

NEW WINE IN NEW WINESKINS

Zac Poonen

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THIS BOOK AND YOU

The Lord Jesus Christ waged a constant battle against the religious leaders of His time who had taught the Jewish people to respect the traditions of their elders more than the word of God. Our Lord was finally killed, because He stood for God's revealed word as being superior to the traditions of men.

Today many believers have been led astray and are in bondage, because they have been fed on the old wine - the traditions of men that have accumulated in Christendom through twenty centuries, and that have been added to God's Word, or that have replaced God's word. When the new wine is offered to them, they say, "The old is good enough" (Lk. 5:39). Thus they remain in spiritual stagnation, year after year.

One of the most difficult things for many believers to do is to read God's Word with an open and unprejudiced mind. Most Christians are unwilling to give up the traditions of their elders, even when they see these to be clearly contrary to the teaching of God's word.

We need to come back to the faith that was revealed by God to His holy apostles and prophets, as recorded in the New Testament Scriptures, if we are to fulfil God's purpose in our day and age. To come back to that, we must be willing to do violence to every tradition of man that is contrary to God's word (Matt. 11:12).

If you have the courage to do that, read this book. It will change your life and your ministry, because it will question many 'sacred' ideas that you have held that have no foundation in God's word. That in turn will save you from regret and loss when you stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of your life to Him.

He who has an open mind and a bold heart, let him read on....

Bangalore

Zac Poonen

CHAPTER 1

THE NEW WINE IN NEW WINESKINS

Jesus spoke about new wine being put into new wineskins (Lk. 5:37). The new wine is the life of Jesus and the new wineskin is the church that Jesus builds.

The New Wine

At the marriage in Cana, where Jesus was present, the old wine ran out. The old wine was made with human effort, over a period of many years - but it could not meet the need. This is a parable of life under the law - the old covenant. The old wine runs out; and the Lord has to wait until it runs out before He can give us the new wine. "For the Lord God says: Only in waiting for Me will you be saved. ... but you say, We will get our help from Egypt (human strength)! So you will be chased by your enemies. ... And the Lord is waiting for you (to come to an end of yourself) and to come to Him, so that He can show you His love; He will conquer you to bless you. ... Blessed are all those who wait for Him to help them" (Isa. 30:15-18 Living Bible).

When we have tried and tried and tried to live in victory and failed repeatedly, this is the lesson that God is trying to teach us: "You cannot have victory in your own strength." As long as you are under the law, you will be ruled by sin. The chief work that God seeks to do in each of His children is to break down the strength of self totally. Jesus waited for the old wine to run out, at Cana, before He did His miracle. He is waiting now for our strength to come to an end. All our failures and defeats are meant by God to bring us to the end, for He can manifest His power perfectly only in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). We can see the strength of self in the moments of temptation and provocation, when we react with bitter words, angry expressions, self-justification, criticism and judgment of others, unforgiving attitudes, a grabbing-love for material things, fighting for our rights and our reputation, seeking vengeance etc. These and other similar attitudes show how strong self still is in us - the old wine has not yet run out; and Jesus waits on the sidelines doing nothing for us.

If only we allow God to break us, if only we would humble ourselves and gladly accept death to our rights and reputation, how quickly He could lead us into life under the new covenant! All the trying circumstances, frustrations and disappointments, heartaches etc, that we go through are meant by God to bring the strength of our self down to zero.

This was how God dealt with Job. Finally Job reached that zero-point where lying on his face in the dust, he said, "Lord, I am nothing. (I am zero.) ... I lay my hand upon my mouth in silence. ... I had only heard about you (second-hand) before, but now I have seen you and I loathe myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 40:4;42:5,6).

This is what happens when God has finally broken us and given us a revelation of Himself. The same Moses, who once thought himself to be so capable (at the age of 40), when broken by the vision of God (40 years later) says, "Lord, I can't speak. Send someone else" (Ex. 4:10,13).

The same thing happened to the great prophet Isaiah when he saw God's glory. He said, "My doom is sealed, for I am a foul-mouthed sinner" (Isa. 6:5). Daniel says that when he saw the vision the Lord gave Him, that his strength left him. He came to a zero-point (Dan. 10:8).

When the Spirit-filled apostle John, after having walked with God for 65 years, saw Jesus on the isle of Patmos, he fell at His feet as a dead man (Rev. 1:17).

Such has always been the experience of all who have seen the glory of the Lord! Their face is in the dust and their mouth is shut.

When God can bring us to that place, it is but a quick task for Him to give us the new wine, the life of Jesus, the divine nature, the pre-eminent blessing of the new covenant sealed through the blood of Jesus.

Oh that we might all come there quickly and live in that place - with our face in the dust before God - all our days! For there is a development in this life from light to light (Prov. 4:18), from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18).

John speaks of "Walking in the light" (1 Jn. 1:7). There is no standing in the light, but rather a walking - a progression closer and closer to Him in whom there is no darkness at all. Thus the light shines brighter and brighter upon us and we become more and more conscious of the hidden sins that lurk in our flesh, which we were not aware of in earlier days; and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all those sins.

Thus it is, that the closer we come to the Lord, the more aware we become of sin in our own flesh, and less and less of the sin in others around us. We no longer desire to throw stones at the woman caught in adultery, for we are aware in Jesus' presence, of the sin in our own flesh, and we cry out, "O wretched man that I am", rather than "O wretched woman that she is" (Rom. 7:24). Adam pointed a finger at his wife, even while standing before God (Gen. 3:12). But the Lord made him aware of his own sin (3:17). This is what the Lord will do for us too. And this is really the test of whether we have just a religion and some doctrines or whether we are living before the face of God Himself.

Has the wine run out in our personal life, our married life or our assembly life? Then it is about time that we sought the Lord's face and acknowledged our need honestly. He alone can give us the new wine! The new wine in Cana was not produced by human effort. It was the supernatural work of God. So too can it be in our life. He will write His laws in our heart and mind, making us to will and to do His perfect will (Heb. 8:10; Phil. 2:13). He will circumcise our hearts to love Him and cause us to walk in His commandments (Deut. 30:6; Ezek. 36:27). This will be as much His work as the new wine produced in Cana was His work. This is the meaning of grace. We cannot produce the life of Jesus - even if we try for a lifetime. But if we bear in our body "the dying of Jesus" (the taking up of the cross each day, the dying to our ego, our self-will and our rights and reputation), God promises to produce the new wine of the life of Jesus in us (2 Cor. 4:10).

We are to run this race looking unto Jesus, comparing ourselves with Him alone, all the time. Thus alone will there be a constant cry from our hearts, "O wretched man that I am" - for we shall be constantly aware of how unlike Jesus we are, even when we have come to a life of victory over conscious sin. "Those who compare themselves with other believers are spiritual idiots" (2 Cor. 10:12) for that is the surest way to spiritual pride and a hundred-and-one other evils. We can never be in danger of spiritual pride as long as our eyes are fixed on Jesus and we compare ourselves with Him constantly. The Holy Spirit shows us the glory of Jesus in the mirror of God's word and then only can He conform us to that likeness (2 Cor. 3:18). Paul said that he had only one goal that he pressed on towards - not the conversion of the lost, but "the upward call of God (to become like) Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13,14). And then he said, "Let us who are perfect (in our conscience, living in victory over conscious sin) have this same attitude (of pressing on towards total perfection, total likeness to Jesus)" (Phil. 3:15). This is the mark of the spiritually mature Christian. Service for God, evangelism etc, - all take a secondary place to this goal, in the life of the mature man of God.

John also tells us that it is through such a walking in the light of God that we can have fellowship with one another (1 Jn. 1:7) - not only fellowship with God, but also fellowship with other believers in perfect unity. The reason for this is very simple. The one who is walking in the light of God, living before God's face, will always be aware of his own shortcomings and will be living in a constant self-judgment, and will not have anything to accuse other brothers of. Thus there can never be any strife between any two brothers who are walking in this pathway. This is the narrow way to life that, Jesus said, few find (Matt. 7:14). Judgment begins at the house of God even for the righteous, because in God's house, God dwells in unapproachable light (1 Pet. 4:17,18; 1 Tim. 6:6). "Who can live with the consuming fire? ... He who walks righteously (facing up to the truth concerning himself)" (Isa. 33:14,15).

