

The same case applies to the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell in you once get saved: You may not feel any change to suggest His presence, but upon repenting toward God and trusting in Jesus, He comes to abide in you, and henceforth, yours is to yield to Him by living in obedience to God’s Word.

As many as have repented toward God and trusted in Jesus as Saviour have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. Just as you do not need a special experience to know that you are saved, you do not need a special experience to know that the Holy Spirit has come into your life. Promised to all those who believe, Acts 2:38, His sealing is a fact, not an experience.

You may have heard people say about a Christian who has fallen into sin, “It is because he does not have the Holy Spirit.” That is not the case. The Holy Spirit does not produce robots out of believers or resist the devil on people’s behalf. We have even heard of great men of faith falling into sin. The Holy Spirit shows people what is right to do but allows them the choice to do it or not, coming in to empower them only when He establishes their determination to follow through in obedience. The Holy Spirit comes to empower us, but the fighting is ours. Nobody can doubt that Apostle Paul had the Holy Spirit, but even he, as we see in 1 Corinthians 9:27, had to bring his body into subjection to be able to do the will of God.

The reason a Christian sins is not because he or she does not have the Holy Spirit but because they have made deliberate choice to disobey Him (the Spirit of God). In fact the main distinction between a mature Christian and an immature one is not that one has the Holy Spirit and the other one does not have the Holy Spirit; the difference is in the level of yielded-ness to the Spirit. When Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:30 requires us not to grieve the Holy Spirit by sinning, he presumes that the Holy Spirit dwells in all true believers and that it is within our ability to obey or disobey Him.

Do Christians claim to be better than other people?

This is a question that some unbelievers ask to make the believers feel guilty or as a way of intimidating them as they share the Gospel with others. We should, however, answer this question with meekness as required in 1 Peter 3:15 and in 2 Timothy 2:25 by replying that Christians never say they are better than other people; they merely testify that they are forgiven because that is what the Bible says concerning those who have put their faith in Jesus, 1 John 2:12.

Some people may even dismiss you as unsaved for refusing to go along with their selfish demands. But while you should not be hostile to such people, you need to know that you are not saved because of living up to people's expectations but because of having repented toward God and placed your faith in Christ.

Moreover, we remain victorious in our walk of faith because whenever we sin and repent, God through Christ applies the same grace by which we were saved to forgive us. One can therefore understand what Apostle Paul meant when he said in 1 Corinthians 15:10 that he was what he was by the grace of God. We would be very helpless if there was no forgiveness of sin. The NKJV Bible says in Psalm 130 beginning verse 3, *If You, Lord, should mark [note down] iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared [respected]*. Apostle John comforts the believers with these words in 1 John 2:1: *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

Should Christians drink alcohol?

The answer to the above question is NO. If there is anything that the devil has used over the ages to facilitate evil and wreak havoc in this world, then it is alcohol.

When people are in court and are pleading for mercy before the judge, it is not uncommon to hear them say, “I did this under the influence of alcohol”, this being indirect admission that being drunk and having a sound mind do not go together. Yet the Lord requires His people to have a sound mind as we read in 2 Timothy 1:7 where the Bible says, *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.* Many people have contracted all manner of diseases after drunkenness undermined their judgment, making them to mess. In the developed world where they have managed to capture data on misuse of alcohol, it has been established that 40% of all crimes are carried out when people have been drinking. Through alcohol and drugs, we have seen the character of people we admired disintegrate before our eyes as they lose control of their lives. Marriages have been broken and children suffered. Many in Kenya have died or become blind after drinking “kumi kumi” or similar alcohol-related concoctions.

In our country, it is an open secret that we do not have enough rehabs for all the young people who need to be weaned off the addiction of alcohol and substances. Many who started drinking for recreation then graduated into drugs as they sought to experience a new high. Before long, they started seeking external help to be freed from the oppression in which they found themselves. Woe unto them if parents or relatives do not have the resources or awareness to enable them help their son or daughter! Nor is alcohol a respecter of persons. There are many priests from churches that serve strong drinks for Holy Communion who are seeking help in rehabs after becoming addicts.

The devil likes anything like alcohol that causes oppression, since he is the thief of John 10:10 whose work is to steal, to kill, and to destroy.

Jesus in Cana of Galilee did not make strong drink. Our Lord was aware that the Old Testament, for example in Proverbs 31:4, had warned against the effects of *strong drink*. What Jesus made in Cana of Galilee was the equivalent of the fruit juice or soft drink that we use even today in weddings to down the food (*mechele*) that we eat. As evidence that the wine Jesus used was a drink in the family of unfermented fruit juices, in Matthew 26:29 it is referred to as “fruit of the vine”. Those who are qualified in the exegesis of ancient languages tell us that the Greek and Hebrew words for strong and soft drinks are different. And the Greek word that is used for the wine that Jesus made in Cana of Galilee is that for soft drink.

Rather than drinking wine (strong drink), the Word of God requires that believers be filled with (or yield fully to) the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 5:18. The same way the various parts of a person who is drunk get under the control of alcohol, believers ought to yield all aspects of their lives to the control of God’s Holy Spirit. Just as strong drinks and drugs are instruments that the devil uses to perpetuate evil, the Holy Spirit is the Lord’s tool for promoting righteousness.

Which is the correct day of worship?

The Law of Moses was not just the Ten Commandments in Exodus chapter 20. It comprised over 600 do’s and don’ts that included holy days and diverse washings. Besides Exodus, read books like Leviticus to get a sense of what the Law of Moses involved. These do’s and don’ts were too many to commit to memory much less make part of one’s life. Yet observing one demand of the Law made you a debtor to do the whole Law, Galatians 5:3. Accordingly, failing at one point of the Law made you guilty of it all, James 2:10.

So no one of its dispensation was able to keep the Law, Acts 7:53, and that way its purpose was accomplished, which was to prove all people sinners, Romans 3:20 and 23, and thus prepare people for the grace of God that was to come by Christ. Galatians 3:24 says the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

Keeping the Sabbath of the seventh day of the week was one of the commandments under the Law, and we believers are not under obligation to keep it. In the Bible, Saturday is the seventh day of the week, and it is the day the rest (or Sabbath) of the seventh day of the week was observed under the Law of Moses. But the believers are not under the Levitical priesthood. When Jesus died and rose again, the priesthood and the Law changed, Hebrews 7:12. Believers are a royal priesthood whereby every believer is a priest unto God, with Jesus Christ as the High Priest who is set at the right hand of God. We Christians are not under the Law of Moses but are under the grace or Law of Christ. Instead of congregating for worship on the Sabbath, the apostles began congregating on Sunday, the first day of the week, 1 Corinthians 16:2 and Acts 20:7. In Revelation 1:10, Sunday is also called the Lord's Day.

Sabbath has never been changed to Sunday, and those who still observe the Law of Moses, like non-Christian Jews, still rest on Saturday. Neither do those who go to church on Sunday view Sunday when they gather for worship as Sabbath. By meeting on the Sabbath, the 7th day of the week, the Jews under the Law of Moses remember creation. Being under the Law of Christ, believers gather on the first day of the week (Sunday) as a reminder of the resurrection of Christ when their victory was realized.

Proponents of Sabbath observance argue that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday by the king referred to in Daniel 7:25 who was to change times and laws. But the king referred to here is the Antichrist and he will be revealed in future after the church is raptured. The question is, is it possible that someone who will come onto the scene in future could have had a role on things that happened in the past?

Apostle Paul went to church on Sunday, the first day of the week, Acts 20:7, and though he sometimes also went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, Acts 17:2, it was not to keep hallow the day but to meet with the Jews and witness Jesus to them. According to 1 Corinthians 9:20, he was determined to be a Jew to the Jew, who were themselves still under the law of Moses, so as to win them

to Jesus. And to ensure that the believers did not feel guilty for not observing the Sabbath he told them in Colossians 2:16: *Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days.*

Why do false teachers discourage independent Bible study?

Satan is very zealous when it comes to hindering the kingdom of God. To do so he uses all manner of methods, including inspiring persecution. Church history teaches of a time when even groups operating under the name Christianity persecuted those seeking to translate the Bible in a language that everybody understood, the ultimate aim being to prevent independent study of the Scriptures. And now that the truth of God's Word is generally available, we hear they are pitching the idea that the teachings of the Bible do not match the times as to be able to guide people in the 21st century, being a way of justifying coming up with another book to replace God's Word. Of course the devil's objective in inspiring his people to do this is the same old one: to hinder people from knowing the truth so that they are not set free from his kingdom. If the Bible were irrelevant for our time, it could not have foretold today's increase of knowledge revealed through Prophet Daniel about 500 years before Christ and recorded in Daniel 12:4. The Bible will be for ever relevant.

Satan also inspires false teachings with the objective of holding unbelievers in error and to try to move the believers from their steadfastness in Christ. False teachings are perpetuated by false teachers. Satan is aware that false teachings cannot thrive where people are guided by the Word of God. God's Word is the truth, John 17:17, and Satan has no power in an environment of truth. To discourage people from relying on the Bible as the authority of faith and practice, false teachers make it look like the Bible is a part of the truth and as if they alone have access to the other part of the truth in form of the materials they distribute. But that is a lie. The Bible contains God's full plan for man from the time of creation to the

end of the world. And since the ultimate end of religion is to show people how they can be reconciled to God, something that the Bible fully achieves as we see in John 20:30 and 31, why should we look further as suggested by the false prophets?

Sometimes false teachers discourage followers from studying the Bible on their own, arguing that the book is too difficult to understand and should be read by a select few who qualify to interpret it. But that is just another trick to prevent people from knowing the truth and be set free. God could not have packaged His message in a way that is too hard to understand while intending that all His people be guided by it. When Scripture is allowed to interpret Scripture, the Bible is simple enough and without loose ends, simple to the extent of being understood by Sunday school children.

To guard against the error of the wicked, we ought to study God's Word, 2 Timothy 2:15, so that we are able to rightly divide (interpret) the word of truth, and test every teaching or spirit by it, 1 John 4:1. Many people are aware of the presence of falsehood but could still be deceived because they are not conversant with the Bible. You have to know the truth to be able to detect doctrinal deviations.

Why do people who were baptized when they were babies submit themselves to baptism after getting saved?

First of all baptism does not save; salvation comes when you repent toward God and place your faith in Jesus, Acts 4:12 and Romans 10:13.

When you get saved, the Holy Spirit baptizes (adds) you into the invisible body of believers, 1 Corinthians 12:13. The physical baptism that follows in church is a way of outwardly identifying with Christ before people to show what has taken place inside you, and it is actually at that point that you biblically join the local church (Acts 2:41), although that does not mean being baptized every time you relocate and change church membership. You can go to heaven without having been water-baptized, like the thief who trusted Jesus on the cross, but like Jesus who submitted Himself to the baptism of

John to *fulfil all righteousness*, you too ought to follow in obedience and be baptized if you get saved and live on.

In all cases in the Bible, believers' baptism is by immersion in water as a way of identifying with the death, burial and resurrection with Jesus, Romans 6:3 and Colossians 2:12. Actually the word "baptize" comes from the Greek word "baptizo", which means to immerse, and you cannot immerse someone in a cup of water, under a flag or through a handshake. Moreover, salvation has nothing to do with giving a new name, although there is nothing unbiblical with taking one at the time of baptism.

The other thing that we see in the Bible is that baptism follows repentance, for instance in Acts 2:41. Acts 8:37, a Scripture missing in some modern Bible versions, also shows that you may (*thou mayest*) be baptized only after believing that Jesus is the Son of God, meaning after salvation. Salvation is a prerequisite for baptism. Indeed we do not see the baptism of infants in God's Word, since children under the age of accountability cannot repent. The baptism of infants started with the erroneous teaching that baptism washes away sins. And so, caring parents for fear that their children might die early before they reached the age of accountability submitted them to baptism. But this worry is unfounded. Children who die before the age of accountability are given special grace by God. In support of this, we have the example of the child King David got by Bethsheba as recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 11. The child fell sick and died. Later, David repented of his sin with Bethsheba, as in Psalm 51, and hence got reconciled to God. And as an indication that this baby too went to heaven, we read in 2 Samuel 12:23 about David saying that the child could not come back but that he himself would go to where the child had gone.

The responsibility we have over our children is to dedicate them as was done for Samuel in the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 1:24, and Jesus, Luke 2:27, and then expose them to the Word of God so that they get the earliest opportunity to trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour.

Is seeking medical attention and taking medicine a sign of reduced faith in God?

Doctors only treat; it is God who heals, and even the knowledge to treat is given by Him. God conveys his help to us through other people. When we are sick, He helps us by availing doctors. Even those who criticize medical treatment recommend soup when one is experiencing pain in the bones. And the reason why the pain goes is because the supply of calcium in the body is thus replenished. The question that one ought to ask is: How different is that from swallowing calcium tablets prescribed by a doctor?

It is God who gives knowledge to address challenges, even those related to sickness. When the children of Israel reached Marah in the wilderness where the water was bitter, God showed Moses a tree which when put in the water made it sweet, Exodus 15:25. When the Good Samaritan found the man who had been beaten by thieves, we see in Luke 10:34 that he bound his wounds and poured on them a concoction of oil and wine. Is this not what doctors do in hospitals? In fact when Paul recommended that Timothy be taking a little wine for his stomach, 1 Timothy 5:23, this was no different from prescribing a medical drug with alcohol content in its formula. Luke of the Bible was a physician (doctor), and Apostle Paul had no problem with his career. In fact in Colossians 4:14 he greets him and refers to him as a beloved physician.

Is Apostle Peter the Church's spiritual rock?

There are some people who take Matthew 16:18 to mean that Apostle Peter is the rock upon which the church is founded. But really, who was Jesus referring to as the rock in this Scripture?

True, the demonstrative pronoun *this* in this verse has no clear antecedent, and this makes it hard to know whether Jesus was referring to Peter or to Himself by reading this Scripture alone. But Scripture is supposed to interpret Scripture, so let us read other parts of the Bible and use exegetical methods to find out what Jesus meant. In the Greek New Testament from which the King James

Version of the Bible is translated, the Greek word for Peter is *Petros*, meaning, a small stone, whereas the Greek word for rock is *Petra*. And so Matthew 16:18 should be understood to read: "...thou art Peter (*Petros*), and upon this rock (*Petra*) I will build by church..." From the foregoing, it is clear that Apostle Peter is not the *Petra* of this Scripture, and since there were 2 people in this discussion, *Petra* must be Jesus Christ. Moreover, there is confirmation for this in 1 Corinthians 10:4. Here, the English Bible refers to Jesus Christ as the Spiritual Rock, and the Greek New Testament word for "Rock" in this verse is *Petra*. So, Jesus in Matthew 16:18 is referring to Himself as the rock upon which the church is founded.

This fact is consistent with all other Scriptures in the Bible on the relationship between Jesus and the church. In Colossians 1:18 we see that Jesus has pre-eminence on all things concerning the church. When the church is compared to a spiritual building, each believer becomes a living stone, 1 Peter 2:5, with Jesus Christ Himself as the Chief Cornerstone, Ephesians 2:20. Three times in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 1:8, 21:6, 22:13), Jesus refers to Himself as the Alpha and Omega. In God's plan of reconciling people to Himself, Jesus is the beginning and the end. According to Ephesians 1:22, Jesus is Head over all things to the church.

How can you distinguish between a true church and a cult (hereticized Christianity)?

Satan is the master counterfeiter and he has organized his kingdom (also called the kingdom of darkness) just like the kingdom of God but with the underlying aim of fighting the kingdom of God.