This was the sin of the leader in the church at Laodicea that he did not live in this constant self-judgment (and it is easy to slip into that error when you become a leader) and thus did not know that he was 'wretched' (Rev. 3:17).

May we so live before God's face all our days, so that we live in constant brokenness and constant self-judgment crying out "O wretched man that I am". Thus even when we reach the heights of holiness that a saved sinner can reach on earth, we shall still say (sincerely and honestly, without any false humility) "I am the very least of all the believers. ... I am the chief of sinners" (Eph. 3:8; 1Tim. 1:15). Thus we shall have a fellowship with other believers who walk the same way and gradually our mutual fellowship will become more and more like the fellowship that the Father and the Son have with each other (Jn. 17:21). This is the new wine Jesus desires to give us.

The New Wineskin

Many who would have rejoiced in the message thus far, may not now be willing to pay the price to have the new wineskin as well. But Jesus said, "New wine must be put into new wineskins" (Lk. 5:38). And here is where our obedience is tested.

In acquiring the new wine, our battle is against *sin*. But in acquiring the new wineskin, our battle is against *religious traditions* that have annulled the word of God. And it is far more difficult for many to break free from the traditions of men than it is for them to break free from sin! But, men of violence alone will possess the kingdom of God (Matt. 11:12). Religious traditions cannot be removed apart from violent treatment.

Jesus was crucified not because He preached against sin, but because He preached against religious traditions that had replaced God's word among the Jews (Mk. 7:1-13). He exposed the hypocrisy of religious leaders, the emptiness of their religious traditions and turned out of the temple those who made money in the name of religion. His zeal to purify God's house was what infuriated the religious leaders to ask for His crucifixion.

It is unlikely that people will demand our crucifixion, for preaching a message of 'brokenness' and the new wine. But if you are determined to go on and proclaim the whole counsel of God that the new wine must now be put into new wineskins, you can expect the wrath of the religious hierarchy in every single denomination that there is in Christendom.

Why did Jesus say that the new wine could not be put into the old wineskin? Because the old wineskin could not stretch any more, and so would burst. The old wineskin was once useful - to put the old wine in - but it is of no use for the new wine.

The Jewish religious system - the old wineskin - was once ordained by God through Moses to contain the old wine. But once Jesus had come and established a new covenant, a new wineskin was needed. The old had to go. Jesus said that the old could not even be modified with the new patched on to it! That would tear the garment (Lk. 5:36).

We may think that, being Christians, we have got rid of the old Jewish wineskin and that we have a new wineskin in the Christian church. But if you look carefully at what you call your Christian assembly, you may be surprised to find a number of old-covenant characteristics in it.

Consider just three examples, although there are many others.

First of all, the Jews had a special tribe (the Levites) who were priests who did all the religious work. Not all Jews could be priests. Under the new covenant however, all believers are priests (1Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6). Although this is a truth held theoretically by most believers, it is actually practised by very few. Almost every group of Christians has their 'priest' or 'pastor' or 'God's servant' or 'full-time worker' who are exactly like the Levites of old, leading the worship of God's people. Only these 'Levites' can baptise new converts and break bread. And these 'Levites' are supported by the tithes of God's people. In the meetings, these 'Levites' dominate the show, giving no opportunity for a 'body'-ministry. A one-speaker show is part

of the old wineskin. Under the new covenant, every believer can drink of the new wine, be anointed with the Holy Spirit and have the gifts of the Spirit. Two or three prophets are to begin the meeting, one or two may speak in tongues (with an interpretation for each) and every believer is free to prophesy in the meeting and build up the church. This is the new wineskin (1 Cor. 14:26-31). The new wine is described in 1 Cor. 13 - the life of love. The new wineskin is described in 1 Cor. 12 and 14. But how many believers want things done God's way? Alas, very few. Most are content with their old wineskin, and their paid 'Levites'.

Secondly, the Jews had their prophets who found God's will for them in various matters - since the prophets alone had the Spirit. But under the new covenant, the prophets have quite a different function - to build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11,12). Since all believers can now receive the Holy Spirit, they do not have to go to some prophet to find out God's will for them (Heb. 8:11; 1 Jn. 2:27). Yet many believers are still living in the old wineskin of going to some man of God to find out what they should do, whom they should marry, etc.

Thirdly, the Jews were a large community of people scattered over a wide area but having a central headquarters in Jerusalem and having an earthly High Priest as their leader. Under the new covenant, Jesus alone is our High Priest and the only headquarters we have is the throne of God. The Jews had a lampstand with seven branches branching out of the central stem (Ex. 25:31,32). This was the old wineskin.

Under the new covenant, each local church is a separate lampstand - with no branches. You see this clearly in Rev. 1:12,20, where the seven local churches in Asia Minor are represented by seven separate lampstands - unlike the Jewish lampstand. Jesus, as the Head of the churches, walks amidst those lampstands. There was no earthly pope, or general superintendent or president of any denomination in those days. There was no chief elder brother anywhere on earth either, who was the final voice in any matter. Each local church was governed by local elders. These elders were directly responsible to the Lord as their Head. But we see multitudes of Christians around us today who are in a denominational system (the old wineskin), whether with or without a name - for there are some groups who claim not to be a denomination but who nevertheless have all the characteristics of a denomination. All this is the old wineskin.

God has ordained the new wineskin of the local church to prevent the spread of corruption. If the seven churches of Asia Minor had all been branches of one another, then the corrupt doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans and the false prophecies of Jezebel (Rev. 2:14;15,20) would have spread to all the seven churches. But since they were all separate lampstands, two churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia, could keep themselves pure. Get rid then, of the old wineskin of denominationalism, if you want to keep your assembly pure.

May the Lord raise up many in our land who are willing to do violence to the traditions of men (Matt. 11:12) that have held so many in bondage; and who will build the body of Christ in each locality.

CHAPTER 2

GOD NEEDS MEN

God needs men today -

*** men who will stand before His face and hear His voice daily,

*** men who have no desire in their heart for anyone or anything other than God Himself,

*** men who fear Him so greatly that they hate sin in every form and love righteousness and truth in all their ways,

*** men who have overcome anger and sexually sinful thoughts, and who would rather die than sin even in thought or attitude,

*** men whose daily lifestyle is one of taking up the cross and pressing on to perfection, and who are constantly working out their own salvation with fear and trembling,

*** men, full of the Holy Spirit, who are so rooted and grounded in love that nothing can ever move them into an unloving attitude towards another human being however great the provocation,

*** men who are so rooted and grounded in humility that neither human praise nor spiritual growth, neither a divinely endorsed ministry nor anything else will be able to make them lose the awareness of their being less than the least of all the saints,

*** men who have an understanding of God's nature and purpose through His word, and who tremble at that word so that they will not disobey even the smallest commandment or neglect to teach it to others,

*** men who will proclaim the whole counsel of God and expose religious harlotry and unscriptural human traditions,

*** men who have the revelation of the Holy Spirit on the secret of godliness, on Christ having come in the flesh and opened a new and living way through the flesh,

*** men who are diligent and hard-working, but who also have a sense of humour, and know how to relax and play with children and enjoy God's good gifts in nature,

*** men who are not ascetics, but who at the same time live a disciplined life and who are not afraid of hardships,

*** men who have no interest in expensive clothing or sight seeing and who will not waste their time in unprofitable activities or their money in unnecessary purchases,

*** men who have mastered their desire for fancy foods and who are not enslaved to music or sport or any other legitimate activity,

*** men who have been disciplined successfully by God in the fires of affliction, abuse, tribulations, false accusation, physical sickness, financial hardships and opposition from relatives and religious leaders,

*** men full of mercy, who can sympathise with the worst of sinners and the worst of believers, and have hope for them, because they consider themselves to be the chiefest among sinners,

*** men who are so deeply rooted in the security of the love of their Heavenly Father that they are never anxious about anything, or afraid of Satan or evil men or difficult situations or anything,

*** men who have entered into God's rest, believing in the sovereign working of God in all matters for their best and who therefore give thanks always for all men, for all things and in all circumstances,

*** men who find their joy in God alone and who are therefore full of the joy of the Lord, having overcome all bad moods,

*** men of living faith, who have no confidence in themselves or their natural abilities, but complete confidence in God as their unfailing Helper in all situations,

*** men who live, not by the promptings of their own reason, but by the leading of the Holy Spirit,

*** men who have been genuinely baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire by Christ Himself (and not just thrilled by some emotional counterfeit or convinced by some theological argument),

*** men who live constantly under the anointing of the Spirit, endowed with the supernatural gifts that He has given them,

*** men who have revelation of the church as the body of Christ (and not a congregation or a denomination), and who give all their energies, their material wealth and spiritual gifts to build that church,

*** men who have learnt to bridle their tongues through the help of the Holy Spirit and whose tongues are now aflame with the divine Word,

*** men who have forsaken all, who are not attracted any more to money or material things, and who desire no gifts from others,

*** men who can trust God for all their earthly needs and who never hint about their material needs or boast about their labours, either in their conversation or through letters and reports,

*** men who are not stubborn, but gentle, and open to criticism and eager for correction from older and wiser brothers,

*** men who have no desire to dominate or advise others (although ready to give advice, when asked for), and who have no longing to be considered as 'elder' brothers, or leaders, but who only desire to be ordinary brothers and servants of all,

*** men who are easy to get along with, and who are willing to be inconvenienced and taken advantage of by others,

*** men who will make no distinction between the millionaire and the beggar, the white-skinned and the dark-skinned, the intellectual and the idiot, and the cultured and the barbarian, but who will treat them all alike,

*** men who will never be influenced by their wife, children, relatives, friends or other believers to cool off even slightly in their devotion to Christ or their obedience to God's commandments,

*** men who can never be bribed to compromise by any reward that Satan may offer (whether honour or money or whatever),

*** men who are fearless witnesses for Christ, fearing neither religious heads nor secular heads,

*** men who desire to please no human being on the face of the earth, and who are willing to offend all men, if necessary, in order to please God alone,

*** men for whom God's glory, God's will and God's kingdom always take priority over mere human need and their own comfort,

*** men who cannot be pressurised either by others or by their own reason into doing 'dead works' for God, but who are eager and content to do the revealed will of God for their lives alone,

*** men who have the discernment of the Spirit to distinguish between the soulish and the spiritual in Christian work,

*** men who look at things from a heavenly view point and not an earthly one,

*** men who will refuse all earthly honours and titles offered them for their labours for God,

*** men who know how to pray without ceasing, and also how to fast and pray when needed,

*** men who have learned to give generously, cheerfully, secretly and with wisdom,

*** men who are willing to be all things for all men, so that by all means they might save some,

*** men who have a longing to see others not only saved but also made disciples of Christ, and brought to the knowledge of the truth and to obedience to all of God's commandments,

*** men who have a longing to see a pure testimony established for God in every place,

*** men who have a burning passion to see Christ glorified in the church,

*** men who do not seek their own in any matter,

*** men with spiritual authority and spiritual dignity,

*** men who will stand alone for God in the world, if need be,

*** totally uncompromising men, like the apostles and prophets of old,

God's work in the world suffers today, because such men are few in number. Determine with all your heart that you will be such a man for God, in the midst of a sinful and adulterous generation and a compromising Christendom. Since there is no partiality with God, it is possible for you too to be such a man, provided you yourself earnestly desire to be one. Since God demands commitment and obedience only in the conscious area of one's life, it is possible for you to be such a man, even though the conscious area of your life may be limited. (That area will keep increasing as you walk in the light and press on to perfection). There is no excuse then why you cannot be such a man. Since nothing good dwells in the flesh, we have to seek for grace from God to have the virtues listed above. Cry out to God daily then, that He will give you grace to be such a man in these the closing days of the age.

CHAPTER 3

GOD NEEDS WOMEN

God needs women today who will faithfully portray through their lives, the glory that He originally intended to manifest through a woman, when He created Eve.

Her Glory As Man's Helper

When God made Eve, it was in order that she might be a helper suitable for man (Gen. 2:18). The glory of this ministry is seen, when we notice that the title of 'Helper' is what Jesus used to refer to the Holy Spirit as well (Jn. 14:16)!

As the Holy Spirit invisibly and silently, yet powerfully helps the believer, even so the woman was created to help the man. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is 'behind the scenes'. So is the woman's to be.

The life of Jesus also is an example to woman; for God's Word states that man is the woman's head in exactly the same way as God (the Father) is the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). Jesus always acted in submission to His Father. A God-fearing sister will act likewise in relation to her husband. Eve's mistake in the garden of Eden was that she failed to consult her husband before she took a decision. Thus Satan deceived her (1 Tim. 2:14). Where Eve failed, God calls Christian wives today to manifest the glory of submission to their husbands, exactly as Jesus was to the Father and as the church is to Christ (Eph. 5:24).

Sin entered the universe through the rebellion of Lucifer. Salvation came through the submission of Christ. The spirit of humble submission to God's authority is the greatest power that there is in the universe - for it is the Spirit of Christ. That Spirit conquered all the spirits of rebellion on the cross. When a wife submits to her husband, she is actually submitting to the authority of God's Word which

commands her to do so; and she is then being influenced by the greatest power in the universe. Even unconverted husbands can be won over by that power (1 Pet. 3:1,2). If she lives in that submissive spirit during her earthly life, she will be an overcomer, and will qualify to reign with Jesus for eternal ages (Rev. 3:21).

Here is where Satan deceives the woman again. As he led the angels astray, he leads the woman astray - through the spirit of rebellion. A rebellious wife converts her home into a barren wasteland, worse than any desert (that is the implication of Prov. 21:19). On the other hand, a virtuous, submissive wife, crowns her husband as a king and thus converts her home into a palace (Prov. 12:4). Your home can either be a palace or a desert, spiritually speaking. It all depends on the type of wife that you are. No wonder that what God values most highly is a meek (gentle) and a quiet spirit (1 Pet. 3:4).

Prov. 31:10-31 describes some of the characteristics of this virtuous wife. Her heart, hands and tongue are described as excellent.

Nothing is mentioned about her physical beauty or her feminine charms, for these are declared to be worthless and deceptive (v. 30). It would be an excellent thing if all women and young girls, and especially young men considering marriage, realised this fact.

The virtuous woman described here, has a heart that fears God (v. 30). This is the foundation for her whole life. She works with her hands, stitching clothes, cooking meals, planting trees and helping the poor (v. 13-22). She uses her tongue at all times with kindness and wisdom (v. 26). She is God-fearing, hard-working and kind - even if she is not beautiful. The glory of God is manifested through her pure heart, rough hands and soft tongue. (Worldly women, in contrast, have an impure heart, soft hands and a rough tongue!). It is in these areas that God looks for women today to manifest His glory.

As a wife, this virtuous woman is a true helper to her husband. She does him good consistently till the end of her life - not in fits and starts (v. 12). In other words, she never loses her first love for him. She also adjusts herself to his profession and calling in life, supplementing his income with her own quiet labours at home, being thrifty and careful in expenditure, so that no money is wasted. She relieves her husband of home responsibilities, so that he can have a ministry in the land for the Lord (v. 23-27). No wonder her husband praises her saying that of all the women in the world (including women prime ministers and women preachers), she is the best of the lot (v. 29). Such a woman certainly deserves to be praised publicly too (v. 31), for she has understood the glory of her calling as a woman.

The New Testament places great emphasis on 'serving the saints' in our homes. "Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay in the night. ... and get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner" (1 Pet. 4:9; Rom. 12:23 - LB). Hospitality is primarily the responsibility of the wife in the home. She can receive a prophet's reward, without ever being a prophet herself, merely by welcoming a prophet into her home (Matt. 10:41). She will be rewarded for hospitality shown to the least of Jesus' disciples as well (Matt. 10:41). To receive an apostle into our homes is equivalent to receiving Jesus Himself (Matt. 10:40). Likewise, to receive a child in Jesus' name is also equivalent to receiving Jesus (Matt. 18:5). What fantastic possibilities are opened up for sisters in the area of hospitality! The early Christians (to whom Paul and Peter wrote concerning hospitality), were by and large, very poor. Simple food and a place to sleep on the floor however, were all that they were asked to offer the saints. It is when believers seek the honour of men that they feel that they cannot be hospitable, until they are capable of offering rich food and grand accommodation. 1 Tim. 5:10 indicates that even poor widows in the first century, served the saints in their homes!