Satan knows all about the kingdom of God, having lived in heaven as Lucifer before he sinned and was thrown out of the mountain of God (Ezekiel 28:16). He is therefore aware that Jesus Christ the Son of God is the only way by which to deal with sin and be reconciled to God, John 14:6 and Acts 4:12. So, all Satan's strategies have one ultimate objective that is recorded in 2 Corinthians 4:4: to hinder

unbelievers from receiving the light of the gospel of Christ of the Bible.

Satan is a spiritual being and cannot be seen with physical eyes. He therefore uses his agents, the false teachers, who live openly in the world. These are the people behind cults.

Unlike true churches, cults are not guided by the Bible on matters of faith and practice. They are guided by documents that are authored by their leaders. Also, unlike Bible-based Christians who contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, Jude 3, cultists change their teachings and practices to suit the demands of the hour.

Christian denominations may differ on minor points of doctrine, but all true churches embrace the following fundamental beliefs: The divine inspiration of the Bible and its authority for faith and practice; the virgin birth, death and resurrection of Christ; the fact that Christ is the Son of God and hence God manifested in the flesh; the sinfulness of man and justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone; and Christ's second coming. A cult is any religious group that deviates from one or more of these distinctive of a true church.

Through cults, Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, 2 Corinthians 11:14. These religious systems have false apostles, who are actually deceitful workers, verse 13. They preach *another* (or false) Christ, using *another* (or false) gospel Christ, verse 4.

As mentioned elsewhere in this book, the truth of any spiritual teaching is judged by its view of Jesus. This other christ who was not preached by the apostles is false because he is presented as fully human but not God. So he is not worthy trusting for salvation. This explains why followers preach salvation by works, not by faith in him. There is even a cult that has come up with its Bible version in which verses alluding to the deity of Christ are changed to support the view of Christ that is in line with what they teach. According to that version, Christ is merely "divine", not God.

God is a mystery and there are things about Him that we do not

know. What He has revealed about Himself in the Bible is just what is necessary to facilitate salvation and serving Him. In a way this is what the Bible means when in Deuteronomy 29:29 it says that hidden things belong to God and that the things that are revealed belong to us and our children. As a believer, you should therefore not waste time pursuing things that are not revealed in the Bible, like the teachings contained in resources of cults where false teachers claim to have received extra-biblical revelation that people supposedly need to believe for their salvation to be complete. Repenting toward God and putting your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is alone enough to give complete salvation (Colossians 2:10).

But people in cults are not to be treated as enemies; they are a mission field. They are like any other people who need to be told about Jesus of the Bible, who is the Son of God, just in case God give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth and they recover themselves out of the snare of the devil who has held them captive, 2 Timothy 2:25-26.

If you have been in a cult and get saved, you should leave it and join a Bible-teaching church so as to avail yourself to be grounded in the Bible and become equipped to reach out to those who do not know Christ of the Bible.

The sacrifices that people in false faiths offer are devilish, and as a believer, you should not knowingly avail yourself for the feasts of people in false faiths in the name of going to eat the food to be eaten. If you do so, you will be knowingly defiling yourself. Just like Apostle Paul said of the Gentiles in 1 Corinthians 10 beginning verse 20, people in cults sacrifice to devils, not to God. The Scripture goes on to warn against fellowship with devils, adding in verse 21, *Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table [Holy Communion] and of the table of devils.*

Finally, the Lord is against religious alliance between Bible-believers and false faiths (cultic groups). In Revelation 18:4, the command is that we de-link ourselves from fellowshiping with

such a religious system so that we do not become partakers of her sin. Such fellowship is characterized by justifying their teachings and practices so as to gain their acceptance.

Can a Christian be cursed?

There is a new doctrine that is built around identifying curses and breaking them. The assumption is that if you can dig into the past of your relatives and have curses emanating from their sins broken, you would be prosperous financially and health-wise. But how far back can you go and how can you find out all the sins your fore parents did?

The devil would like us to focus only on our individual welfare in this life (what Jesus called the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches) so that we have no time for reaching others with the gospel. While we should not court problems deliberately, we should not expect a problem-free life in this world. Jesus said that in this world His followers would have tribulations, but He wanted us to be of good cheer because He had overcome the world, John 16:33.

Problems cannot come into your life unless God allows them. Moreover, God could allow trouble for the following reasons:

- (i) When He wants to prove to the devil that you are faithful, as He did with Job. In Job 2:6, the Lord told Satan, *Behold, he [Job] is in thine hand.....*” Following that we see the devil excitedly leaving the presence of the Lord and really wreaking havoc in the life of Job.
- (ii) For His own glory, as was the case with the sickness of Lazarus, John 11:4, or the blindness of the man of John 9:3.
- (iii) As a repercussion for sin as continually happened to the children of Israel as recorded in the book of Judges. Reading the book of Judges, you will keep on coming across these words: *And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of God.* And every time this happened, God would allow oppression

from their enemies. Then the children of Israel would cry to God and He would send a judge to help them out.

There are people who keep moving from one curse-breaking conference to another, never pausing to find out whether the difficulties they are experiencing could be as a result of any of the above reasons.

Before we got saved, we were under a curse. What awaited us was eternal punishment in the lake of fire. But Jesus was made a curse for us, Galatians 3:13, by taking our punishment on the cross. As a result, we are no longer under a curse but have, instead, inherited eternal life by believing Him.

Even if a fellow human being were to wish you evil, the Bible in Proverbs 26:2 shows that a curse without a cause will not have an effect. When Balak wanted Balaam to curse the children of Israel, we see God refusing Balaam to do so, saying they are blessed, Numbers 22:12.

All that the apostles required of those who had been deep in the kingdom of darkness before getting saved was to destroy paraphernalia that linked them to their devilish past (Acts 19:19) and then pursue a life of purity and grow in the knowledge of Jesus.

Whenever people go to take the Word of God where it has not been heard, all manner of witchcraft is done by the servants of the devil to hinder them, but all the time the side of the Lord wins because greater is He (the Lord) who is in us than he (the devil) who is in the world, 1 John 4:4. Even if you became a Christian against your relatives' wish and they curse you, that curse will not affect you.

Nor are you under obligation to heed to devilish demands just because they are made by relatives or because people who made them later died. I know of a man who operated a beer club and before he died said that it should never be closed. His wife took this to be a curse and for fear of going against her deceased husband's will continued running this club, despite the fact that she herself

was a Christian. Such fear is unjustified. It is inspired by the devil through ungodly traditions and teachings. We ought to study God's Word so as to know the power of Christ and walk in the freedom that we have in Him. Jesus in John 8 beginning verse 31 told the Jews who believed in Him that if they continued in His words, they would know the truth and the truth would make them free.

If we trust Jesus Christ and abide in Him by avoiding sin, we will be in right standing with God and beyond cursing. And if we find ourselves in trouble when we have not sinned, we should continue worshipping God as Job did according to Job 1:20 and commit our lives to Him in well doing, 1 Peter 4:19.

Should Christians be involved in exorcism?

Those in the kingdom of darkness pretend to remove demons from people, but through exorcism. But this is a devilish show and a lie. Jesus in Matthew 12:26 revealed that Satan cannot cast out Satan. He (Satan) cannot deliberately divide (destroy) his kingdom. Isaiah chapter 14 speaks about Lucifer who fell from glory and became Satan. And in verse 17 the Bible reveals that he (Satan) never opens the house of his prisoners. People in the kingdom of darkness have to be wrenched from the grip of Satan by Christ. It is Jesus who has the power to free people from the kingdom of the devil and any demons that are tormenting them. As the Bible says in 1 John 3:8, the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. In fact even believers on their own have no power to remove demons; they are to pray to Jesus to do it through them. In Luke 10:17 the disciples said, *..even the devils are subject unto us through thy name*. Here, they are acknowledging that the reason the demons obeyed them and left the people they prayed for is because they used the name of JESUS, not their authority.

Besides, demons are aware of a person who is truly saved. When the exorcists of Acts chapter 19 tried to use the Name of Jesus upon those with the evil spirit, we see in verse 15 the evil spirit replying.... *Jesus I know and Paul I know; but who are ye?* This shows that

Jesus only moves through the prayers of truly born-again people to deal with the kingdom of the devil.

After salvation, we are to depend on the Lord entirely and have no place for the devil. Our lives should be governed by a motto similar to that of Apostle Paul as recorded in Philippians 1:21, *For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain*. When confronted with issues of life, we are to pray instead of resorting to devilish options to help ourselves out the way people in the kingdom of darkness do. Such devilish methods include divination, sorcery, etc. Instead of consulting wizards that peep and mutter, God's people, according to Isaiah 8:19, ought to seek their God. Actually it is diabolical for the living to be consulting the dead.

False prophets, diviners, soothsayers and sorcerers inquire of the devil to foretell the future. Yet in Zechariah 10:2 we see that idols speak vanity (delusion), the diviners envision lies and tell false dreams, comforting in vain. Those who depend on such for guidance are compared to people without a shepherd. If you want to know what the future holds, consult the Bible. God's Word is the one that is described in 2 Peter 1:19 as the sure word of prophecy, and it says in Hebrews 9:27 that it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment. And the way to prepare for the future is by repenting toward God and putting your faith in Jesus.

Divination is foretelling the future, or the unknown, using devilish methods like astrology (stars). Unfortunately, the devil has managed to make his ways gain acceptance in society to the extent where even Christians are flirting with horoscopes. Necromancy is the art of predicting the future by conjuring up the spirits of the dead. But believers are to renounce all these and entrust their lives to the Lord.

Upon getting saved, people ought to follow the example of those of Acts 19:19 who used curious arts when they were in the kingdom of darkness but burned their books after knowing the Lord. Even today, though we should not build doctrines around symbols, we ought to shun devilish hairstyles, tatoos, literature and music that links one with (or promotes) the kingdom of darkness. Satan's a liar.

His instruments are a lie and those who serve him represent a lie. But what is encouraging to know is that Satan has no power in an environment of truth. The Bible shows that once we know the truth, the truth will set us free, John 8:32. The culture and traditions that guide the believers are set forth in the Bible.

Does the Lord prefer believers of one gender to believers of another gender?

Both the man and the woman were created by God, who started the first family at the Garden of Eden. For the success of the home, God gave them roles, desiring that the man exercise leadership in the marriage. But God loves the man and the woman in the same way and would not like one being unfair to the other.

In Colossians 3:19, husbands are required to love their wives and be not bitter against them. In Malachi 2:15, we see that the Lord is unhappy with anyone who deals unfairly with the wife of his youth. In fact a brother who treats his wife unfairly risks having his prayers hindered, 1 Peter 3:7.

Concerning matters of faith, Apostle Peter in the above Scripture shows that both husbands (men) and wives (women) are heirs together of the grace of life. Apostle Paul corroborates this fact in Galatians 3:28 where He says that there is neither male nor female, that we are all one in Christ Jesus.

Jesus had women disciples like Mary and Mary Magdalene, who were even among the first people to witness His resurrection. We also see ladies like Mary the mother of John Mark who had opened her home for the first New Testament church to be meeting, Acts 12:12. The Bible also records two believers in the family of Pastor Timothy. These were Lois and Eunice, Timothy's grandmother and mother respectively. These must have been the ones who taught young Timothy the Holy Scriptures, making him wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, 2 Timothy 3:15. The Bible in Joel 2:28, a Scripture quoted in Acts 2:17, had foretold of a time when sons and daughters would prophesy (evangelize by witnessing

or preaching Christ). So, ladies too should study the Bible, even at Bible school level so as to become effective witnesses of Christ.

But for order in the local church, our Lord gave roles, wanting men in leadership, 1Timothy 2:11, 12. Of course the Lord is sovereign and no one can rightly question the way He wants things to be. Although Jesus had both male and female followers, when it came to the time of choosing the leaders of the church that He was establishing, He chose men as apostles. Also, we have no precedence of women pastors in the Bible. And probably one might be tempted to ask: what about the lady judge in the Old Testament? But Deborah led Israel to battle after Barak, as recorded in Judges 4:8, refused to go to war alone. That is how the Lord, according to the following verse, gave *Sisera into the hand of a woman*. And that should make men eager to take up their role in the church so that women are not forced to assume leadership out of necessity.

How should the church deal with a polygamous brother?

To begin with, God in the first marriage in the Garden of Eden joined one man to one woman. But because of man's hardness of heart, we see polygamy even among God's people, beginning with Lamech, the father of Noah, Genesis 4:19 and Genesis 5:28 and 29.

The church ought to teach against polygamy among its members because this was not part of God's plan. But a polygamous person who gets saved is still a brother-in-Christ. He ought to be biblically baptized and even allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper because these ordinances have nothing to do with one's marital status. It is however advisable that the church does not attempt to formalize such a person's marriage through a church wedding or encourage the putting away of extra wives. This would complicate matters and introduce unfairness or suffering to dependants. While it is good to dedicate your family to God through a church wedding, getting to heaven is not tied to such ceremonies.

However, 1 Timothy 3:2 and 12 disqualifies a polygamous brother

from holding any church office (pastor or deacon). Only husbands of one wife qualify for these offices. But that does not mean that a polygamous brother should not witness Christ. Evangelism is for every believer, irrespective of their marital status.

What is Biblical preaching?

To many people, preaching is some entertaining religious talk. Others think of preaching as striving to win people to their congregations, though there is nothing wrong if the person you win to Christ chooses to join your local church of their own volition. But what the Bible calls preaching is pointing people to Jesus. We do not preach to people so that they become our disciples but the disciples of Jesus Christ. Biblical preaching is preaching Christ. Unfortunately if you listen to many preachers today, all you hear are their own opinions that they keep punctuating with the statement “*Bwana asifiwe! Praise the Lord!*” This is why we have even educated congregants who have been attending church for decades but cannot open the Bible to show you why they believe what they believe. Such people are unequipped to witness Christ to the unbelievers, besides being vulnerable to be moved to and fro with every wind of doctrine.

As mentioned earlier, the church’s main business is preaching Christ. But this is no longer the case in certain congregations. Lately in Kenya, even the Evangelicals who were once known for their zeal in witnessing and teaching the Bible have shifted their priority and are now busy emulating people in religions through the establishment of hierarchical structures, titles and “clothes of service” that go with them.

Yet Jesus is the only name given to men whereby people are saved, Acts 4:12. We are not witnesses to a denomination, a doctrine or even an experience; we are witnesses of Christ. The Apostles Peter, John and James preached Jesus Christ, Acts 5:42. Apostle Paul did not preach himself, either, 2 Corinthians 4:5. He preached the crucified Christ. Even where conduct was involved, he wanted the believers to imitate him as he imitated Christ, 1 Corinthians 11:1. Bible believers should be unlike members of cults who follow

their leaders blindly, even when the latter tell them to do unbiblical things.

Sound preaching does not direct people to the preacher; it points people to Jesus who in John 12:32 said, *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.* Also, biblical preaching is not with enticing words of human wisdom. If the preacher were to use his persuasive words instead of preaching Christ, the faith of those who believe would stand in the wisdom of men like himself, 1 Corinthians 2:4, 5.

Preaching Christ is declaring that all people have sinned and come short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23, and that Jesus Christ, being God manifested in the flesh, came on earth, died for our sins and rose again, 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4, and that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord Jesus shall be saved, Romans 10:13. There is nothing wrong with using personal experiences and other stories to illustrate points, but whatever one says in the name of preaching or witnessing should lead to conveying the fact that all people are sinners and that the crucified and risen Christ is the only way for them to be reconciled to God.

Does everybody have a reason to worship God?

In some congregations, motivational preaching has overshadowed preaching Christ. As a result, people who do not live in big houses or drive big cars have come to view themselves as not blessed. Worse still, Satan is using this sense of dissatisfaction to make them feel as if they do not have a reason to worship God.

Everybody who is alive has a reason to worship God. People are not to worship God just because they are rich. People are not to worship God just because they are in good health. People are to worship God, first and foremost, because He created them, Revelation 4:11. Everybody, whether lying in a hospital bed or hungry somewhere, has the basic reason for worshipping—having been created and being alive.