The glory of God is seen in a woman who has seen her calling as a home-maker.

Her Calling As A Mother

Adam called his wife 'Eve', because she was a mother. In the pure light of God's presence, in Eden, he knew clearly what his wife's ministry was. Eve knew it as well. Sin and human traditions (influenced by

Satan) have now, however, clouded women's understanding, so that she no longer sees her glory as a mother. Children are now called by the Satanic name of 'accidents', when God calls them 'gifts' (Psa. 127:3). They are also considered to be a 'nuisance', when God considers them to be a 'blessing' (Psa. 127:5; 128:4). This is but another indication of how far, even so-called Christians have drifted away from God and become Satanic in their thinking!

Timothy's mother, Eunice, however, was quite different. She had seen her calling clearly. Even though her husband was an unbeliever (Acts 16:1), it did not dampen her faith. She was a woman with a 'sincere faith' (2 Tim. 1:5) who knew the word of God. She taught God's Word to Timothy (2 Tim. 3:14,15); and more than that - she imparted her sincere faith to him as well. Timothy's home was one where his mother enabled him to breathe the pure air of 'faith' in the midst of a world full of the poisonous fumes of unbelief. He probably saw his mother frequently in prayer, frequently praising God, trusting God in difficult situations and never nagging or complaining - for these are but some of the characteristics of a 'sincere faith'. It is not surprising then that Timothy grew up to be an apostle and a close co-worker of the apostle Paul. His mother's labours finally bore fruit.

That should be a challenge to all 20th century mothers. Eunice, Timothy's mother, did more for the Lord and the church, by being a first class mother at home for 16 to 20 years, than she could ever have done if she had travelled the world as a preacher for 100 years! In more recent times, we have heard of Susannah Wesley, who was the mother of 15 children. Poverty stalked her home and some of her children died in childhood. But she brought up the others in the fear of God, personally instructing each one of them. One of her sons, John Wesley, grew up to be a mighty instrument in God's hands. Millions throughout the world have been blessed during the last two centuries, through his labours and his writings. Susannah Wesley could never have done even a small fraction of what her son did, if she had neglected her home and gone to work to make more money, or even travelled the world as a Bible teacher or evangelist.

In talking about the ministries of men and women, Paul tells Timothy, that although women cannot have either the ministry of teaching or eldership, they can have the ministry of motherhood (1 Tim. 2:12,15). In the context of the letter, it is obvious that Paul considers motherhood to be a ministry in the church. This is the second ministry that God calls women to - to be a God-fearing mother to her children. Timothy had seen the glory of this in his own childhood home. He was now to teach that to others in Ephesus.

Men excel women in all professions in life. In one area alone do women stand out as unique - as 'mothers'. This, by itself, indicates what God created woman to be. Mothers who have neglected their children either to go to work to earn more money (to live in greater luxury) or even to be preachers, have invariably had the sad experience, later on in life, of seeing their children suffer in one way or another, due to their being neglected in their early years. They can do nothing but regret now. This should be a warning to the younger generation of mothers. If a mother goes to work, for the sake of her family's financial survival, God will certainly give such a family extra grace. But where the motive is luxury and a higher standard of living, she can only expect to reap corruption, for God cannot be fooled (Gal. 6:7,8).

May the eyes of all mothers be opened to see the glory of their calling.

Her Glory As A Witness For Christ

A woman's primary witness for Christ, as we have seen, is by being a man's helper and a mother to her children. But God also calls her to be a witness by her mouth. God has never called a woman in the New Testament age, to be an apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd or teacher. There were prophetesses under the old covenant - the last being Anna. But the only prophetess in the New Testament (after the day of Pentecost) is Jezebel, the false prophetess (Rev. 2:20). Every woman who claims to be a prophetess or preacher today, is therefore a follower of Jezebel. Let no one be mistaken about that fact. All 'Elijahs' of God must resist and expose such 'Jezebels' (1 Ki. 21:20-23). In the New Testament, women could prophesy occasionally as Philip's daughters did. (But it is clear that these sisters were not prophetesses;

for when God wanted to give a message to the apostle Paul, while he was in Philip's house, He did not use any of Philip's four daughters, but brought a prophet, Agabus, from 50 miles away (Acts 21:8-11). Jesus never called a woman to be one of His apostles, for He never intended a woman to have authority over man (1 Tim. 2:12). But although none of these ministries are open to women, yet they can be witnesses for the Lord in many other ways.

Mary Magdalene was the first witness of the risen Christ. She was not an evangelist, but a faithful witness who testified about what she had seen and experienced. Every woman should be baptised in the Holy Spirit and fire (like Mary and the other women were, on the day of Pentecost) in order to be such a witness for Christ (Acts 1:8,14). The restrictions of Indian culture prevent many of the Indian women from ever hearing the gospel through the mouths of men. Only Spirit filled women can reach them. Every God-fearing sister in Christ, should therefore take this responsibility of giving the gospel to those with whom she is in contact - relatives, friends, neighbours, women-servants, etc.

The New Testament teaches that a woman can pray and prophesy in the church too, provided she has her head covered (1 Cor. 11:5). Prayer is one of the primary ministries that all sisters can engage in, for the building of the church. God is certainly looking today for women who will engage in secret prayer for the fulfilment of His purposes. Women can prophesy too. Acts 2:17,18 clearly states that when the Spirit is outpoured, both men and women will prophesy. This is part of a woman's privilege under the new covenant. She can share God's word in a spirit of submission in the meetings of the church, provided she does not try to teach (1 Tim. 2:12). Older women are however exhorted to teach the younger sisters practical matters related to their conduct at home (Tit. 2:4,5). 'Helps' is one of the gifts that God has appointed in the church (1 Cor. 12:28). All sisters - young and old - should seek for this gift so that they can help in the church in various practical ways. There were many such godly sisters in the early church ("Phoebe has been a helper of many" - Rom. 16:1,2. See also v. 3,6,12). God desires that there be many in the church today as well.

The covering of a woman's head (taught in 1 Cor. 11:1-16) is meant to symbolise:

- (a) That the glory of man is to be covered in the church (v. 7).
- (b) That the glory of woman should also be covered in the church (v. 15) - for a woman's long hair is her glory. (Women are conscious of this, and that is why even many who do cover their heads cover them only partially!)
- (c) That she is submissive to the authority of the man (v. 10) - whether husband, father or elder.

According to v. 16, every church, which is a church of God, will insist on this head covering for women.

A woman is also to be a faithful witness for Christ through her clothing. The Holy Spirit totally forbids three things for all Christian women - fancy hairdos, expensive clothes and jewellery (mentioned twice, in 1 Tim. 2:9 and 1 Pet. 3:3). Every God-fearing sister who trembles at God's word will obey even the least of these three commandments exactly (Matt. 5:19). Women are also to be modest and discreet in their dressing (1 Tim. 2:9). Clothes are meant to cover a woman's body, not to expose it. No God-fearing sister will ever permit a tailor to cut and 'shape' her clothes according to the fashions of the women of the world. The low-worn sari, the low-cut blouse and the painted lips and nails are marks of the followers of Jezebel (2 Ki. 9:30), not of the disciples of Jesus Christ. (Read Isa. 3:16-24 carefully, to see how God denounces the dress fashions and the jewellery of the worldly daughters of Zion).

Since Satan is eager to destroy the God-appointed distinction between the sexes as well, it is not surprising that he has got 20th century women to cut their hair short like men and to wear men's clothes (which God said was an abomination to Him - Deut. 22:5). Domineering wives and women preachers are all part of the drift of Christendom's women further and further away from God and His Word.

In the midst of all this, God needs women who will stay within the boundaries that He has laid down in His Word, and who will manifest the true glory of womanhood throughout their lives. Determine with all

your heart then, that you will be a woman after God's own heart, in these last days, in the midst of a sinful and adulterous generation and a compromising Christendom.

God will give you grace for this, if you earnestly desire it yourself.

CHAPTER 4

RELIGIOSITY OR SPIRITUALITY

One of the greatest dangers that faces the Christian in his pursuit of a holy life is that of ending up being religious and not spiritual. Religiosity is often mistaken by the undiscerning believer for spirituality. But there is a world of difference between the two. The former is human, the latter is divine. The law could make people religious, but not spiritual. Religiosity is taken up with the external, visible things. Spirituality is primarily a matter of the heart.

God's word warns us that there will be many in the last days who have a form of godliness without its power - in other words, they will be religious, but not spiritual (2 Tim. 3:5). They will go religiously to meetings, pray and read the Bible daily and even attend all-night fasting and prayer meetings, tithe their income, etc. But they will still seek honour from men, live for themselves, love money and be interested in gossiping, etc. Such people are religious, not spiritual. They have a form of godliness without the power. Here are some examples.

If you are more interested in going to meetings than in crucifying the flesh (Gal. 5:24), you are religious, not spiritual. If you are more interested in reading your Bible every morning than in controlling your tongue the whole day, you are religious, not spiritual. If you are more interested in fasting and prayer than in being free from the love of money, you are religious, not spiritual. If you are more interested in evangelism than in personal sanctification, you are religious, not spiritual.

All the activities of religious people mentioned in the above examples are good. But it is a question of priorities. It is right priorities that makes a man spiritual.

Religious people are interested in the written word alone ('the letter') and end up having the righteousness of the law. Spiritual people however are interested in the Word being manifested in flesh and blood, and thus end up having the righteousness of God, the divine nature.

Religious people justify their actions by quoting the words or actions of some man of God. Spiritual people however, never seek to justify themselves before men.

Religious people are more interested in men's opinions than in God's opinion. Spiritual people care only about God's opinion. Religious people can meditate for years on the words of praise that some elder brother spoke concerning them. Spiritual people, on the other hand, like Jesus, refuse to receive testimony from men (Jn. 5:34). They know that other men do not know the corruption that they see within themselves, and so they realise that the praise of men is worth less than nothing.

Religious people are legalistic and are under the law. They think in terms of the minimum necessary in order to please God. This is why they calculate exactly how much 10% of their income comes to and then offer it reluctantly to God. In the Old Testament, this attitude finally ended up in the Israelites offering blind sheep and sick bulls as sacrifices to the Lord (Mal. 1:8). It is possible to have an identical attitude to the New Testament commandments. A sister can think in terms of the minimum necessary in order to keep the letter of the word that commands her to be subject to her husband; or the minimum necessary covering required for her head in the meetings - without the beauty of her hair being totally hidden! Men and women can think in terms of the minimum necessary in order to be 'spiritual' without altogether

giving up everything. "What is the minimum that I have to give up of this world?" is a question that is always in the minds of such people. Such can never be spiritual. They can only be religious.

Jesus' attitude was totally different. He never sought to discover what the minimum requirement was to please His Father. On the contrary, He sought to find out what the maximum was so that He could offer everything to the Father. Therefore He sought to find out the spirit behind each commandment. Thus He knew that it was not enough to merely avoid adultery in the flesh (even though that was the minimum required by the law). He understood that the spirit behind that commandment was that one should not even lust (covet) in one's heart. Likewise, He saw that anger and murder were similar. And so on. Thus He understood the spirit behind each commandment.

An earthly bride who is deeply in love with her bridegroom never thinks of the minimum necessary to please her partner. On the contrary, she thinks of what the maximum is that she can do. This is the attitude of the bride of Christ too. It is here that we see the distinction between the servant and the bride. Those under the law can only be servants. The employee works for wages and is therefore very calculative in his service. He measures his work by the clock. If he works overtime, he expects extra wages. One who is a son (or a wife), on the other hand, will work for any length of time - not for reward, but out of love. Herein lies the difference between religiosity and spirituality.

The attitude of mind that thinks, "*What can I get out of the Lord?*", leads to religiosity. On the other hand, the attitude that thinks, "*What can the Lord get out of the one earthly life that I have?*", will lead to true spirituality. It will then become natural for us to go the second mile when the minimum requirement is to go just one mile.

Adam made a covering for himself with fig leaves. This is symbolic of religiosity - to make oneself presentable before men, and even before God! Jesus cursed the fig tree covered with fig leaves (Mk. 11:13, 14,21) - because there is a curse on all religiosity. God hates it. God gave Adam another covering - of skins. And this is a symbol of true spirituality - God's own nature that He gives us, not what man manufactures himself. When Jesus came to the fig tree, it was not the season for fruit. We can say that the old covenant was not the season for the fruit of the Spirit. That legalistic system that led man to bondage has been abolished now. God ordained it for a period to show man his need. The law was never given as a means for sanctification. Heb. 8:7 says that it was a faulty system - just because it could not make a man spiritual, but only religious. One has to enter into the new covenant in order to become spiritual.

God gave the law to see if man would be satisfied with an external righteousness that brought the honour of men, or whether he would seek for more. Since most believers are satisfied with an external righteousness, they remain content with the law and a covering of leaves - human religiosity. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It curses and withers up the leaves and gives us the true sanctification that God intended man to have.

But to receive this gospel, we must repent radically first. The word '*radical*' means '*proceeding from the root upwards*'. And this is exactly what is meant by a radical repentance. John the Baptist who came as the forerunner of Jesus with a message of repentance, said that Jesus would lay the axe to the root of the trees. Every sin comes forth from a root. If we repent of the sin (fruit) alone, we have not been radical. For example, backbiting comes from the root of a wrong attitude towards a brother. Radical repentance will deal with the wrong attitude, and not just with the backbiting. To deal with the external act would be equivalent to snipping off the fruit with a pair of scissors. Jesus however has not come with a pair of scissors, but with an axe (to deal with the root). He looks for genuine fruit - not just leaves. Where He sees only leaves, He curses and withers up the leaves even today (where people allow Him to do it), so that He can make them fruitful. Many other sins too are the result of a wrong attitude within us of seeking our own or of loving money, etc. The spiritual man is the one who judges the root of sin within himself, in God's light and who is not content with just snipping off the fruit to impress men.

Religious people are easily deceived. It is possible for a husband to have a wrong attitude towards his wife for 6 months and yet to have such self control that he never says anything to hurt her. But then one day he explodes in anger. If he then imagines that he had victory for 6 months but fell into sin just for a moment (when he lost his temper), he is deceiving himself. He had been accumulating sticks of dynamite for 6 months. Then at the end of that time, when a small match was lit, the whole stack exploded. He was living in sin all the time, but it was not manifest externally for a long time. It was not the matchstick that caused the explosion, but rather the dynamite that had been collected over the 6 month period.

If we don't fight the battle to keep ourselves 'in the love of God' in our attitude towards others (Jude 21), then we sin, even if we continue to have a good testimony externally. Since most believers do not have discernment, they may even consider us to be spiritual. To be satisfied with their opinion is as foolish as asking someone who has no idea whatsoever of music to evaluate our musical ability!

We must call sin 'sin' if we are to be radical in our repentance and be freed from religiosity. Anger must be called by its real name - that is 'murder' (Matt. 5:21,22). If you do not do that with each sin, you are doomed to a 'religious' life all your days. You will never become truly spiritual. A religious person can be very exact when it comes to matters of external righteousness. The Pharisees even paid tithes of their mint, dill and cummin. They would not move even 1 millimetre away from external righteousness. Yet they went miles away from love, mercy and goodness. So can it be with those pursuing righteousness today. It is possible to be 100% exact in external righteousness and yet to miss the path of love altogether. The path of new covenant righteousness is the path of love - and we must be alert to ensure that we do not move even 1 millimetre away from *this* path. This is the way of spirituality.