The other thing that God's Word teaches us is that we are to worship Christ for redeeming us, Revelation 5:9 and 12.

Is an expensive wedding necessarily Christian wedding?

Marriage is a covenant between 2 people and the Lord. As a result, no one can lie to the Lord that they are married when they are not, or vice versa. God is the Architect of marriage, having brought the first man and woman together at the Garden of Eden, and His desire is that no *man* (including the spouses themselves) puts asunder what He has joined together, Mark 10:9. In Malachi 2:16 the Bible says God hates putting away (divorce).

Also, the Lord's will is that His people express sexuality only within the confines of marriage. In Hebrews 13:4 the Bible says that marriage is honourable in all and the bed undefiled, adding that God will judge adulterers and whoremongers.

Behind the scenes these days, a lot of groundwork is taking place under the inspiration of the devil to re-define marriage to integrate perverse lifestyles into the society. But marriage ought to be between persons of the opposite sex. In Genesis 2:24, the Bible speaks of a man leaving his parents and clinging to his wife, not to another man.

And now concerning wedding. In chapter 2 of the gospel of John, we see the account of Jesus attending a wedding in Cana of Galilee, but the Bible doesn't say how weddings should be conducted. Wedding in church is a tradition. Yet it is a good tradition because believers ought to commit all their decisions to God through prayer, and a church wedding provides an opportunity to pray for the new couple. But a husband and wife who did not wed in church are not living in sin.

The Bible does not say how much one should put aside for a wedding. The most important thing in a wedding is the joining of the two people, the man and the woman. Anything else is a by-the-way. In the sight of God, a low-key wedding with only the man and woman who are getting married, the pastor who is officiating and the witnesses is the same as one that has taken millions to prepare and has been attended by thousands. Moreover, understanding pastors keep encouraging poor believers to consider simple weddings. Not long ago, BBC aired a report on how many young people are

starting their married life weighed by debt to fund lavish weddings. They cited the example of a newly married couple in one of the East African countries that detoured and fled on the way from the photo session because they feared appearing at their wedding reception in case the caterers called the police to arrest them. As it turned out, they had contracted high-end caterers to organize an expensive feast in the hope that friends would raise funds for them, but they didn't. What an embarrassing way to start a family!

Another thing is that Bible-based Christians do not regard wedding in church as a sacrament, something by which one is said to earn special grace. Grace is by one man Jesus Christ, Romans 5:15, and there is only one way to receive it: to repent toward God and put your faith in Jesus Christ.

What kind of attitude should we have when we hold offices in the church?

The office of the pastor and that of the deacon are the two scriptural offices in the New Testament church. Any other offices are for organizational purposes as may be deemed necessary. Actually in the Bible, the titles “pastor”, “overseer” (bishop), and “elder” are used interchangeably, showing that they refer to the same office with emphasis to the work involved. Even Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 5:1 refers to himself as an elder. The other thing is that pastors are not our priests; they are fellow believers. Believers are all priests unto God (Revelation 1:6), with Jesus Christ as the High Priest (Hebrews 3:1). This is the same message in 1 Timothy 2:5 where are told that there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. When the Christian is compared to a soldier in the army of the Lord, his armour is not physical. He is to put on the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:13-17).

Jesus should have preeminence in all things in the church, Colossians 1:18. In fact the way to find out how yielded to the Holy Spirit a church is, is to find out the extent to which members uplift Jesus. Even the Holy Spirit did not come to speak of (uplift) Himself but to glorify Jesus Christ, John 16:13 and 14.

A church that glorifies its leaders instead of uplifting Christ is therefore not yielded to the Spirit of God. Jesus showed in Matthew 23:8 that He alone is the Master and the rest of us (believers) brethren, irrespective of the position we occupy in the church of course. Failure to embrace this attitude, a church becomes a hierarchical organization where the glory that belongs to Christ has been shifted to fellow believers at the top of the ladder.

The apostles were careful to remain humble so that the glory goes to the Lord. When Paul healed a cripple in Lystra and the priest of Jupiter and his people decided to sacrifice to Paul and his team, we read in Acts 14 beginning verse 14 that Paul and his team rent their clothes and ran, crying out, and saying, *Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you....* By saying that they were men of like passions, Paul and his team were acknowledging before these people who regarded them as gods that they were people with human nature like them and that it is the Lord they were preaching who was doing the miracles through them.

Moreover, even after getting involved in the service of the Lord, we are to retain the humble attitude of Luke 17:10 that we are just unprofitable servants who have done what was our duty to do. The Lord is so, so great that the opportunity to even serve Him through cleaning the church toilet is indescribable honour.

Is every believer anointed to do God's Work?

Some Christians keep moving from conference to conference, seeking impartation and to find out what God would want them to do for Him. But you qualified for (or were anointed to do) God's work the time you believed in Jesus Christ, John 6:29. That time you were also given the Holy Spirit to empower you in doing that work. You were also given the work to do when Jesus commissioned you in Matthew 28 beginning verse 19 to go and preach the gospel and teach those who believe on the Lord as a way of grounding them in the faith. Indeed as a believer you ought to dedicate time to Bible study so that as required in 2 Timothy 2:15, you can be a worthy worker for God in witnessing and teaching.

As a Christian, am I deficient if I do not speak in tongues?

The Biblical answer to the above question is NO. Even during the days of the apostles, it is not all believers who spoke in tongues. Expecting a NO to his rhetorical question, Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:30 asks, *Do all speak with tongues?* If going to heaven was tied to speaking in tongues, then the Lord would have made sure that everyone who believed in Him spoke in tongues. Actually we all have departed friends and relatives who never spoke in tongues but whom we believe are in heaven just for having trusted in Jesus as Saviour.

Before the coming of Jesus, salvation was of the Jews, John 4:22, in that they alone knew the true God and the right way to worship Him because according to Romans 3:2 God had revealed Himself to them by giving them His oracles (Scriptures). But with the coming of Jesus, the grace of God appeared to all people, Titus 2:11. John the Baptist in John 1:29 introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, not the sins of the Jews alone.

In a way, speaking in tongues was God's way of proving to the unbelievers that through Jesus, He was doing something new that involved all races. Indeed on the Day of Pentecost, people could hear God being worshipped in their own languages, Acts 2: 8 and 11. Moreover, those tongues were real languages. It was like you can go somewhere in Russia and find a Russian who has never left his village speaking wonderful things about God in impeccable Dholuo or Kikuyu. Actually Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:22 says that tongues were a sign for the unbelievers. The prophesying referred to in the same verse has to do with preaching, aimed at grounding believers in the faith, Matthew 28:20.

There is someone who told me that theologians are not yielded to the Holy Spirit, suggesting that only people who speak in tongues are guided of the Holy Ghost. But that is not true. According to 2 Peter 1:21, prophecy (God's Word) reached us by holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. So, just by living in obedience to the Word of God, you are being guided of the Holy Spirit. In Psalm 119:105, we hear the Psalmist telling God that His Word is a lamp to the Psalmist's feet and a light to his path.

Even true churches have different teachings concerning tongues. There are those who say that all the gifts that were there in the first New Testament Church of the apostles are still in operation today. Others, citing 1 Corinthians 13:8 where there is allusion to tongues ceasing, teach that certain gifts like tongues stopped operating with the death of the apostles during the first century. True, after Jesus rose and in Mark 16:15 commanded the apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel, in verse 17 He also told them the signs that would follow their ministry, among them casting out demons and speaking with new tongues. And according to verse 20, these signs followed the disciples as they went about preaching. But it is like some of those signs were to cease at some point after they served their purpose.

What did Jesus mean when He said, *Judge not*?

Jesus according to Luke 6:37 said, *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged*....and there are unbelievers who use this Scripture to silence those who are trying to witness Christ to them or to other people.

But in the Scripture above, Christ is merely discouraging you from condemning others and, instead, forgiving them when they do you wrong. That way, you will even be better placed to plead for forgiveness from God when you yourself do wrong. You should, however, not feel guilty when someone you are witnessing to says that you are judging him or her, that you are claiming to be holier than they are. All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, 2 Timothy 3:16, so when you are witnessing to someone, you are merely allowing yourself to be used of God to convey His (God's) message, not justifying yourself before others. When you are preaching to people from the Bible, it is the righteous God who is judging them, not the preacher. The preacher may have his or her weaknesses as a person, and that is between him or her and God. Irrespective of the motive of the preacher, Christ is preached, Philippians 1:15-18, and hearers will not have an excuse if they do not repent.

Is it possible for people who do not claim to perform miracles to be preaching the true Word of God?

There are people who think that miracles are the only proof that truth

is being preached. But that is not the case. God's Word is the truth, John 17:17, and so long as people are preaching from the Bible and allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, they are communicating the truth, miracles or no miracles. In John 10:41 we read that John the Baptist did no miracle but that the things that he said concerning Christ were true. This is to say that a crusade does not become any less of an evangelistic meeting if miracles do not occur.

When Jesus came for the first time, He did not come to do miracles so as to make this present world problem-free. He came to deal with sin so as to prepare those who believe in Him for a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, 2 Peter 3:13, a world that will be without problems. The purpose of the miracles that Jesus did was to prove that He is the Son of God so that people believe in Him. And that purpose was accomplished because even when Nicodemus came to see Him at night he said to Him, "...*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him,* John 3:2.

Miracles, even during the days of the apostles, were to facilitate the preaching of the Gospel. They were not a demonstration of power for its own sake. They were not even planned in advance in form of, for instance, "miracle services".

We ought to preach the Word of God in season and out of season, that is, when convenient and when inconvenient, whether miracles take place or they don't. We pray to God because we believe He can intervene miraculously and He does intervene, sometimes in ways we do not get to know. But like Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego as recorded in Daniel 3:17 and 18, our faith in God should not be dependent on whether He intervenes the way we would like or not. In the face of the trials that God had allowed in his life, Job said, *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him....*" This is a classic example of yieldedness to the lordship or will of God.

Why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ so important to us the believers?

From 1 Corinthians 15:3 and 4, we see that true preaching should drive home the fact that Jesus died as a substitute for fallen man,

was buried and rose from the dead. We could not be saved by the mere appearance of Jesus on earth if He did not die and rise again. According to Hebrews 9:22, without the shedding of blood is no remission of sins.

It was, however, not possible for the blood of bulls and goats that were sacrificed under the Law of Moses to take away sin, Hebrews 10:4. The blood of animals merely covered sin, Psalm 32:1. The sin of a human being required a human sacrifice to take away, and there was only one Person who was Himself without sin, Hebrews 4:15 and 1 John 3:5, and hence worth dying on behalf of others: Jesus Christ.

Jesus destroyed the works of the devil by bearing witness to the truth, John 18:37, and then dying to provide the only blood with power to take away sin, 1 John 3:5. Moreover, our Lord did not remain in the grave after dying: He rose again from the dead. The implications of our Lord's resurrection are enormous. His resurrection is the great miracle that God did to prove that Jesus is His Son. Apostle Paul opens his letter to the Romans in Romans 1 beginning verse 3 by referring to Jesus as *the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*

According to Romans 4:25, Jesus was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. By resurrecting Jesus, God also demonstrated that He approved of Christ's death and that He accepted it as full payment for the sins of mankind. In the Old Testament when the priest offered an unacceptable sacrifice, for instance Nadab and Abihu of Leviticus chapter 10, he would not come back from the holy place alive but would be struck dead there. And the fact that Jesus our High Priest came back through resurrection after offering Himself as our sacrifice is proof that God accepted His (Christ's) sacrifice.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then our preaching would be in vain, 1 Corinthians 15:14. As Apostle Paul shows, the victory of the believer is in the resurrection of Jesus because it gives us

the hope that if we die before our Lord comes back for the church, we too shall rise. The Bible in 1 Corinthians 15 beginning verse 20 reads: *But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.* This particularly encouraging message is echoed in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 where the Bible says: *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.* In Romans 8:11, Apostle Paul reiterates that if the Spirit of Him that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us, He that raised Christ from the dead shall also quicken our mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwells in us. As a result, we are told in Ephesians 4:30 not to grieve the Holy Spirit, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption.

If Christ is God, does it mean that God can die, now that Jesus died and remained in the tomb for 3 days?

Jesus was both God and man, fully God in the Spirit and fully man in the flesh. The opening verse of the book of Romans describes Jesus as the seed of David according to the flesh.

When He was sacrificed on the cross, Apostle Peter is specific that Jesus was put to death in the flesh, 1 Peter 3:18, meaning that He lived on in the Spirit. In fact Peter goes on to reveal that Jesus went by the same Spirit to preach to the spirits of the disobedient people who had died during the days of Noah and were now in prison, verse 19 and 20. Three days later, the same Spirit went back to His body and quickened (resurrected) Jesus as we see in Romans 8:11. God can never die; He abides forever. Jesus as God existed before even Mary. Actually that is why Bible-based Christians do not regard Mary as Mother of God.

With whom was the Church left when Jesus went back to Heaven?

There is a tradition that teaches that Jesus when going to heaven left the church under the guidance of Apostle Peter. But the teaching that

is supported by the Scripture is the one that says that the Church was left under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That is why all disciples, including Peter, were required to tarry in Jerusalem, Luke 24:49, to wait for the new Guide, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who came to *guide* the disciples into all truth, John 16:13, and endow them with power from on high to do the work they had been given by Jesus.

There is no doubt that Peter was a leader in the first church in Jerusalem, but like every other believer, he operated under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus told Peter to feed His sheep, it is just as He would tell any other believer because every believer is required by Jesus to witness and feed (ground using God's Word) those who believe.

Moreover, there is no indication in the Bible that the disciples regarded Peter as a special apostle. In fact when he became hypocritical in his relationship with the Gentile believers, we see in Galatians 2:11 that Paul did not treat him exceptionally but *withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed*.

There is also a teaching that Peter travelled to Rome. But that teaching is not supported by the Scriptures, either. Paul could not have preached in Rome if Peter had preached there. In Romans 15:20, we see that Paul went to preach where Christ was not yet preached, lest he should *build upon another man's foundation*. Indeed whereas Paul greeted over 20 Christians towards the end of his letter to the Romans, he does not make any mention of Peter. According to Galatians 2:7, Peter went to the Jews (to preach the gospel of the *circumcision*), whereas Paul was sent west, having *the gospel of the uncircumcision* (gospel to the Gentiles) committed to him. From Jerusalem, Peter seems to have gone east (to Babylon, where there may have been some Jews, 1 Peter 5:13) from where he wrote his epistles.

The same tradition that ascribes a high position to Peter has to contend with the other impossible task of proving that he lived for as long as 3 centuries because the state religion he is supposed to have headed did not exist prior to the 4th century. Actually of the

12 apostles of Jesus, John the Revelator, who was exiled in Patmos, is the one who lived longest, but not long after 95 AD when he received the vision that became the Book of Revelation.

Cult leaders give those under them the impression that what they say is on par with the Bible, and as if they are the mediators between God and their people. But that is not what the Bible teaches. According to 1 Timothy 2:5, there is only one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Also, our Lord could foresee people who would position themselves for special honour, requiring fellow believers to obey them blindly and worship them instead of worshipping the Lord. As a result, Jesus according to Matthew 23:8 emphasized that He alone is the Master and the rest brethren, regardless of their title in the church. As admonished in 1 Peter 5:3, we should not lord it over God's heritage the way cult leaders do to their followers but be examples to fellow believers, in humility and behaviour that is consistent with Biblical teachings of course.

Can people who love God or are serving God experience suffering?

There is a teaching that people only suffer because there is sin in their life, but this teaching does not have Biblical support. There is no doubt that sin leads to suffering. The book of Judges is constantly punctuated by the statement: *And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord*. And every time this happened, God gave them up to their enemies and suffering followed until He raised someone in form of a judge to save them.

But people of God do not experience suffering just because of being outside the will of God. People like Job did not suffer because they had sinned. God allowed Job's sickness and loss of children and property to prove to the devil that Job did not love God because of the things God had given Job. The brothers of Joseph had sold him in Egypt planning evil against him, but as we see in Genesis 50:20, God meant it for good, His ultimate goal being to save many people who were threatened by famine.

In John 11:4, we see that Lazarus' sickness had a reason: to bring glory to God. The same case applies to the blindness of the man of

John chapter 9. According to verse 3, it was to make God's works (power) manifest in him. In the New Testament are other cases of people who were in the perfect will of God but still suffered. Some were widowed, others barren, some imprisoned, some like James of Acts 12:2 killed for their faith, etc. For instance according to Philippians 1:12 we see that God was in Apostle Paul's imprisonment in Philippi to facilitate the furtherance of the Gospel.

This is not to glorify suffering, but we too could find ourselves facing challenges while serving the Lord until we start wondering, "Is God unhappy with my serving Him this way?" Very often we believers experience suffering, not because God is powerless and cannot get us out of trouble but because He has a sovereign purpose that He wants to accomplish through our suffering. Although it is within God's power to make us live a problem-free life, sometimes He allows adversity to draw us closer to Himself. People tend to seek God more when going through a rough patch in life than when all is well.

Apostle Peter according to 1 Peter 4:12 would like us not to see trials as anything strange happening to us. They occur even in the life of those who are in the will of God. In 1 Kings 19:4 we see Elijah, the prophet who was later taken up in a chariot without dying, feeling frustrated to the extent of wishing that God take his life. In 2 Corinthians 1:8 Apostle Paul tells about how he and his team had come across so much trouble in Asia to the extent of despairing *even of life*.

When on earth, Jesus our Lord Himself suffered hunger, for instance when He was coming from Bethany, Mark 11:12. The Apostles like Paul, according to Philippians 4 beginning verse 11, knew how to be abased and how to abound, to be full, to be hungry and to suffer need. But in whatever state he found himself, he learned to be content. Actually Paul wrote this epistle to the Philippians while in jail. And despite his circumstances, he still encouraged the brethren to rejoice in the Lord, Philippians 4:4, which shows that he himself rejoiced despite his situation. And Prophet Habakkuk on his part, according to Habakkuk 3:17-18, said, *Although the fig tree*

shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat.....Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

The lady Fanny Crosby who first sung the great worship hymn “To God Be the Glory” was blind throughout her life. And if someone so disadvantaged could see reason to thank God, what about me and you? The man Joseph Scriven who wrote the song “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” is said to have lost, through drowning, his fiancée on the night before his scheduled wedding. But he found solace and the support he needed in his Friend, Jesus Christ.

Accepting God’s will over your life demonstrates great humility. Actually it leads to worship as Job did, according to Job 1:20, even after losing his children and property. After knowing the Lord, one’s attitude toward life and the things of this world should be like that of Apostle Paul in Philippians 1:21: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* This shows real victory over the devil.

There are people who when they pray for you and you do not get healed tell you that it is because you did not have faith. But that is not necessarily the case. Really, faith is not what does miracles; what faith does is to move God to do miracles. (It is even worth mentioning that faith does not create salvation; it merely receives salvation. Jesus is the one who saves.) Even after praying, God has the prerogative to intervene in your situation the way you want or not. Prayer is not a way of arm twisting God. We ought to pray and still yield ourselves to the will of God the way Christ did according to Matthew 26:39. People of God never ceased to worship Him even when they were going through challenges of life. Despite losing everything including his health, we see Job, according to Job 13:15, saying, “*though he [the Lord] slay me, yet will I trust him.*” That is the same attitude that we should have as believers. The Bible in 1 Corinthians 15:19 tells us that if in this life only we have hope in Christ, then we are of all men most miserable. We will keep contending with all forms of challenges here on earth. Really, we did not come to Christ for earthly gain and peace but for eternal life and future glorification.

Rejoicing in trials as taught in James 1:2-3 demonstrates

acceptance of the lordship of God in our lives. The reason we pray is because we believe in a miracle-working God. But the choice to intervene miraculously on our behalf or not is His Sovereign right. The Scripture in the book of Isaiah (specifically Isaiah 53:5) that says that with His (Christ's) stripes we are healed is not rendered untrue when a believer falls sick and does not improve even after prayer. Through the suffering of Jesus of the cross, it is our spirits that were healed, first and foremost. Despite being physically sick, the spirits of those who have trusted on Jesus remain healthy because of having identified with the suffering of Jesus on the cross.

Contrary to today's popular preaching, Jesus when He came for the first time did not come to make the present world problem-free. He came to seek and to save that which was lost, Luke 19:10. It is when He comes for the second time that He will create a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, 2 Peter 3:13. That is the world that will be without any problems. And as we have already seen in Romans 8:18, the sufferings of the present time are not comparable to the glory that shall be revealed in us when Jesus comes. As of now if you find yourself going through challenges as you serve God, do not think of this as strange.

Was Apostle Peter a married man?

Yes. Apostle Peter was a married man. We see in Matthew 8:14 Jesus coming into Peter's house and seeing *his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever*. According to the following verse, Jesus touched her hand, and the fever left her. There are groups that teach that Peter was not married, but whenever what the Bible teaches conflicts with what tradition teaches, the Bible prevails. Not all teachings are Biblical.

If Adam did not sin, would there be everlasting fire?

Yes. Even if Adam did not sin, there would still be everlasting fire. Sin started in heaven with Lucifer who, as a result, became Satan or adversary of God and an everlasting fire reserved for him and the angels who followed him in disobedience, Matthew 25:41. Then, Satan, that *old serpent* according to Revelation 12:9, deceived Adam as recorded in Genesis chapter 3 and Adam fell into sin by eating of the tree that God had forbidden man to eat. That is how sin,

which had started in heaven, *entered into the world*, Romans 5:12, and qualified for everlasting fire people who do not have their sin dealt with by Jesus Christ.

God is good and kind beyond description and would not like people to perish in the everlasting fire. That is why He sent Jesus, His only begotten Son, John 3:16, to die for us. God's will is that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, 1 Timothy 2:4. This fact is reiterated in 2 Peter 3:9 where the Bible says that the Lord is long-suffering, not willing that any person should perish but that all should come to repentance.

For God to save us from the everlasting fire that we deserve because of sin, that is mercy. But through the grace of Jesus, God has gone to the next step of giving those who believe what they do not deserve, the everlasting life, John 5:24. Through the grace of Jesus, you are not only saved from everlasting fire but also given a gift, everlasting life.

Imagine yourself in the presence of the devil, whose sole agenda has always been to steal, to kill and to destroy you. And imagine that there is no friend nearby, or God to cry to. Like the bush that Moses saw burning without getting consumed (Exodus 3:2), people in the lake of fire will be burning without dying. That is how it will be in the lake of fire where there will be those people whose sins are not dealt with by Christ, Matthew 25:41, the angels of the devil, and the evil trinity comprising the devil, the beast and the false prophet, Revelation 20:10. Here, they will be *tormented day and night for ever and ever*.

On the other hand, imagine yourself in the presence of the Person who loves you most, Jesus Christ, who has the ability to give you whatever He desires and whose intention is to give you life and give it to you in abundance. In this world people do all sorts of things in search of joy but never realize it fully. But according to Psalm 16:11, it is in the presence of the Lord where people experience fullness of joy. No wonder words cannot fully describe the joy of those who will be in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ the Lamb in heaven, people who according to Revelation 22:4 shall have the name of the Lord *in their foreheads*.

What is the difference between sacrament and the Lord's Supper, also called the Lord's Table?

Our Lord Jesus gave the church two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper, the cup that He commanded the believers to be observing in His remembrance, Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24. Passover in the Old Testament looked forward to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world; the Lord's Supper that we celebrate today, on the other hand, reminds us of Jesus' sacrifice, now that it has already taken place.

The Lord's Supper is not a sacrament. The teaching behind sacraments is that the bread and wine that are celebrated once blessed become the real body and blood of Jesus Christ (transubstantiation). Sacraments are also viewed as a means of additional grace to the partakers.

Those who celebrate the Lord's Supper, on the other hand, base their practice on the Biblical teaching that Jesus alone is the source of grace, quoting John 1:17. Apostle Paul in Romans 5:15 emphasizes that the grace of God is by one man, Christ Jesus. The elements and wine taken during the Lord's Supper are symbols of the body and blood of Jesus. We appropriate Jesus, the bread of life, John 6:33, though salvation, not through what we eat during the Lord's Supper.

Do I lose salvation every time I succumb to temptation and sin?

Many young people in secondary school respond to the altar call for salvation every time an evangelist comes, fearing they might have lost their salvation through sin. But that fear is not justified.

Sin is yielding to temptations. It is also necessary to mention that though God may allow temptations, temptations do not come from God but from the devil. The Bible says in James 1:13, *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* Moreover, temptations are common, so if as a Christian you find yourself facing temptations, do not suppose that you are going through an experience that is unique with you. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10:13, *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God*

is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye maybe able to bear it.

Even Jesus was tempted, yet without sin, Hebrews 4:15. The result of this is a High Priest who is familiar with human frailty and challenges.

Apostle Peter was tempted, too. When Jesus called Simon Peter, he was a fisherman and Jesus promised to make him a fisher of men. Over time Peter became a key disciple of Jesus Christ. Before Jesus was betrayed and arrested, He foresaw Peter cornered by Satan to deny Him, and Jesus warned Peter about this as recorded in Luke 22 beginning verse 31.... *Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.* And just as Jesus had prophesied, Peter, under great fear, denied the Master three times. But what is most heartening is that the next time Jesus met Peter, after the former had died and resurrected, our Lord did not go about castigating him. As recorded in John 21 beginning verse 15, Jesus instead asked Peter thrice whether he loved Him and every time Peter affirmed his love for the Lord. Then for an equal number of times the Lord charged Peter, *feed my sheep/lambs.*

Today, we too have been warned in advance of the existence of our spiritual enemy, the devil, who walketh about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, 1 Peter 5:8. As a result, we are advised to be sober, to be vigilant. As people with their eyes on the crown of righteousness that awaits those who emerge victorious in this life, we are supposed to resist sin, if need be *unto blood*, Hebrews 12:4. But should you fall into sin, do not throw your hands up and continue in it or wait for an evangelist so as to respond to the altar call for salvation again. Seek forgiveness from the Lord through prayer and continue in your walk of faith. The Bible in 1 John 2:1 says, *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

If falling in sin meant getting saved again, Apostle Paul would have told believers in Corinth to get born again another time because of the sin that some had involved themselves in. But what Paul did was to remind them that upon salvation, their bodies had ceased to be their own and become the temple of the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:19 so that they pursue purity.

If the Bible is the Word of one God, why are there different versions, like KJV, NIV, etc?

What one needs to know is that the original scrolls were written using the old languages. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic, while the New Testament was written in Greek. Inspiration applies to the original scrolls; the different Bible versions are copies of the original writings. Moreover, a Bible version becomes a good version if it is an accurate reproduction of the original writings.

Also when it comes to the gospels, some people have a problem of having 4 different books describing the life of one Person, Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ was not one of the regular folks. Through the different gospels, God through the Holy Spirit reveals the different offices of Jesus Christ, a task that could not have been achieved through one narrative.

Besides, there are people who wonder how one person, Jesus Christ, could have 2 different genealogies as recorded by Matthew and Luke. But everybody has 2 genealogies—one through the father, and the other one through the mother. In the case of Jesus, Matthew in His gospel traces our Lord's family line through Joseph, whereas Luke traces our Lord's family line through Mary.

What is the difference between preaching and teaching?

When preaching, you do all the talking, telling people what God's Word says. Teaching, on the other hand, is interactive. You don't just talk. You make others do certain things and get them to talk, also. For instance, what happens in Sunday school is basically teaching.

Jesus in the synagogues preached and taught, as we see in Matthew 9:35. When teaching, there is asking of questions and answering

them. Jesus when teaching would, for example, ask question like: “Who do people say I am?” And then He would answer them while involving his listeners. Teaching is mainly done to people who have accepted the Lord with the aim of grounding them in the faith for victorious Christian living and to equip them to be effective witnesses of the Lord.

What does the Bible say about saints?

Many things happen to a person at the point of salvation, among them becoming a child of God, a saint and being added into the body of Christ, the church. People are not made saints or children of God by one of their own; it is the Lord who adds to the church as many as are saved, Acts 2:47. By one Spirit are we all baptized (added) into one body (the body of Jesus), whether we be Jews or Gentile, whether we be bond or free, 1 Corinthians 12:13. Entering your name into the church register is done just for administration purposes. But before your name is written by the church clerk or pastor on a paper register or entered into the computer, it is first written in heaven by the Lord through His Spirit, Luke 10:20, and this should be cause for great rejoicing.

Moreover, Christians are not looked after or kept by saints but by the same Saviour Jesus Christ the Son of God. Beginning Jude 24 NKJV we read: *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.*

What does it mean when people say that the grace of Jesus provides more than forgiveness of sin?

A major distinguishing factor between the Bible-believing Christians and cults and other faiths is the teaching that Jesus is the Son of God and that the grace that brings salvation is by Him alone, Romans 5:15. But grace avails more than forgiveness of sins. In addition to forgiveness of sins, the grace of Jesus comes with a gift, the everlasting life, John 3:16. Believing in Jesus not only reconciles us to God but also qualifies us for the greatest gift, the everlasting life.

What does the Bible mean when it says that to whom much is given much will be required?

What is “given” here is knowledge of the will of God by way of instruction in the Word. The Lord expects those to whom He has availed much teaching to go and teach others, 2 Timothy 2:2, and also demonstrate more obedience. Unfortunately most people study theology and remain with that knowledge in their heads as other members of the church are moved to and fro with every wind of doctrine through ignorance. Many do Bible study just to know how to get God’s blessings for their individual benefit. That way they are not acting like faithful stewards, and the Lord is not happy with them.

Also, the Lord expects much by way of obedience from those to whom much has been invested by way of teaching, since they are aware of His will.

Did God create some people for hell and others for heaven?

There are people who, upon reading Romans 8:29, misunderstand the words “foreknow” and “predestinate” to mean that God created some people to go to heaven and others to go to hell. But if that were the case, it would contradict 1 Timothy 2:4 where we see that God’s will is that *all* men (people) be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth and 2 Peter 3:9 where we read that the Lord is not willing that any should perish but that *all* should come to repentance. According to Hebrews 2:9b, Jesus tasted death for *every* man. Why, then, would God make provision for the salvation of all if His will was for some to go to hell? Actually, the lake of fire was originally prepared for the devil and his angels, Matthew 25:41; people merely qualify themselves to go there by refusing Jesus.

John 17:6 is not referring to special people whom God the Father gives to Christ to save. The giving of people to Christ by God the Father that is mentioned here concerns people who are already saved being committed by the Father to Christ to follow Him for Godly living and increase in their knowledge of God, Colossians 1:10. Saved people are the sheep Jesus says He knows, according to John 10:14. There are no people who become our Lord’s sheep before salvation. The term ‘elect’ that some cite in their argument

can never mean ‘chosen for salvation’ because it is applied on Jesus as well in Isaiah 42:1 and 1 Peter 2:6, yet Jesus was without sin and did not need salvation. True, according to Romans 3:11 *there is none that seeketh after God*; it is God who seeks people, and He does so by sending preachers their way. And the fact that the Lord wants the whole world evangelized means He is seeking after all people. Israel is a case of unconditional election, but as a nation to serve God’s purpose, for example in bringing Christ into this world, Romans 9:4-11. The election of Jesus as Saviour was also unconditional as we deduce from 1 Peter 1:20. But the election of the rest of us is on condition of believing in Jesus.