More people go to hell, through false religion than through outward worldliness. This is why we must be careful to distinguish between *religiosity* and *spirituality*. Our external works, even though good, can yet be a form, if they are not motivated by a fervent love for the Lord. Such works are dead works, for the power of love is not behind them. We are commanded to repent of dead works - that is, religious works that have not come from a heart of devotion to Christ (Heb. 6:1; 2 Cor. 11:3).

God loves cheerful givers - not only of money but of obedience as well. When obedience to God becomes a burden, it is clear that we have strayed away from the path of spirituality and are now treading the road of religiosity. Everything that we give to God under the new covenant must be given out of love - joyfully and voluntarily. Otherwise we become legalistic and are back under the old covenant - with the spirit and attitude of a servant and not that of a son.

Jude speaks in his epistle of three people who were religious, but not spiritual - Cain, Balaam and Korah (Jude 11). Let us consider them, one by one.

Cain was not a godless man. He was a deeply religious man who believed in offering sacrifices to God (Gen. 4:3). Abel also offered sacrifices to God. But the difference between the two sacrifices and between Cain and Abel was the difference between hell and heaven, the difference between religiosity and spirituality. Cain and Abel symbolise two ways in which people have trodden - the way of religiosity and the way of spirituality. Cain is a type of those who offer external things to God - money, services, time, etc. Abel, on the other hand, symbolically laid himself on the altar, when he killed the lamb and laid it on the altar.

Religious people can give gifts, pray, and do many good works - but they do not understand what it is to offer themselves. They may pay their tithes exactly, But they will not put their self to death in the moments of temptation. That is the difference between the old and the new covenants. You could enter the old covenant without dying to self. But it is impossible to enter the new covenant without dying to self. Jesus did not come to offer tithes, but to give Himself as an offering acceptable and well-pleasing to God. Cain and Abel symbolise the broad and narrow ways of approaching God - the way of religiosity and the way of true spirituality. You can be a servant without death to self. But you cannot be a son without it.

God answered Abel's sacrifice with fire from heaven. But nothing fell on Cain's offering. When a man consistently dies to self day after day, there will be a fire from heaven on his life and his ministry. This is the genuine baptism of the Spirit and fire that John the Baptist said that Jesus would give, to those whose roots He had first axed. On the other hand, a brother who merely does the right things externally, may have a good life, but the fire and the anointing of heaven will be missing from his life. Satan's counterfeit 'baptism' which tickles the emotions (which is what most are enjoying today) is worthless garbage compared with the genuine baptism of the Spirit and fire that Jesus sends upon His disciples who choose the way of the cross.

Balaam was another religious man. He was a preacher who wanted to serve God, but who was also interested in making money and meeting great men in the world (Num. 22). He sought honour and financial gain for himself in the name of the Lord. There are many, many false prophets, like Balaam today. Their doctrines are all fundamentally right, according to the letter of the word. But undiscerning believers cannot recognise that they are motivated by the spirit of Balaam (loving money and honour). These are the ones about whom Paul writes in Phil 2:21, saying that they all seek after their own interests. There were people in the church in Pergamum who lived by this doctrine of Balaam (Rev. 2:14). There is no difference between seeking for honour and seeking for money in the church. Both are but different variations of the same spirit of Balaam.

Korah was another religious man. He was from the priestly tribe of Levi (Num. 16). But he was dissatisfied with the ministry allotted to him by the Lord. He desired to be more prominent, like Moses was. This covetousness (cloaked with a religious garb), was what proved to be his destruction finally. He and his co-rebels, Dathan and Abiram, and their families, are the only ones recorded in Scripture who went alive into hell (Num. 16:32,33). So seriously did the Lord take this sin of rebellion against the authority that He Himself had appointed over His people.

Most elders, preachers and pastors today are self-appointed. To rebel against them may not be serious. It may sometimes even be necessary! But to rebel against one who has been appointed by God would bring upon one the severest judgment of God. A spiritual man would never even dream of doing such a thing. But religious people will. Such is the spiritual foolishness that accompanies religiosity.

Korah symbolises those who are in an unhealthy competition with others in the church. When you find it difficult to praise and appreciate a God-fearing brother, it is an indication that you have something of the spirit of Korah in you. When you criticise him, then you are full of the spirit of Korah. If you can listen to others criticising him, then you are like the 250 rebels, who joined Korah, and who were also judged by God.

We can never become spiritual if we do not discern between *religiosity* and *spirituality*. It is the need of the hour - for it is concerning the last days that it is written that many would have the form of godliness, without the power (which is the word of the cross). The Spirit has also specifically warned that many Christians would turn away from the way that God has appointed for us to be godly, and turn to other religious means - such as avoiding marriage and certain types of food, etc.

Man has invented many other counterfeits too, such as the public confession of sin (to become 'humble') and not taking medicines when sick (to increase 'faith'), etc, etc. All these are but doctrines of demons, meant to lead Christians away from the true secret of godliness (Read 1 Tim. 3:16 to 4:5).

The only way to true spirituality is by offering oneself to death daily as Jesus did (Rom. 8:36; 2 Cor. 4:10-12). Every other way is a counterfeit.

CHAPTER 5

THE SPIRIT OF THE NEW COVENANT

In the Old Testament, just after the giving of the ten commandments (Ex. 20), comes a beautiful ordinance that God gave to the Israelites that aptly describes the difference between the old and the new covenants. There, in Ex. 21:1-6, we read of the Hebrew slave who served six years because he was a slave and was compelled to serve; and who then served his master on a different basis - *because he loved to do so* (Ex. 21:5). This was God's postscript to the law, prophetically portraying the spirit of the coming new covenant.

The 6 years of compulsory slavery corresponds to serving God *legally*. The 7th year onwards corresponds to the 'Sabbath rest' that God has ordained for His people (Heb. 4:9). Under the law, the people could rest on the seventh day only after working for six days. But when God created Adam, He gave him a day of rest first and then six days of work (for God's seventh day was Adam's first day of existence). This was to teach that all man's labour for the Lord was to come out of a relationship of love and fellowship with Him. Otherwise it would be legalistic and worthless.

The fact that we live in the new covenant *age* does not mean that we live by the new covenant *spirit*. It is possible to have understood the message of 'victory over sin' and yet to live by legalistic principles. In Rom. 7:1-6, we see that even the man who has come through Rom. 6 (the chapter that presents the gospel of victory) can still be in bondage to legalism. In practice too, we find this to be true. Many who have come to an upright and good moral life are yet living by the principles of the law.

It is possible to live an externally righteous life - from wrong motives. Under the old covenant, the Israelites had to keep the law, but the motive with which they kept it could not be judged by the law. Most people kept the law out of fear of judgment. Others kept it out of hope of reward. Both these motives are however inconsistent with the spirit of the new covenant. In the new covenant, the *spirit* matters more than the *letter* (Rom. 7:6). It is possible to keep all the commandments and for the Lord to rebuke us saying, "I have something against you. You are no longer keeping My commandments out of love for Me, as you did at first. Therefore repent" (Rev. 2:4 paraphrase). When love was not the motive, it was not a crime under the law. But under the new covenant, this is so serious, that the leader in Ephesus was in danger of losing his anointing, if he did not repent. Do we realise that it is not enough to keep the commandments if our motive in keeping them is not right?

When we cleanse ourselves from the filthiness of the flesh, we get a good testimony before men. But it is only when we cleanse ourselves from the filthiness of the *spirit* as well, that God bears testimony about us. This is the way of perfecting holiness, as 2 Cor. 7:1 makes plain. There is 'iniquity in our holy things' (Ex. 28:38). What is this iniquity but the wrongness of our motives in our pursuit of righteousness?

Beneath this iniquity lies the far more serious evil of seeking the honour of men. It is when we seek the honour of others (particularly in the church) that we are careful to keep our external life in order. This is the evil that we must be quick to detect behind our legalism, or else it will destroy us.

In the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), it is clear that none of them were 'harlots'. They were all virgins. They had all cleansed themselves from the filthiness of the flesh. Therefore they had a good testimony before men. Their lamps were burning and men saw their good works and praised them (cf. Matt. 5:16). Little did men know that some of these virgins had no inner life. Although all ten appeared spiritual in the eyes of undiscerning unbelievers, yet God could see that only five of them had truth (reality) in their innermost being (Psa. 51:6). The other five were legalistic, keeping the letter of the law, content with their testimony before men. Little did they realise that they would be left behind in the rapture. The Bridegroom said to them, "I do not know you". He did not call them 'workers of iniquity', as He called another group (Matt. 7:23), for these five were not workers of iniquity. Yet, they had not partaken of the spirit of Christ in their inner life. The Lord told them (as it were), "I do not have any fellowship with your spirit. Your spirit is the spirit of legalism, even though your external life is upright.

You are the Pharisees of the new covenant". This is the implication behind the words, "I do not know you".

It is possible to keep *the letter of the New Testament commandments* and yet not to radiate the spirit of Christ. For example, when another has done us some evil, we can obey the word that says that we are to repay evil with good. And we can go to that man, perhaps, even with an expensive gift, to show our love to him, and to do him good, according to the commandment. Yet our spirit, in our approach to him, may be saying these unspoken words, "Here I am, the great saint, coming to do good to you, an evil sinner". In such a situation, even though we may have spent much money buying that gift, and gone to much pains to do that 'good' act, yet our offering is not a fragrant aroma to God, for our 'self' has not been sacrificed (See Eph. 5:2).

Consider another situation. A brother may sit quietly, without opening his mouth, at a time when his wife is upset and angry with him. It may appear to an undiscerning outsider there, that the husband is the 'saint' and the wife the 'sinner'. Yet God who weighs the spirits of men may have an altogether different opinion about both of them. For the unspoken words of the husband's spirit, even while his mouth is shut, may be, "Lord, I thank Thee that I have victory over anger, unlike my wife". He may not realise, that his defeated wife may be more acceptable to God than he, the self-righteous Pharisee. Truly, the harlots and thieves will get into the kingdom before the Pharisees. Losing one's temper is certainly unbecoming of a Christian. But so is Phariseeism. What we must do is to cleanse our spirit from the filthiness of the Pharisee that it can be polluted with, in such situations. This is the way of salvation.

In the parable of the prodigal son, we have the attitudes of Christ and of the Pharisee, clearly portrayed in the persons of the father and the elder son. The father was delighted to see his younger son repent and come back, even though the lad may not have got victory over his sins yet. The Pharisical older son, however, could not welcome his younger brother in the same way. If he had had his way, he would have put his younger brother in the servants' quarters for at least a year to test whether his repentance was genuine or not.

This Pharisical spirit in our flesh is most evident, in our attitude towards those who have harmed us in some way. Even when they apologise for their error, we can still 'put them in the servants' quarters' for a while, to test their repentance. Yet Jesus told us that even if a person sinned against us every two hours in a 12 hour day, and came back each time saying that he had repented, we were to forgive him, without questioning the genuineness of his repentance (Lk.17:4). We were to accept his words at their face value. He may not be genuine perhaps. But that is for God to judge - not us. We can only see the outward appearance. God sees the heart.

In the day of judgment we shall discover that *why* we did something was far more important than *what* we did (1 Cor. 4:5). The elder brother had "never disobeyed a single commandment" of his father's (Lk. 15:29). Yet we find him at the end of the story outside the father's house (the church), because his spirit was the spirit of legalism. He was a virgin, but he had no oil in his vessel. His motivation was finally exposed. He had served for reward. He tells his father, "Even though I obeyed all your commandments, yet you never rewarded me"!

Jesus warned His disciples against this attitude, when Peter asked Him (after the rich young ruler had turned away from Him), "What shall we get, who have forsaken everything (unlike the rich young ruler)?" (Matt. 19:27). Jesus replied with the parable of the landowner, hiring labourers. Five sets of labourers were hired by this landowner. Four of them were hired on the basis of a specific contract. The last group alone came without any contract (Matt. 20:1-16). This is the point of the parable. The first group worked for the specific wage of one denarius (v. 2). The second, third and the fourth groups also worked for reward, although the amount was not specified (v. 3-5). These four groups of labourers are all symbolic of those who keep the commandments or who serve God or make external sacrifices for Him - but who are secretly hoping for some reward for it all - perhaps the carnal joy of sitting on a throne in the millennium, or of wearing a 'crown' on their heads; or perhaps, what looks like a 'spiritual' desire, of

being in the bride of Christ. All such Christians are working for a reward. And that is the spirit of the old covenant.

The only reward that a truly spiritual man desires is the reward of partaking more of God's holy and loving nature and of a closer fellowship with Him. This is the 'crown' that he is looking forward to; and this is the reward that Jesus is coming with (Rev. 22:12). And this reward will be in exact proportion to the faithfulness with which a man has worked out his salvation, cleansing himself, not only of the filthiness of the flesh, but also of the filthiness of the spirit - particularly the filthiness of the Phariseeism in his spirit. This is why the degree of our glory, when we are resurrected, will be as different from each other's as the brightness of the various stars (1 Cor. 15:41,42). For a righteous God will reward each 'virgin' righteously - according to what He saw, and not what men saw (2 Cor. 5:10).

In the above parable, only the last group of labourers came to work, without any contract and without any promise or hope of reward (Matt. 20:7). They came in the spirit of the new covenant. Therefore they were rewarded first - and received (proportionately speaking) far more than all the others (See Matt. 20:16). The first group of labourers, on the other hand, were exactly like the Pharisaical older brother of the prodigal son - self-righteous and legalistic and expecting to be rewarded.

Jesus is our Example and Forerunner, in this new covenant. And He certainly did not keep His Father's commandments in order to gain some reward or some position or honour - either now or in eternity. Much less did He keep the commandments, because He was afraid of being punished by His Father. We read that He endured the cross, only because He thought of the joy that was set before Him - that supreme joy of fellowship with the Father. In the Father's presence alone is there fullness of joy (Psa. 16:11). Fellowship with His Father was what Jesus desired all the days of His life. Therefore He cried with loud cries and tears that He might be saved from 'death' - that is, from a break of fellowship with His Father (Heb.5:7). For 33 years on earth, He had preserved Himself from 'death'. Finally, in Gethsemane, when He saw that His fellowship with His Father would still be broken on the cross for 3 hours (when He would have to suffer the pain of being forsaken by God for *our sins*), He cried out again, seeking to find if there was some other way. But there was no other. And in love for us, having counted the cost, He went to the cross and paid the greatest price that He could ever pay.

It is only when we partake of this spirit of Christ that eagerly desires fellowship with the Father, that we can be freed from legalism. Freedom from legalism - from straining at gnats and swallowing camels - can never be attained by any techniques or by any method. There is only one way. That is the way described in 2 Cor. 3:18. There, Paul, after contrasting the old and the new covenants in the whole chapter (v. 6-17), finally states that the Holy Spirit has come to show us the glory of Jesus in the mirror of God's word, and then to transform us into that same likeness.

The Holy Spirit desires, first of all, to show us how Jesus lived on this earth. He was born under the law (Gal. 4:4). Yet, when Jesus meditated on those commandments in the law, He saw more in those commandments than any Israelite before Him had ever seen. As we considered in the last chapter, Jesus saw that the command not to commit adultery also meant that one should not lust after a woman in one's heart, and the command not to commit murder also meant not to be angry in one's heart, etc. There was a great desire in Jesus' soul, when He was on earth, to obey the Father perfectly, and not just according to the letter of the law. Thus, although He was born under the law (Gal.4:4), He inaugurated a new covenant. This is the One whom the Holy Spirit shows us from the pages of Scripture.

To follow Jesus in this way means to meditate on the Scriptures as He meditated on them. Then we shall find more in God's commandments than others find in them.

The words that Jesus spoke were spirit and life (Jn. 6:63). This is why many could not understand Him when He was on earth and this is also why many cannot understand Him today. God gives light only to those who love the truth. He allows all others to be deceived. This is the plain meaning of 2 Thess. 2:1-12. When we meditate on God's word, with a wholehearted love for the truth, we shall no longer

congratulate ourselves for keeping the letter of the law, but judge ourselves often, for not having kept it in the right spirit.