Our God, who according to Isaiah 46:10 declares the end from the beginning, foresaw the fall of man, predestined (determined in advance) the existence of the church and foreordained that individual believers be conformed to the image of Jesus through salvation in order to become *holy and without blame before Him*, Ephesians 1:4. The Lord also predetermined that calling people would be through preaching, and indeed when Jesus came He required that the Gospel be preached to every creature, Mark 16:15. But though through preaching many—actually all!—are called, it is the individual who qualifies himself or herself to be chosen for the marriage supper of the Lamb by exercising his or her free will to trust Jesus as Saviour. We should not think of “foreknow” as meaning “forechoose”. You are the one to exercise individual soul liberty and repent toward God for Jesus to give you eternal life.

What does the Bible in Hebrews chapter 4 mean by saying that those who have believed have entered into rest?

The unsaved person is restless, ever struggling to look for ways of reconciling himself to God. People under the Law of Moses sought their rest or peace with God in the Law, Romans 2:17. But believers have ceased from their own works or effort and found true reconciliation to God through Jesus, 2 Corinthians 5:18. And just the way we enter into that rest—being right with God—through faith in Christ Jesus, we remain in that rest and in the victory associated with it by continuing to trust in Jesus. The believer’s rest comes from the assurance that in Christ our salvation is complete, Colossians 2:10.

How can I share the Gospel with a person from a cult or from a faith hostile to Christianity?

People in cults and those in faiths hostile to Bible-based Christianity are not our enemies. They just happen to be held hostage by the devil and are therefore a mission field. We are therefore under obligation to witness the Gospel to them since Jesus required we do so to the whole world. However, to witness to people in false faiths without risking being drawn into falsehood yourself requires that you be well versed with the Scriptures. Also, it would help if you first invested some time to study what they teach and how it deviates from the Bible. It may cost you time, and money maybe, but like King David according to 2 Samuel 24:24, be determined not to give God an offering or a sacrifice that costs you nothing.

When you confront such a person, begin by giving him or her the first opportunity to tell you what they believe so that you can earn their patience and make them listen to you. Then when your time to speak comes, do not seek to show them how mistaken they are by believing what they believe, as this will result in an argument and your aim is not to win an argument. According to 2 Timothy 2:24, the servant of God must not strive but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient. When sending the disciples to the outside world, Jesus according to Matthew 10:16, advised them to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. We also read in 1 Peter 3:15 that we are to give an answer to every man that asks us the reason of the hope that is in us with meekness and fear (of God, of course).

Begin by citing areas in which you agree before moving into areas in which you disagree. Consider when the spirit of Apostle Paul was stirred to witness to the Athenians after he saw the whole city given to idolatry. When he stood on Mars Hill, he begun by appreciating the fact that they had an altar with the inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD (Acts 17:23). Building on that, he added that this God whom they ignorantly worshipped is the One whom he was declaring to them. According to verse 28, he then reminded them what their poets said—that we are the offspring of that God—and tactfully used that to challenge their idols by implying that it

would be ironical to believe that we are the offspring of God and yet suppose that God is like metals *graven by art and man's device*.

But your ultimate aim should be to give your listener a clear presentation of the Gospel by highlighting what God's Word says concerning Jesus. Tell them that the Bible says sin entered into this world through Adam at the Garden of Eden and immediately God promised to send the Saviour through whom He would deal with that sin and thus provide a way of reconciling people to Himself. Then tell him or her that the Old Testament is about God dealing with the Children of Israel as He prepared to bring Jesus through them, and reiterate the fact that Jesus was coming to deal with the sin of whosoever believes Him because God through Jesus sought to deal with the sin of the whole world. Then conclude your discussion by telling your listener that the Bible says Jesus is the only way by which sinful man is reconciled to God. You could go further in your explanation if they give you more time and lead them to Christ of their own volition. But even if they don't give you more time, you can leave the rest to the Holy Spirit, who, according to John 16:8, does the convicting. By then you will already have done your part and they will not have the excuse that they never heard the Gospel.

What sin shall not be forgiven?

When Jesus was here on earth, it is by the Spirit of God (the Holy Ghost) that He cast out devils and preached, Matthew 12:28 and John 3:34. And when people ignored what He was doing and even associated what the Holy Spirit was doing through Him with evil, Matthew 12:24, Christ warned that whosoever would speak against the Holy Ghost would not be forgiven even in the world to come, verse 32.

Today, also, it is by the Holy Spirit that the believers witness Christ, Acts 1:8. Refusing to heed their message so as to have your sin dealt with before dying is tantamount to looking down on (or ignoring) the Holy Spirit and thus committing a sin that will not be forgiven, even in the world to come. Indeed such a person is destined for the lake of fire, Matthew 25:41. The warning here is: do not refuse to get saved in the hope that God will change His mind when you die unregenerate!

If God is good, why are there so many problems in this world, like hunger?

God has equipped this world with skills and resources, such as arable land and water, to grow enough food to ensure that no one in the world goes hungry. Research reveals that if the land that makes up The Democratic Republic of Congo alone were to be properly cultivated, it could feed the whole of Africa. In fact the earth can support many times its current population of people and animals.

But Satan, who has made the world as a wilderness (Isaiah 14:17), has inspired ways of misdirecting these resources so that they do not benefit people. As we learn from John 10:10, Satan hates people and his agenda concerning them is always to kill, to steal and to destroy.

One of the main ways by which Satan misdirects resources intended for helping mankind is inspiring the funding of wars and war equipment. It is common knowledge that if the nations of the world were to direct all the resources they spend on the military to growing food, even dry lands could be irrigated and everybody could afford at least 3 meals a day and a good place to sleep. But just as the Bible in John 3:19 says that the light has come into the world but people have chosen darkness rather than light, God has provided resources to feed, clothe and shelter us, but people have preferred the devil's idea of squandering these resources in many different ways, for example in war equipment. With that awareness, should we blame God or ourselves?

Actually during the 1000-year reign of Christ from Jerusalem, we read in Micah 4:3 that swords will be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks. This is an indication that resources that are today used for war will be redirected to agriculture. Small wonder there will be no hunger.

What are the characteristics of a real Christian song?

A Christian song should have at least 2 goals: worshipping God and teaching the Bible so that as admonished in Colossians 3:16, the Word of God can dwell richly in the believers. A good gospel song should therefore communicate at least a small part of the gospel.

Many believers who do not know how to read or are blind benefit very much from gospel songs whose lyrics are the Word of God. When we were growing up, there were songs in Kikuyu with as many as 12 stanzas, songs that could tell the story of the Children of Israel from the time they left Egypt to the time they got to the Promised Land. People who seek to minister in songs should therefore be good students of God's Word so that they can write spiritually edifying lyrics, not empty words.

Also, people are supposed to meditate on the words of the Christian music so that it ministers to them. Unfortunately, we have introduced dances and their arranged steps and movements to Christian music, thus removing our focus from meditating on the words of these songs and shifted it to the demands of choreography. Also, some churches have done away with hymns, which are better in teaching the Word and embraced repetitive choruses, which are more danceable.

Choruses were meant for children because their understanding is low. But just as new babes in Christ ought to graduate from being fed with milk to eating meat (1 Corinthians 3:2) so far as the Word is concerned, at some point we too should outgrow repetitive choruses and learn hymns in an effort to have a better understanding of the Word of God and also deepen our worship.

The disciples sang hymns (Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26). According to Ephesians 5:19, we are to admonish ourselves in psalms and hymns, and according to Colossians 3:16, we are to admonish one another in psalms and hymns.

Where is the true cradle of mankind?

The migration of peoples that we read about in history is one thing that deals the teaching of evolution and other human ideas on the origin of mankind a very big blow. Migration is evidence that people came from somewhere to get to where they are. If you take the world map and picture yourself standing in the Middle East, to the south-west will be the dark-skinned people or Africans. To the east and south-east will be brown-skinned people or Asians,

and to the north and north-west will be pink-skinned people or Europeans. This is compelling evidence that migration of peoples has a common epicentre, and that epicentre is the Middle-East where the Garden of Eden was and where Noah lived, the father of the three sons by whom God repopulated the world (Genesis 9:19). This is the true cradle of mankind. Even the indigenous Americans, the Red Indians, whom the Europeans found in America had their origin in the Middle East. The fact that they have physical features similar to those of people in the Far East supports the view that they reached America by going east until they crossed the Pacific Ocean. Europeans met them by going west and getting to America through the Atlantic ocean.

What did Jesus mean when He told the Samaritan Woman that salvation is of the Jews?

In John 4:22, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that salvation is of the Jews. By telling her so, He was communicating a fact about the Old Testament days before He died and rose and the grace of God appeared to all people. That time, only the Jews had the benefit of God's Word that revealed the true God, the Saviour (Isaiah 49:26), and who rightly qualified to be served. But in the Old Testament days, God was dealing with the Jews as He set the stage to bring Jesus to avail salvation to the whole world.

There are people who when you say that you are a Christian try to intimidate you by telling you, "But you are not a Jew!" John the Baptist in John 1:29 introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. After Jesus died and rose again, He commanded the disciples to go throughout the world making disciples, Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:19. As we see in Titus 2:11, the grace of God that brings salvation had *appeared to all men*, not just to the Jews.

Has there been any time when there was no Bible-based Christian anywhere in the world since Pentecost?

The answer to the above question is no. Jesus, the Rock of Matthew

16:18, said that He was building a church that the gates of hell (Satan and his servants) would not prevail against. There has always been people who believed in salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone since Pentecost.

With the advent of state religion in the 4th century that fought fundamental or Bible-based Christianity, followers of the latter went underground and continued practising their faith secretly, sometimes in mountains and in caves. This is to say that the reformers like Martin Luther did not resurrect what had been discontinued at any time; they merely made independent study of the Bible, got saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus and, as it were, joined the river of Bible believers that had been flowing uninterrupted since Pentecost. And no matter how hard the devil works, there will still be Bible-based Christians when Jesus comes for the church during the Rapture.

What made Jesus teach with authority?

First, what does it mean by teaching with authority? To teach with authority means to teach without citing opinions of men or expressing doubts on anything that you are saying, and yet without contradicting yourself. And this is only possible if you are privy to (or aware of) the truth. Jesus quoted the Scriptures and interpreted prophecies, revealing what had theretofore been mysteries to the teachers of the Law. He explained the Scriptures in a way that the Scribes could not (Mark 1:22). And this is evidence that He came from God (John 8:42) and hence understood the mind of God and God's complete plan for man. In other words, He was aware of the complete truth and had come to reveal it. This is what He meant by saying in John 18:37 that He had come to bear witness to the truth.

Jesus brought understanding to what were mysteries during the Old Testament days, thus living up to what was expected of the Messiah, according to John 4:25. In John 14:6 He referred to Himself as the truth and in John 8:12 said that He is the light of the world and that whosoever follows Him shall not walk in darkness.

What will be the culmination of today's efforts to find world peace using humanistic approach?

Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, Isaiah 9:6, and any little peace that is enjoyed in the world can be traced to the presence in this world of the Bible-based church and laws crafted with Judeo-Christian values in mind.

The devil too has his approach to world peace using humanistic approach that ignores Christ, but this approach always takes the world from one war to another, from suffering to suffering. The history of this world has actually been a litany of wars, with peace as just an interlude. It is said that the League of Nations that was signed after the First World War was meant to ensure that the world ends wars for ever. But a few years after, in 1939, an even worse war, the Second World War, was declared. When this war ended, the United Nations came into being together with the Bretton Wood institutions to oversee the political and economic activities in the world. But wars and the attendant suffering continue.

But why is this? This is because the present world system is under the control and guidance of the devil, the god of the world, 2 Corinthians 4:4, whom as Christ revealed in John 10:10 is the thief who comes to kill, to steal, and to destroy. He is that old Lucifer of Isaiah 14:17 who has made this world as a wilderness.

But things will become worse when the church is raptured and Satan becomes freer to operate. Humanistic efforts to bring world peace will result in placing someone whom the Bible calls the Beast or Antichrist in control of world politics and economy. At first, the reign of this man whom Satan will be controlling will be peaceful, or at least have a semblance of peace. But as we see in 1 Thessalonians 5:3...*when they [people] shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.* What will follow will be trouble of a magnitude that has not been witnessed in this world before.

The Beast's rule and the suffering it will have brought will be put to an end by the second coming of Christ who will throw him into the lake of fire and start His 1000-year rule from Jerusalem.

During that time, true peace will reign in the world, since Jesus, the Prince of Peace, will be in charge. As we see in Isaiah 2:4, the Lord *shall judge among nations....and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*

Believers today should seek peace and pursue it, but they should not get deceived that we have become so civilized until Christ has become irrelevant when it comes to matters regarding global peace. Moreover, any interlude of peace should be exploited to take the Gospel places. We are to redeem the time, for the days are evil.

If a brother- or sister-in-Christ dreams or sees a vision today, can what he or she learns from it be used to guide the church in matters of faith and practice?

No. That is normally how cultism starts, when people start getting new teachings outside the Bible but which are supposed to be on par with the Scriptures. But it does not matter the status of the person who supposedly receives the teaching or where he or she receives it from, even if it is at the top of the highest mountain in the world. Unlike Bible believers who preach Christ, cultists preach their leaders' extraordinary experiences. Even during the days of Jeremiah, as we see in Jeremiah 23:25-26, some preached only dreams, which happened to be the deceit of their own heart.

God still speaks to the believers today. For example He can speak to you by showing you a need to address among His people. But He will never tell you to do what is contrary to His Word or tell you to do what amounts to adding new teachings to the Bible because it is complete. Christianity is not a faith under development. The Bible, which is supposed to guide the believers on matters of faith and practice, got complete with the book of Revelation, and no one should add anything to it, Revelation 22:18. But Satan through the false prophets encourages curiosity for what is not revealed so that he can get an opportunity to teach falsehood. It is common to hear false teachers saying that the Bible is not the complete truth and that they alone have the "missing" information. 'Propheying', as

the word is used in the New Testament has to do with edifying, exhorting and comforting (1 Corinthians 14:3), not foretelling.

Every spiritual teaching should pass the test of God's Word, 1 John 4:1 and Acts 17:11. We should search the Scriptures to confirm whether the things that we are taught are so.

By following the Bible, we are, as commanded in God's Word, contending for the faith which was once delivered to the saints, Jude verse 3. According to Deuteronomy 29:29, we ought to confine ourselves to what is revealed—in God's Word, of course. Actually if all you want is eternal life and the rewards that go with living a faithful life after salvation, the Bible is a sufficient guide for that, as we see from John 20:31: *but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

What is the Rapture of the Church and how different is it from Christ's Second Coming?

The Bible is unlike any other so-called holy book in that it contains God's complete plan concerning His creation, including prophecy concerning the future. It predicts history before it happens, being additional proof that it is God's message in whose hand is the future. The Lord alone is able to declare the end from the beginning, Isaiah 46:10.

The purpose of studying prophecy is not to find out the date of Christ's return but to see the need to exercise spiritual watchfulness by living a godly life. Jesus would like to come for a glorious church that has no spot or wrinkle, Ephesians 5:27. In 1 John 3:3 we are reminded that everyone who has the hope (of the resurrection) ought to purify himself, even as the Lord is pure.

God alone has the timetable of events of the last days. In discussing prophecy concerning the future, therefore, we try to create the best possible sequence of events from Scriptures found in different parts of the Bible. As a result, even sincere people of God may differ slightly on fine details about how events will be and how they will follow, but this does not matter so long as they all believe that what

is foretold will happen without failure because with God nothing is impossible.

Even the Old Testament prophets foretold about the first coming of Christ and about availability of salvation in Him to all people but did so using covenant language that the children of Israel of their day could understand. In the Old Testament, salvation was of the Jews, John 4:22, in that it is to them that the Lord God had revealed Himself. But we see Prophet Zechariah, according to Zechariah 14:16, speaking of a time when there would be a remnant from the people of the nations keeping the feast of the tabernacles. And this was a hint to a future time when even the Gentiles would also access salvation. Prophet Isaiah also, according to Isaiah 9:1-2, had foreseen a time when Zebulun, Naphtali and Galilee of the nations (Gentiles), a people who walked in the darkness, would see a great light—and that is just what happened with the coming of Jesus, Matthew 4:15-16. According to Ephesians 2:12-13, it is through the blood of Christ that we the Gentiles, who were without God and therefore strangers from the covenants of promise, were brought *nigh* to God. But the Old Testament prophets had also been shown other things related to the last days that they still communicated using the language that their people could understand.

The next great event in the calendar of the church is the Rapture. This is the term commonly used to describe the event recorded in 1 Thessalonians 4 beginning verse 16 when Jesus will come for the church (the living and the dead believers of all ages) and meet her in the air, following which the believers will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:10, for rewards and the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The Rapture is not the Second Coming. These are 2 separate events. Jesus at the time of the Rapture will not touch the ground but will meet the church in the air. The Second Coming, on the other hand, is an event that will take place later when Jesus will come back with the believers or saints, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, to set up an earthly kingdom and rule with a rod of iron, Revelation 12:5, for 1000 years. In other words, at the Rapture Jesus will come “for”

the saints; at the Second Coming He will come “with” the saints to reign.

From the Bible, the history of the earth is an interlude of about 7000 years sandwiched between two eternities. Unlike the evolutionists, Bible-based Christians believe and teach that our planet has been in existence for only about 6000 years. Even civilizations as old as that of the Chinese do not go back beyond that time. And to the Lord, that translates to just six days, since 1000 years to Him is as one day, 2 Peter 3:8. Sometime in future will begin the next 1000 years, a period known as the Millennium (Revelation 20:4) when Jesus will be reigning on earth, following His second coming. But the rapture of the church must take place first, followed by the Tribulation.

There is more than ample evidence in books like 2 Thessalonians and Revelation that the Rapture will precede the Second Coming. But Jesus from the gospels did not discuss these events in the order in which they will occur but rather by the subject matter. Generally our Lord begins with the events affecting the Jews, including the great tribulation which takes place during this period, before focussing on the future of the church. That is what happens in the first part of Matthew chapter 24. Then, beginning verse 36, our Lord alludes to the Rapture, saying that of the day and hour knoweth no man.

False teachers keep coming up with dates for the return of Jesus Christ, the devil’s trick being that when the Lord does not return on the predicted dates, many disbelieve the Bible. Apart from the Lord Himself, no one knows when the Rapture will take place, and according to Acts 1:7, it is not for us to know the times and seasons which the Father hath put in His own power. The church, even in Apostle Paul’s days, lived in continued anticipation of the Rapture, and Apostle Paul told the believers of Thessalonica that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. Moreover, the only way to prepare for it is for believers to live a life of righteousness, serving the Lord. Nobody should stop working to wait for the Lord, but we know that what the Lord has promised will certainly happen in the fullness of His time.

God may allow the devil to sift His beloved with the aim of proving to the devil His people's faithfulness to Him. But the Lord does not persecute His children. And so, before He pours His wrath upon the earth, the church will be evacuated through the Rapture. In 2 Thessalonians 2:7, 8, the Beast or Antichrist is referred to as the Wicked and we also see that there is one (the church), who must first be taken away before this wicked one is revealed.

Also in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 we see that our Lord through salvation has delivered us from the wrath which is to come. The church of Philadelphia symbolizes a Bible-believing church that is living in obedience to God's Word, and in Revelation 3:10, Jesus promises to keep it from the hour of temptation—through Rapture, of course—which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Jesus in Luke 21 beginning verse 6 tells of the distress of nations that will precede His Second Coming. Then in Luke 21:36 He advises the believers: Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be counted worth to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. Another thing to make us believe that the church will not go through the tribulation (that will follow the Rapture) is that the church is not mentioned directly or indirectly between Revelation 6 and Revelation 18, which are the chapters of the book of Revelation that deal with the Tribulation period. Also, John the Revelator – a symbol or type of the church, since he belongs to the Body of Christ – was called up, Revelation 4:1, in the Spirit before being shown things which must be hereafter, meaning that Christians will be up in heaven as the Tribulation takes place on earth.

Does the Woman of Revelation chapter 12 represent the Church or Israel?

Believers who say that the Rapture will take place in the middle of the Tribulation are those who assume that the woman of Revelation chapter 12 represents the church. But this woman who is clothed with the sun and moon under her feet and a crown of 12 stars represents Israel, not the church, as is confirmed from Joseph's dream in Genesis 37 beginning verse 9.

Joseph, who was sold in Egypt, was one of the children of Jacob, also called Israel. In his dream, Joseph saw the sun and moon and 11 stars (12 children of Jacob or Israel minus himself) making obeisance to him. This is evidence of the fact that the Jews (children of Israel) are the woman of Rev. 12:13 who brought forth the man child. This man child is Jesus because concerning the flesh, it is the children of Israel of whom Christ came, Romans 9:5. In fact the reason the devil and the unbelieving world hates the Jews is because of Christ who came through them, and who delivers people from Satan's captivity. The church did not bring Christ; the church came by Christ, who bought her with His blood, Acts 20:28.

Revelation chapter 12 is about the Beast (the Antichrist) apparently leading the nations mentioned in Zechariah chapter 14 who will gather against Jerusalem. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, and standing upon the Mount of Olives (by His power, apparently) on the East of Jerusalem, create a great valley through which the children of Israel will flee. Here in the wilderness according to Revelation 12:14, Israel will be nourished divinely for a time, and times and a half a time (3½ years in our reckoning) as the Antichrist continues with his sinful mission. Apparently this is the collective flight involving the Jews that was referred to by Christ in Matthew 24 beginning verse 20. It is worth mentioning that Jesus in Matthew 24:1-35 was speaking about the future of the Jews and after that the future of the church, starting with the Rapture. Of course the Antichrist, also called the Wicked, will eventually be destroyed with the brightness of Christ's coming, 2 Thessalonians 2:8, and thrown into the lake of fire, Revelation 20:10. Then Christ's 1,000-year rule will start.

What will follow here on Earth after the rapture of the Church?

To understand the things that will follow the Rapture, we refer to Daniel 2:31-45 for the dream of Nebuchadnezzar which Daniel interpreted. In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar was shown his empire and other world empires that would follow. These include Babylon,

represented by fine gold in the image; Medo-Persia, represented by silver; Greece, represented by brass; and Rome, represented by iron. In Daniel chapter 7, Daniel himself was shown these world powers, but this time represented by beasts. Babylon was symbolized by a lion that had eagle's wings; Medo-Persia by a bear-like animal; Greece by a winged leopard with 4 heads; and Rome by a dreadful, territory strong beast with iron teeth.

From history, we know that these world powers have reigned and gone. But there is a world power that is yet to reign. This world power that will rule very briefly will actually be a revival of the Roman Empire, and in Nebuchadnezzar's image, it is represented by feet of iron and clay. This is the empire that the Beast will lead. And since Rapture must precede the revelation of the Beast, the latter remains a future event so long as the church is here on earth.

In Daniel's vision, we see the 10 kings who will rule with the Beast represented by horns of the fourth beast, Daniel 7:7. In the following verse 8, the Beast himself is represented by the little horn before whom were three of the first horns plucked, and he had eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things. In Daniel 8:9, the Beast is symbolized by the little horn of the he-goat that, according to verse 5, came from the West on the face of the whole earth. (The fact that the Bible refers to the Beast as the he-goat from the West is what makes the emergence of the European Common Market – at one time also called EEC and now European Union – in Rome in 1957 generate a lot of interest among students of prophecy.)

The empire that the Beast will lead will last up to the second coming of Jesus, the stone that was cut out without hands, smote the image and became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth, Daniel 2:34, 35. The filling of the earth by the mountain symbolizes the 1,000-year reign of Christ on the earth, commonly known as the Millennium rule.

Around the time of the Rapture, many things will happen in quick succession. Among them we see a series of wars between the king of the North and the king of the South as recorded in Daniel chapter

11. These, we can only imagine, are a part of the wars and rumours of wars that Jesus said would precede the *end* and are referred to as the beginning of sorrows, Matthew 24:8. Apparently these are the same wars prophesied about in Ezekiel chapter 37 to 39, when the Lord will cause Gog and Magog (apparently Russia) to come against Israel from the north, only for the Lord to fight on behalf of His people and make their attackers fall upon the mountains of Israel. (According to Ezekiel 39:9, the weapons of this war will take 7 years to burn, which could be the 7 years of the Tribulation period.) Then at some point, a vile person shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries, Daniel 11:21. This person is the Beast or Antichrist. The devil is the master imitator, and just as Jesus is the Prince of Peace, the devil will package the Beast, the second person in devil's evil trinity, as a man of peace. The Beast is the rider of the white horse of Revelation 6:2, mimicking Jesus, the rider of the white horse of Revelation 19:11. But the Beast will show his true colours by changing to a red horse, symbolizing war, then to a black horse symbolizing hunger and famine and finally to a pale horse representing death. These are the things that will characterize his reign.

Towards the end of the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, Daniel received the vision of the seventy weeks that foretold the future of Israel all the way up to the time of the Second Coming of Jesus. Read Daniel 9 beginning verse 24. Each day in Daniel's vision represents one year. And so the 70 weeks stand for 490 years of God's dealing especially with Israel before righteousness is restored. Counting starts from the 20th year of the reign of King Artaxerxes when the command to rebuild Jerusalem's walls (Nehemiah chapter 2) was issued.

According to reliable history (Price 1975), the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes was 445 B.C. From that time to the time when the walls and streets of Jerusalem were fully restored is seven weeks or 49 years. The next sixty-two weeks (three score and two weeks or 434 years) bring us to the crucifixion of Jesus when He

came for the first time. This is the time when Jesus died for our sins or, in Daniel's language in Daniel 9:26, Messiah was *cut off*.

Bible scholars generally understand the period between the Rapture of the church and Jesus' Second Coming to be the 70th week of Daniel, and hence 7 years in our reckoning.

Between the time of the crucifixion of Jesus and the Rapture, when the 70th week of Daniel will start, is the interval called the church age. This is the time of blindness in part for Israel, according to Romans chapter 11. This is the time we are living in when Israel as a nation has rejected their Messiah and salvation has come to the Gentiles to provoke the Jews to jealousy. And as already mentioned, no one apart from the Lord knows when the Rapture will take place so that the church age ends and the 70th week of Daniel begins.

The whole period between the Rapture and the second coming of Jesus is referred to as the Tribulation period (the time of Jacob's trouble, according to Jerusalem 30:7). This period is divided into 2 parts of three and a half years each. The opening of the seventh seal in heaven, Revelation 8:1, signals the middle of the 7-year period and the beginning of the second half of the Tribulation period, known as the Great Tribulation, Matthew 24:21.

The Beast will come to power pretending to be a man of peace and actually the beginning of his reign will be peaceful. But sometime in the middle of the Tribulation period (*midst of the week*, according to Daniel 9:27) he will break his pact with the Jews and Jerusalem compassed with armies, Luke 21:20, as if it is the enemy's chance to annihilate God's people. By this time the Temple in Jerusalem will have been rebuilt and sacrifices resumed. But at some point the Beast will stop this sacrificing and desecrate the Temple by making some blasphemous demands while standing in the holy place. This terrible act is called in Daniel 11:31 the abomination that maketh desolate and was referred to by Jesus in Matthew 24:15.

The Jews will suddenly realize that the Beast is their enemy and flee for their lives. The resulting collective flight is mentioned in Matthew 24 beginning verse 20 and in Revelation 12:14, where

the Jews are compared to a woman who flew into the wilderness and was nourished divinely for a time and times and half a time (3½years). This event is also recorded in Zechariah chapter 14 where the Bible shows that the Lord will allow all nations to gather against Jerusalem and take the city. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations and, standing (by His power, apparently) upon the Mount of Olives on the East of Jerusalem, create a great valley through which the children of Israel will flee. That is how the Lord will miraculously evacuate and take the Jews to security as the Beast continues with his destruction.

An interesting aspect of the Tribulation period is that there will be evangelization, apparently carried out by those Jews and Gentiles who will trust the Lord after the Rapture, and who will refuse to bow to the image of the Beast. Jesus spoke about his evangelization in Matthew 24:14. The *end*, as the word is used here, has to do with the conclusion of the Tribulation, making way for the second coming of Jesus. Apart from the Tribulation saints (these include the 144,000 Jewish witnesses and the Gentiles who will believe after the Rapture), we also see an angel proclaiming the everlasting gospel, Revelation 14:6, and the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3 who will witness in sackcloth for 1260 days. Assuming they will come onto the scene immediately after the Rapture, the two witnesses will finish their task 3½ years later, which will be the middle of the Tribulation. Then they will be killed and remain in the streets for 3½ days after which God will restore them to life miraculously and call them home, Revelation 11:7-12.

From Revelation chapter 12, we see that Satan (the dragon) through the Beast will start by going after the Jews. But after his effort to reach them is swallowed by the Lord's intervention in the wilderness, he will turn to the Tribulation Saints and start making blasphemous demands on them.

God's Word calls both the Antichrist and the False Prophet beasts; after all both are indwelt by the spirit of the devil. Apparently the Antichrist will be both a political and economic leader (*raiser of*

taxes, Daniel 11:20-21), seemingly in charge of the then one-world government and global economy. He will be so powerful that people, according to Revelation 13:4, will worship him, saying, *Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?*

The false prophet will be the spiritual leader of the Satanic coalition of faiths that will exist on earth that time. The False Prophet is to the Beast what the Holy Spirit is to Jesus in the holy Trinity. And so, just as the Holy Spirit seeks to glorify Jesus, John 16:14, the False Prophet will prevail on everyone to worship the Beast, Revelation 13:12. In an effort to ensure that all people take part in this evil exercise, he (the False Prophet) will come up with an initiation-like number to ensure that only those who have that number buy or sell, Revelation 13:17, 18. In addition, according to Revelation 13:15, the False Prophet will cause as many as refuse to worship the image of the Beast to be killed. But those who succumb and worship the Beast have their judgment as revealed in Revelation 14:9 and 10.

From the Scriptures, it is not possible to tell with certainty at what point the evangelization of the Tribulation period will end, the Tribulation saints killed and their souls taken up. But it seems this will take place around the middle of the Tribulation period. The 2 witnesses of Revelation 11:3 are a type of Tribulation saints, and the fact that they are killed and called to heaven gives us reason to imagine that the Tribulation saints will also be killed and called home.

As we see later when we study to find out what will happen in heaven after the Rapture, the troubles of the first 3½ years will come from the Beast. And though the Tribulation saints will suffer the wrath of the Antichrist, it appears like they will be out of the scene on time not to taste the wrath of God, whose painful judgment makes the second half of the Tribulation period to be called the Great Tribulation.

What is the number of the Beast?

When Lucifer fell and became Satan or adversary of God as we see in Isaiah 14 beginning verse 12 and Ezekiel chapter 28, he (Satan) formed his own spiritual kingdom called the kingdom of the devil or the kingdom of darkness that is structured like the kingdom of God but in all ways contrary to the kingdom of God. These 2 spiritual kingdoms are symbolized by the 2 ways that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 7 beginning verse 13. The narrow (strait) way is the one in which those of the kingdom of God are, and it leads to everlasting life. The wide way in which those of the kingdom of darkness are leads to everlasting fire that is reserved for the devil and his angels, Matthew 25:41. It is worth mentioning that when Lucifer fell from glory, he did so with a third of all the angels in heaven, the stars of Revelation 12:4. These Satan's angels are called devils or demons, and they serve in the kingdom of darkness to promote evil.

The kingdom of God has a Trinity, made up of God the Father, the Son Jesus or Word of God, and the Holy Spirit, 1 John 5:7, KJV. In the same way, Satan, the master imitator, has his evil trinity made up of Satan himself, the Beast and the False Prophet, Revelation 20:10. These last two will be revealed after the rapture of the church, an event to take place in future.

In the Old Testament, we see reference to people of God and it is through them that God by the Holy Spirit brought Jesus as Saviour. In the same way, there has been a lineage of disobedient people (antichrists, as they are referred to in 1 John 2:18). The evil spirit or spirit of the antichrist is the one that guides these haters of God, 1 John 4:3. But the main Antichrist, also called the Beast – and who will outdo all the previous haters of God in being evil – is yet to come onto the scene. But he will certainly be manifested among the servants of the devil and the spirit of the devil (after the working of Satan) will be behind his revelation, 2 Thessalonians 2:9.

Just as God was manifested in the flesh in the person of Jesus to take away sin, John 1:29, the devil will some time in future enter the Beast to drive sin to the highest level, what God's Word refers to as

the abomination that maketh desolate, Daniel 12:11. Jesus reiterated this in Matthew 24:15.

After the church is raptured (or taken up) by the Lord, what will have been restraining excess evil will have been taken away, 2 Thessalonians 2:7, and the devil will move in a way that he has never moved before, partly because he will be freer to operate and also because he will be having but a short time to operate in this world, Revelation 12:12. That is the time the Beast (also called the *man of sin* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3) will be revealed. Many people may not think so but the presence of the church in the world and hence the Judeo-Christian values that it promotes are what makes life in this world tolerable. Jesus according to John 10:10 called Satan the thief and said that he comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. In countries where there is Judeo-Christian influence, the laws that are made, for example, generally value human life. But in countries where there is no such influence, human life is destroyed for flimsy reasons, women subjugated, etc. The other day I read the testimony of a lady who escaped from North Korea, telling of a man who was killed by firing squad for killing a cow to eat meat during a time of famine. Imagine the life of a human being sacrificed because of killing an animal for food! One can therefore shudder at the kind of laws that will be crafted after the church is taken up.

Apparently the Beast will be in charge of the politics and the economy of the then one-world government. In Daniel 11:20, he is described as a raiser of taxes. By saying that he will be ruling with 10 kings is just another way of saying that he will be the global ruler. Today's nation states are joining regional co-operations and these seem poised to merge into bigger blocks, leading to some form of one-world government and global economy. Recently, a highly influential European leader, a New Age enthusiast who happens to be open to any idea of spirituality, recommended that there be a military-style campaign to marshal a global private sector with more resources at its disposal than even governments of leading nations. According to him, that is the way to deal with today's global

economic challenges. Needless to say, this entity will at some point need a leader. Moreover, it doesn't seem like controlling people will be difficult in future. Not with today's computer applications that have mapped the entire world and algorithms that are capable of profiling the entire world population.

Spiritually, the Beast is opposite in character to Jesus of the Bible. Even as Jesus is the second Person in the holy Trinity, 1 John 5:7 KJV, the Beast will be the second person in the evil trinity made up of those in Revelation 20:10 (the Devil, the Beast and the False Prophet).

Jesus came from God, John 8:42; the Beast will come from the devil (after the working of Satan, 2 Thessalonians 2:9), meaning he will come to power through the machinations of the devil. Jesus as God coming in the flesh was manifested in the mystery of godliness, 1 Timothy 3:16; the Beast, whose other names include *man of sin*, *son of perdition* and that *Wicked* (2 Thessalonians 2:3), will be manifested in the mystery of iniquity, 2 Thessalonians 2:7, 8. According to John 6:38, Jesus came from heaven; the Beast (actually the spirit of the devil that will be guiding and empowering him) will come from the bottomless pit, Revelation 11:7. Jesus' authority came from God the Father, Matthew 17:5; the Devil or dragon is the one who will give the Beast power, and his seat and great authority, Revelation 13:2 and 4. Jesus came to save, Luke 19:10; the Beast will come to destroy, and according to Daniel 8:24, he shall destroy wonderfully.

Jesus when on earth did miracles that proved He was from God the Father, John 3:2; the Beast's coming to power and reigning will be characterized by Satanic power, signs and lying wonders, 2 Thessalonians 2:9. Jesus is humble and always sought the will of God the Father, John 5:30 and Philippians 2:7,8; the Beast opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God, 2 Thessalonians 2:4. In Daniel 7:25, the Bible records that the Beast will speak great words against the Most

High, and shall wear out (persecute) the saints of the Most High (people who will believe after the Rapture, of course). In Daniel 11:36 he is referred to as the king who will do according to his will, and exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation [God's anger against him] be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done. Without doubt, the Beast will be the incarnation of the devil, the father of pride and lies.

We honour (worship) God the Father through the Son Jesus, John 5:23. According to John 14:10, the Father dwells in Jesus. In the same way, through the Beast or Antichrist, people will be worshipping the Devil, also called the dragon who will be dwelling in him (the Beast) and hence giving him power, Revelation 13:4.

God's Word calls both the Antichrist and the False Prophet beasts. Whereas the Antichrist will head the social-economic and political life of his day, the False Prophet will be in charge of religion, apparently as head of the Luciferic coalition of false faiths that will exist in the world after Bible-based Christians have been taken up through the Rapture.

The False Prophet is to the Beast what the Holy Spirit is to Jesus. And so, just as the Holy Spirit seeks to glorify Jesus, John 16:14, the False Prophet will prevail on everyone to worship the Beast, Revelation 13:12. In an effort to try to have all people take part in this evil exercise, the False Prophet will come up with an initiation-like number system and ensure that only those who have that number buy or sell goods or services, Revelation 13:17, 18.

On its own, the number will not be the problem but the condition attached to receiving it: one will be required to worship the Beast first in order to receive it. That is why there are some who will be living on earth that time who will not qualify for it because of refusing to worship the Beast. These of course are the people who will turn to God during this time of Tribulation and will be killed for not worshipping the Beast.

Satan by his evil spirit will enter the Beast to empower the latter and fulfil his (Satan's) age-old desire to be worshipped like the Most High, Isaiah 14:14. Those who worship the Beast will be worshipping the devil who will be abiding in him. Moreover, they have their judgment. According to Revelation 14:9 and 10, they shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. There are people who feel stumbled when asked to take identity cards, fearing that the number on the ID could be the number of the Beast. But their fear is unjustified. First, one is not required to worship a human person in order to get an ID. Second, the number of the Beast will be marked on people's flesh – on the forehead or on the right hand, Revelation 13:16 – and not on paper. Third, born-again Christians should have no cause for fear because prior to the revelation of the Beast, they will have been taken away through the Rapture. So long as the church is still around, the revelation of the Beast is yet future, and the only one sure way of avoiding the number of the Beast and the trouble of the Tribulation period is repenting toward God and putting your faith in Jesus and living like you believe so that you can be evacuated through the Rapture if it takes place during your lifetime.

Of course God will have allowed the devil to take sin to its highest level so that He can be justified in punishing the devil. As we see in Revelation 20:10 the final abode of Satan, the Beast and the False Prophet is in the Lake of Fire. But they will not be there alone. According to Matthew 25:41, they will be there with all Satan's angels and those people who refuse to put their faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Ignoring the conviction of the Holy Spirit until you die unsaved is an unforgivable sin.

What will happen in Heaven after the rapture of the church?

Another thing that we see in the Bible is that God has set a time when He will pour His wrath upon those who dwell on the earth for

not obeying His will. This collective judgement called the Great Tribulation is recorded in Matthew 24 and in the book of Revelation and referred to indirectly in other parts of the Bible, for instance in Isaiah 13 beginning verse 9, where it is called the day of the Lord. The Great Tribulation will be God's wrath on Christ-rejecting world, rather like the judgment that came upon people of Noah's day.

Sometimes after the Rapture as recorded in Revelation chapter 5 and 6, Jesus in heaven will open and loose the seals of the book sealed with seals and containing the sum of the wrath of God to be poured upon those who will be dwelling on earth at that time. According to Revelation 6:17, the great day of God's wrath will have come, and the question asked is: and who shall be able to stand it? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, Hebrews 10:31, so if you are not saved, consider escaping this dreadful time by trusting Jesus as your Saviour now!

During that period of God's wrath which will be triggered by the opening of the seals, we see angels sound trumpets while others are assigned the duty of pouring vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth forever and ever. This will usher in all sorts of calamities, like widespread wars and the killings and suffering that go with them, worldwide famine, widespread ecological destruction, earthquakes and, towards the end, the sun turning black while the moon becomes like blood.

During that time, life on earth will be extremely hard. In Luke 23:30, Jesus said that people will even plead with mountains to fall on them and with the hills to cover them. In Matthew 24:22 the Bible says that except those days are shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. "The elect" here (as in Isaiah 45:4) refers to the Jews who will still be on earth, having missed the Rapture for not having believed in Jesus due to the blindness in part referred to in Romans chapter 11.

The pouring of the seventh vial, which will also be as a result of the opening the seventh seal, will signal the final wrath of God and a voice will be heard coming from the Temple in heaven, saying,

It is done, Revelation 16:17. The earth will shake so much that Jerusalem will be split in three (verse 19). This time God's wrath will be directed upon the apostate church that will exist in the world during that time of which we expect the False Prophet to be the spiritual leader. The fact that it is apostate means that members will not have trusted Christ as their Saviour and will therefore not go up at the time of the Rapture.

In Revelation 17:5 this alliance of false faiths is referred to as Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. (The true church is to be separate from the blind unity that false faiths call for, which is really a vehicle towards commonized apostasy. Unlike fundamental Christians who are guided by the Bible and to whom Jesus is the only way of getting reconciled to God, false faiths use philosophy to justify whatever they do or believe. And since philosophers are always looking for the convergence point of all faiths, we can only imagine that by the time of the Great Tribulation, they will have found sufficient common ground to forge a concrete alliance.)

According to Revelation 17:6, people in false faiths are the ones the devil has used over the ages to orchestrate the persecution of God's people. They are symbolized by the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. (In the past, one cultic group is said to have tried to purge Christianity of its Judaic origins seemingly so as to persecute the Jews without feeling guilty.) But no revisionist historian can hide facts from God and, according to Revelation 16:19, Babylon the Great will come in remembrance before God, to receive her cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

Towards the end of the Great Tribulation, God will put in the heart of the Beast and those with whom he will be ruling to fulfil His will by hating this whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire, Revelation 17:16, 17. That is how this religious machine that the Bible refers to as Mystery Babylon will fall and those who have benefited from her

over the ages stand afar off for fear of her torment, saying, *Alas, Alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour is thy judgment come*, Revelation 18:10. Meanwhile, as we see in verse 20, there will be rejoicing in heaven for God having avenged holy apostles and prophets over her.

After that we see the sun darkened and the moon ceasing to give light. The stars shall fall from heaven, and the power of the heavens shall be shaken. Then shall Jesus appear with the saints, coming in the clouds of heaven with power and glory, His arrival filling the sky such that no one will miss it, Matthew 24:29, 30. This is the second coming of our Lord, captured in greater details and beauty of words in Revelation 19:11-16.

The first thing that Jesus will do will be to deal with the Beast and the kings of the earth and their armies who, according to Revelation 19:19, will have gathered to resist Him. The Beast and the False Prophet will then be taken and cast alive into the lake of fire, verse 20. Meanwhile, an angel will come down from heaven having the key to the bottomless pit and with a great chain in his hand bind Satan and cast him into the bottomless pit to remain there throughout the reign of Jesus on earth, Revelation 20:1-3. (Our responsibility today is to resist the devil's temptations, James 4:7, because he must operate freely until this time when he will be effectively bound by the order of the Lord.) With the evil forces imprisoned, Jesus will then begin His 1,000-year rule from Jerusalem, ruling with the saints, who will be in glorified bodies. Those who will be under the rule of Christ are the children of Israel and those people who will have survived the Tribulation. The times of the Gentiles' domination of Israel that is mentioned in Luke 21:24 will have ended (fulfilled). The coming of the Messiah to reign over Israel had been prophesied in the Old Testament and that is why the disciples asked in Acts 1:6, *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?* But when Jesus came for the first time, He came as the Saviour to die for the sins of mankind. It is when He comes for the second time that He will come as King. That is when genuine peace will be realized

in Israel. It is the time when the Bible in Jeremiah 23:6 says *Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely*.

The Bible does give us a glimpse of how life will be during that time. Unsaved people who will survive the Tribulation and enter the millennial kingdom will be reproducing, since they will not be in resurrected bodies. (According to Matthew 22:30, those of the resurrection will *neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven*.) And among those who will be reproducing, the person who dies at 100 years will be considered to have died young.

According to Zephaniah 3:9, God will reinstate a unified language. Concerning spiritual matters, the faith will be the same. According to Jeremiah chapter 31, the law of the Lord will be written in people's hearts.

According to Isaiah chapter 35, waters will break out of the wilderness and streams in the desert.

After the 1000-year reign of Christ as we read in Revelation 20:7-10, Satan will be released from the bottomless pit. And since his character will not have changed, he will go to deceive the nations in the four corners, to gather them to battle and match to surround God's people. We can only imagine that the people whom the devil will mobilize to battle are the unsaved and their offspring who survive the Tribulation and enter the Millennial reign.

In response to this revolt, God's fire will come down and devour them. Satan will then be thrown into the lake of fire where the Beast and the false prophet will be already. (Satan is a frustrated being in that having lived in heaven as Lucifer and hence become enlightened, he fell knowingly and therefore has no opportunity for repentance.)

The next event after the Millennial reign of Jesus is the Great White Throne Judgment, Revelation 20:11-15. The Bible speaks of 2 judgments that will affect people as individuals: the Judgment Seat of Christ of 2 Corinthians 5:10 and the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation chapter 20. The Judgment Seat of Christ will

not be a judgment of condemnation but of evaluation. It concerns the believers alone as they receive rewards for their service for the Lord. Romans 14:10 confirms that we believers shall all appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Great White throne Judgment, on the other hand, concerns the unbelievers of all time. It is a judgment of condemnation. The dead unbelievers of all times will be raised, judged and thrown into the lake of fire to join the Devil and his angels, the Beast and the False Prophet. This fact is corroborated in Matthew 25:41.

The next thing we see is the destruction of the old heaven and earth with fervent heat, 2 Peter chapter 3, and a new heaven and earth brought in their place. Then the New Jerusalem will come down as a bride prepared for her husband, Revelation 21:1-2. That is the city we should seek because as we see in Hebrews 13:14, we have no such city in the present world that is characterized by sin. The glory of God will lighten it and the Lamb (Jesus) will be the light thereof, Revelation 21:23. The righteous will shine as the sun, Matthew 13:43, and according to Revelation 22:5, they shall reign for ever and ever.

Was Mary the Mother of Jesus without sin?

Judging by the account in the Bible, Mary was a good lady, but Romans 3:23 declares all descendants of Adam to be sinners. In fact the angel who came to tell Mary that she would conceive said in Luke 1:30 that she had found favour with God. And *favour* or *grace* is for those who fall short because of sin. Of those born on earth, only Jesus was without sin, 1 John 3:5 and Hebrews 4:15.

Who will bring lasting, true peace to the Middle-East and thus end the global insecurity arising from the current conflict?

It is Jesus Christ who will manage to do so when He comes for the second time. Behind the peace of the Jews (Israel) is the Lord, Luke 19:42. So, when Jesus came for the first time and they rejected Him, they actually rejected peace. As a result the Lord said that their enemies would come and lay Jerusalem upon the ground (destroy her) and her children (the Jews) because they had not known or

recognized the time of the Lord's visitation, Luke 19:44. This fact is corroborated in Luke 13:35 where the Bible says that her house would be left desolate and they would not see Him until the time they would say or acknowledge that blessed is he [Jesus] who comes in the name of the Lord.

Just as Jesus had prophesied, Titus in AD 70 overran Palestine, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and the Jews were scattered in many parts of the world, especially in Europe. Moreover, wherever the Jews went to in the Diaspora, God made their businesses thrive because He still loved them. As a result they were hated, persecuted and segregated in the ghettos. Consequently, inside them was always the yearning to go back to their country. In fact they used to greet each other, "Next Year in Jerusalem".

But just as during the time when the Jews had been taken to captivity and some remained in Israel (see 2 Kings 25:22), there remained Jews in Israel even after the invasion and destruction prophesied by our Lord Jesus. Unfortunately world leaders who try to arbitrate in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict today often find themselves forced to work with a false narrative from the enemies of the Jews, a narrative that implies that the Jews are outsiders claiming other people's land in Palestine. And so peace in the Middle-East continues to be elusive. (By the way, Israel was called Palestine by the Crusaders who were also enemies of the Jews.)

Many may have thought that efforts to exterminate the Jews ended with the death of Hitler, but anti-Semitism continues. In fact in the end the Jews will have no one to look up to except the Lord. The devil's desire to wipe out the Jews because it is through them that Jesus came to destroy the kingdom of darkness remains.

After the rapture of the church, the world will come under one political and economic leader called the Beast or Antichrist. Initially this man who will be indwelt by the devil will enforce a false peace, 1 Thessalonians 5:3, seemingly to facilitate the rebuilding of the temple and then desecrate it by seeking to be worshipped there. This event that will take place in the middle of the Great Tribulation will

be the culmination of sin. The Bible describes it as the abomination that maketh desolate, Daniel 11:31 and Matthew 24:15.

When the Jews see this happen, they will realize that the Beast is their enemy and flee. Apparently the Beast will go after them, resulting in the distress and wrath upon God's people (the Jews) referred to by Jesus in Luke 21:23. This collective flight is mentioned in Matthew 24 beginning verse 20 and Revelation 12:14 where the Jews are compared to a woman who flew into the wilderness and was divinely fed for three and a half years. This event is also recorded in Zechariah chapter 14 where the Bible shows that at one time the Lord will allow all nations, specifically the global army of the Beast, to gather against Jerusalem and take the city. (The European Union, the foremost example of nations without borders is said to have come up with a constitution that avoids 'God'. As they work towards a one-world Godless culture, dark forces are prevailing on nations to start giving respectability to immoral practices, like same-sex marriage, that were once frowned upon. And the people behind this evil culture of the world of Beast's time will continue hating the Jews for standing in the way of their evil plan by insisting that their country Israel remain a sovereign state, with her people guided by the Scriptures.) Then the Lord will go forth against those nations and create a great valley through which the children of Israel will flee.

The reason Bible-believers think the rapture is near—though no one knows the day or the hour—is because the things happening today seem to set the stage for events that will follow the Rapture, like the revelation of the Beast and of the False Prophet and the flight of the Jews as they escape the wrath of the Beast.

As alluded earlier, it seems the Beast will arise out of the one-world government that will result from the merger of today's regional blocks and trans-national corporations. He will be both political and economic leader. (By the way, a new world order, the digital order, is emerging, and it is controlled by tech companies through their devices, not governments. You can therefore imagine

the level of control that the person under whom these companies will eventually come will have.) The False Prophet, on the other hand, will arise out of the pot-pourri of false faiths that keep looking for common ground and hence common leader.

With the death of Hitler, many thought that the threat to the Jews was behind them. But today they are facing an even greater threat in the Western world with the emergence of anti-Semitic alliance of the far Left and the migration into Europe of radicalized Middle-Eastern people from cultures with deep hatred for the Jews. Clearly, the stage is being set for what looks like another Holocaust.

What is prophesied in God's Word must happen and ours is to continue praying for the peace of Jerusalem and also that the Holy Spirit open the believers' eyes to relate today's developments to the Second Coming and see the need to intensify Gospel outreach rather than committing all the resources that churches raise to build showpiece auditoriums or maintain fat bank accounts as souls die and go to a Christless eternity.

At the end of the Tribulation, Jesus will come back for the second time, destroy the Beast, 2 Thessalonians 2:8, and the False Prophet and have them thrown into the Lake of fire. Then the devil will be put into the bottomless pit as Jesus begins His Millennial rule in Jerusalem. That is the time true peace will reign in the Middle-East. God's Word in Jeremiah 33:16 says that *in those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.*

What kind of culture will be in this world after the Rapture?

So far in this world, the dominant culture has been the Judeo-Christian one that is characterized by biblical values. But there is a systematic effort to replace it with a Godless culture that will be dominant after the Rapture and that will create an environment that is conducive for the worship of the Beast.

After the Bible-believers are taken, what will be left in this world will be an alliance of false faiths—including cults that go by the

name ‘Christian’—and they will be headed by the False Prophet. The False Prophet is the other ‘beast’ of Revelation 13:11 who according to Revelation 13:15 will cause the Tribulation saints to be killed because of refusing to worship the Antichrist. Cults have their own Bible versions that keep being modified to suit the times and new challenges. They are unlike Bible-believing Christians who preach the ‘common salvation’ which is by faith in Christ Jesus, and contended earnestly for this faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints, Jude 3. The leader of a cult with followers the world over recently said that the Bible is inadequate for spiritual guidance in the 21st century, and we can imagine that by the time the Rapture takes place, cults will have compromised enough to accept the spiritual book, if any, that will have been introduced to guide the alliance of false faiths under the False Prophet.

Today, every effort is being made to kick God out of people’s mind so that He does not feature when they think about creation. In the West, there are institutions of higher learning that will not accept you if you do not subscribe to the teaching of evolution. With surprising conviction, newscasters keep punctuating what they say with clauses like “before we came down from the trees” as if everybody has come to believe the lie that people were once animals.

Some people in the US, a country that in the past enjoyed Christian heritage, are said to have gone to court to challenge the use of “God” in the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools. Moreover, this took place shortly after prayer, Bible reading and Christian symbols were removed from public schools. And there is no ruling out of the possibility that this unfortunate trend will catch on in other countries.

The other thing that dark forces are busy with is pressuring nations to destroy moral barriers by, for example, legalizing practices like same-sex marriage. In Taiwan recently, parliament simply went against the will of the majority to allow the registration of gay couples. We have also read about legalization of the use of

marijuana in some parts of the world. Imagine whole populations under the influence of drugs! Wouldn't it be making the world into a wilderness, just as the devil, according to Isaiah 14:17, has always wanted it to be! Consumption of drugs makes people extra vulnerable to sin and also easy to manipulate. And yet these are just a few examples of the ways in which this world is being prepared for the future Godless culture in which sin will receive respectability.

In conclusion, we who have trusted the Lord Jesus for salvation should continue to live in righteousness and holiness (or purity), Revelation 22:11. And as we wait for the coming of the Lord, let us commit more time and resources to evangelization; after all the purpose of our being given the power of the Holy Spirit was, according to Acts 1:8, to enable us make disciples of Christ in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and unto the utmost part of the earth

What age are we living in?

The Bible in Luke 16:16 says that the law and the prophets were until John (the Baptist), and since that time, the kingdom of God is preached and every man presses into it. The Book of Hebrews opens by telling us that God spoke in time past (Old Testament days) by the prophets but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Person about whom all the Old Testament prophets witnessed, Acts 10:43, and when He came, we got to know all things concerning God and His plan for man, John 4:25. The Bible is complete such that modern-day prophets do not qualify to add or remove anything from God's Word, Revelation 22:18-19.

Today, we are living in the Church age, and there is only one work that Christ has given us: to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:19-20. In fact even when the term "prophesy" or its derivative is used in the New Testament as in Acts 19:6 and Acts 21:9, it refers to preaching the Gospel, not revelation of new truths that are supposedly not in God's Word.

Who are the wise virgins, and who are the foolish virgins?

Matthew chapter 25 opens with the parable of the 10 virgins. Five

of these are wise, the rest are foolish, but all of them are waiting for the bridegroom. And we know that this bridegroom is Christ because after He comes for the church at the time of the Rapture, what will follow is the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven.

Normally, it is to a virgin that a bridegroom makes an offer for marriage. According to God's Word, the church is the bride of Christ. And the fact that Christ through the preaching of the Gospel has invited all of us to become part of His bride means that to Him we are all virgins.

Really, all people in this world are waiting for Jesus whether they like it or not, since in Hebrews 9:27 we read that it is appointed unto all men (people) once to die, but after this the judgment, and Jesus according to Acts 10:42 is the one ordained of God to judge the quick and the dead. But the wise virgins are the saved people and therefore have the oil of the Holy Spirit. And since the Holy Spirit who resurrected Jesus is the same one who will quicken dead Christians and change the bodies of those Christians who will be alive at the time of the Rapture (Romans 8:11), the foolish virgins—who include unsaved churchgoers—will not be ready to be whisked away for the marriage supper of the Lamb that will follow the Rapture. The way to be ready for the return of the Son of man is to trust Him for salvation so as to be baptized into (added to) the universal body of believers by the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:13.

What does the Bible mean by saying in John 1:11 that Jesus came unto His own, and His own received Him not?

There are some people, including preachers, who de-emphasize the importance of going around witnessing Christ to others, arguing that those whom God predestined for heaven must get there whether they are preached to or not, and they quote, among other Scriptures, John 1:11 to back their argument. But what does this Scripture actually mean?

In this Scripture, "His own" refers to the Children of Israel, the race

into which Jesus was born (Romans 9:4-5). Although Jesus was born into the Children of Israel, few of them believed Him, and in Romans 11:1 we are told that they stumbled so that salvation comes to the Gentiles and provokes the Jews to jealousy. In fact it is this same Jesus about whom the Children of Israel will say in future that blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.

God in Genesis 12:2-3 had promised that He would bless Abraham and make him a great nation—the Children of Israel to whom he is Patriarch or father, Matthew 3:9—and this is by bringing Jesus Christ through them. That way, all families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham because through Jesus, God would not be bringing the solution to the sin of the Jews alone but to the sin of the entire world, John 1:29. That is why when Jesus came, died and rose, He commanded that the Gospel be preached all over the world, Mark 16:15. Through Jesus we are told in Titus 2:11 that the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men (people). God's Word in 1 John 2:2 says that Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

Does the Bible forbid cross-cultural marriage by Christians?

No. The Bible does not forbid Christians from marrying outside their community or race. According to Acts 17:24-26, the God who made the world and all the things therein is the one who made of one blood all nations of men (people) who dwell on the face of the earth.

When the Lord according to Exodus 34:11-16 required the Children of Israel not to marry from the heathen, it is because He wanted to ensure that His people are not drawn to the gods of the heathen. And even today, God does not want His people the Christians to be unequally yoked to the unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14) by, for example, marrying the unbelievers, since this would make them vulnerable to sin.

By placing your faith on the Lord Jesus, you join the community of believers that is guided by the Bible as the authority of faith and practice. According to Galatians 3:28, believers are one in Christ, whether they be Jews or Greeks (Gentiles), bond, or free, male or

female. It is within this Christian community that you ought to select a life partner, whether he or she is from your tribe or not.

Why are believers baptized?

People are baptized so that they become followers of the one into whom they are baptized. According to 1 Corinthians 10:2, all the children of Israel were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, of course so that they could follow the leadership of Moses as he took them to the Promised Land. In the same way, believers are baptized (added) into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:13, so that they yield to Jesus by following His teachings as He takes them to heaven.

(As mentioned earlier, physical baptism when one is immersed into water is just an outward expression of the work that will have been done inside by the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation, and it is at the time of water baptism that one joins the local church, Acts 2:41.)

We follow Christ by living according to His teachings. It is by so doing that we become His true disciples, John 8:31. Jesus knew the importance of Bible study and in Matthew 28:20 required that the people we witness to, be taught the things He had commanded. We are not to use our creativity to come up with what to believe and practice in our walk of faith—it is all written in the Bible.

It is unfortunate that the church is busy with all manner of activities except what Jesus expressly commanded: to witness Christ and teach the Bible. And once we study the Bible and learn what Jesus taught, let us not keep that knowledge to ourselves but share what we have learned with others who will then teach the same to others, 2 Timothy 2:2. Teaching Bible is what would stop the likes of Shakahola starvation cult from thriving.

How was it possible for Jesus Christ to taste death for every man as written in Hebrews 2:9b?

As we have seen earlier from Hebrews 9:22b, without the

shedding of blood is no remission. Also, the blood of animals sacrificed in the Old Testament served to only cover sins (Psalm 32:1), but it is the blood of Christ alone that has power to take away sin (John 1:29). But how is the blood of one man, Jesus, able to save so many? The reason is that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). If He were not God, Jesus would not qualify to be the Saviour of mankind. But since He is God and as the Creator (John 1:3) He is worthier than all His creation combined, the blood that Jesus shed on Calvary is valuable enough to redeem all people, if all were to repent toward God and place their faith in Him (Jesus).

Should we Africans feel cheated for embracing Christianity and therefore abandoning the way we worshipped?

No. In the old Testament days, God had revealed Himself to us, but only through His creation. It is to the Jews alone that He had revealed Himself through His Word/oracles as well (Romans 3:2 and Ps. 147:19), making them aware of His plan for man which is to have all people saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). Lacking the benefit of God's Word, our people worshipped God ignorantly (Acts 17:30) but God winked. But now that Christ has been preached to us and we too know God's will concerning people, we should believe Christ and henceforth worship as prescribed in the Bible. By believing the Gospel, we Gentiles who in the Old Testament days were aliens to the commonwealth of Israel (Eph 2:12) and were therefore not God's people (Hosea 2:23 and Rom 9:25) have become children of the living God, (Rom 9:26). Henceforth we should be guided by the Bible in our worship and other service to God (Ps. 119:105) and not fall for the deception of engaging in traditional rituals in the name of making our salvation complete. Believing Christ alone gives us complete salvation, Colossians 2:10. Also, Christians need

not go to a certain place like Jerusalem or be facing a certain mountain like Kilimanjaro or Kirinyaga for their prayers to be heard of God, John 4:21. The reason Bible believers go to caves or mountains occasionally for retreats is merely because the quietness in these places facilitates focus in prayer.

Must you die first so as to know where you will spend eternity?

One of the thieves who was crucified with Jesus became a classic example of how and when to approach the Lord for salvation. According to Luke 23:41, he acknowledged being a sinner, adding that that is why he was being punished. At the same time he justified Christ by saying that He was without sin. (And even today, by believing that God raised Jesus from the dead as required in Romans 10:9b, we are acknowledging that Christ was without sin because a high priest who had sinned and went to the holy place to take people's sacrifice the way Jesus did by His blood, Hebrews 9:12, did not return.) Moreover, the thief on the cross did not stop there. According to verse 42, he also acknowledged Jesus as Lord besides pleading for mercy. The response of Jesus according to verse 43 was: "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

Now that he had placed his faith in Jesus Christ, he knew immediately, while he was still on this side of eternity, that he was going to heaven. Apostle Paul also, before dying, knew he was going to heaven where, according to 2 Timothy 4:8, a crown was laid up for him.

To get saved, the Bible requires that you confess the Lord Jesus with your mouth, Romans 10:9, yet you cannot use your mouth when you are dead. And so we are advised in 2 Corinthians 6:2b: "Behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Notes

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