In the ten commandments, it was possible for man to keep nine of them, but impossible to keep the tenth - for the tenth commandment dealt with covetousness, which was an inward matter. The law could never discover whether a man coveted in his heart, and could not therefore punish a man even if he did. This is why Paul, even though he said he was blameless according to the righteousness of the law, yet acknowledged that he could not keep the tenth commandment (Compare Phil. 3:6 with Rom. 7:7-10). He was one of the few who were honest enough to acknowledge this. Thus God could lead him further into the new covenant.

The tenth commandment was placed there by God to test man's honesty. Those who were honest enough to acknowledge having failed in this, would be led on. Only to such would the law become a 'school master' to lead them to Christ and the new covenant (Gal. 3:24). The rest, who concealed their inward sin, would remain under the old covenant. This is the main reason why many Christians remain defeated today. They are not honest enough to acknowledge their inward failures. They remain content with the honour of men. They do not love the truth about themselves. Thus God allows them to be deceived.

It was never God's intention that man should live by rules and regulations. The law was not given to lead man to life, but only to show man's impotence and to test his honesty (as we have just seen). Therefore after Christ came, the Law was set aside and a new covenant was ushered in (Heb. 8:7,8,13).

When God placed Adam in Eden, He told him not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In other words, man was not to live by a rule book of 'good and evil', avoiding all that was evil, and doing all that was good. This is where true Christianity differs from false Christianity and also from all other religions.

God intended man to live by the tree of life - by the leading of God's Holy Spirit who would tell him what was pleasing to God and what was not (See 1 Cor. 6:12 and 10:13). To live by the knowledge of good and evil is to live by the law. This can only bring us into bondage, without understanding *the spirit behind the Law*.

We can come to a righteous life externally ('become virgins'), by keeping the commandments externally. But the only way that we can get oil in our vessels is by cleansing ourselves of the filthiness of the spirit, which no man can see.

Paul, when writing new-covenant truths to the Christians in Ephesus, knew that his words could not give them revelation. So he prayed that their eyes should be opened by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:17,18).

This is what we need to pray for ourselves too.

CHAPTER 6

THE NEW COVENANT - A PARTNERSHIP WITH JESUS

No one has seen God at any time, but Jesus came to reveal Him as a Father (Jn. 1:18).Jesus revealed the Name of God as '*Father*' (Jn. 17:6). In that Name (and in all that lay behind it) the disciples were to find their security (Jn. 17:11,12).

In Old Testament times, God dwelt behind a thick veil (curtain) in the tabernacle. No one knew exactly what type of Person He was. The Pharisees presented a picture of God to the people that made Him look like a merciless and demanding tyrant. Then Jesus came and rent the veil and showed us that it was a loving Father who dwelt inside. But Satan has been active again portraying a false picture of God to

believers and unbelievers alike. It is the calling of the church now to do what Jesus did - present the true picture of God as a loving Father. It is only as we know God as a Father that we can enter into all the good of the new covenant. He is called the God of all grace (1 Pet. 5:10), and since 'grace' means 'help in time of need' (Heb. 4:16), this means that God will always be our Helper. *He is always on our side against the Devil.* This is why Jesus called the Holy Spirit the 'Helper' (Jn. 14:16).

The law came by Moses and its purpose was to reveal sin (Rom. 7:13) and also to reveal our helplessness against sin (Gal. 3:24). But the law provided no helper to help man to overcome. Therefore the law could not lead man to purity within. God has always desired purity in the inward parts (Psa. 51:6). But no man could attain this under the law. But now Jesus has established a better covenant. It is better in this respect: The law merely gave commandments, but under grace, God has provided us not only with commandments, but also with an Example (Jesus in His earthly life) and a Helper (the Holy Spirit), to enable us to keep the commandments. This is the difference between the old and new covenants. Satan has robbed most of Christendom of the encouragement that Jesus as our Example gives us, by hiding from them that Jesus came in the flesh. Secondly, Satan has also robbed them of the power of that Helper, the Holy Spirit, by either counterfeiting or denying the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Multitudes today have received a counterfeit 'baptism in the Spirit', that has given them neither power to fight the lusts in their flesh nor boldness to resist Satan. What a fantastic work of deception Satan has done!

Under law, man tries to please God and fails. Under grace, God works within us and enables us to please Him (Phil. 2:12,13). Those who are trying to please God and failing to do so, while sincere perhaps, are still under the law. Most of them are weary and heavy laden with their struggle to keep the commandments. Such weary and heavy laden people are the ones whom Jesus invites to come to Him and to exchange their heavy yoke for His light one (Matt. 11:28-30). The yoke is a symbol of partnership - whether in a marriage or in business. Jesus invites us to enter into a partnership with Him where He supplies the capital and we get the profits!

John calls the miracles of Jesus '*signs*' (Jn. 2:11). In other words, each miracle was a parable with a message in it. Essentially, the one message that comes across in the miracles recorded in John's gospel, is this, that Jesus wants to enter into a partnership with us.

At the marriage at Cana, Jesus could have filled the water pots with wine - from nothing. But then there would have been no partnership. It would have been a one-man show. The servants therefore were invited to share in the miracle by doing their part - the easy part - of filling the pots with water. Then Jesus did the difficult part - of turning it into wine (Jn. 2:1-11).

Likewise, in the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus could have produced food from nothing. But He did not do that. He invited a little boy to give Him his lunch packet; and in partnership with that little boy He fed the five thousand (Jn. 6:1-13). The little boy did what he could; and Jesus did what He could!

The man born blind too was first asked to do what he could (Jn. 9:1-7). He had to wash in the pool of Siloam. Then Jesus did the difficult part of opening his eyes.

We see the same principle in the raising of Lazarus. His friends did the easy part - removing the stone that covered the grave. Jesus then did the difficult part - of raising Lazarus from the dead. His friends were then once again given the opportunity to do what they could - to unbind Lazarus and release him (Jn. 11:38-44).

After the resurrection, we see the disciples going fishing one night. "And that night they caught nothing" (Jn. 21:3). That is a picture of man striving under the law! Then Jesus came. He could have filled their boats with fish without their casting their nets into the sea. A God who commanded the fish to come near Peter's boat on that lake, could just have easily commanded those very fish to jump into his boat. But then there would have been no partnership. So man had to do his part. They had to cast their nets into the sea. Thus in partnership with Jesus the miracle was done. Man does the easy part and Jesus does the difficult part. But they did have to cast their nets. That is the obedience of faith - that Paul speaks of in Rom. 1:5.

This is the gospel of the new covenant that the apostles proclaimed. Where this gospel is not understood, man tends to swing either to one extreme of legalism (striving all night forever and forever, with empty boats and no victory) or to the other extreme of a false grace (where there is no striving at all and no victory either!).

Many sincere souls are weary and heavy laden because they are groaning under the burdens of self-made commandments. Like Pharaoh's taskmasters whipped the Israelites to produce more bricks, the devil (disguised as a "preacher of righteousness" - 2 Cor. 11:14,15) whips many sincere believers saying, "You are not reading the Bible enough. You are not fasting and praying enough. You are not witnessing enough, etc". Many a preacher too has unconsciously taken sides with Satan in bringing God's people under condemnation through such preaching. All such condemnation is the result of ignorance of the new covenant gospel.

Jesus is a Shepherd who leads His flock by going ahead of them. He does not use a whip and chase them from behind, like a hireling. All preachers who whip their flock are hirelings. True shepherds are those who lead, by being an example themselves. Many have come into bondage because they have listened to hirelings.

God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save it (Jn. 3:17). Those who minister condemnation to others are therefore not sent by God. God's servants always lead people to salvation.

In all our life, Jesus wants to be a partner with us. When Peter came to Jesus to collect the temple tax, Jesus told Peter to throw a hook into the sea and catch the first fish that came up. In its mouth, Jesus said, would be a shekel, which would be sufficient to pay the tax for both Jesus as well as Peter. "*For you and Me*", were the words that Jesus told Peter (Matt. 17:27). Think of that phrase "*For you and Me*". This is partnership. Jesus is interested even in helping us to pay our taxes. From the mundane things that affect our everyday life here on the earth, on to the things that will abide forever, Jesus calls us to live by the principle of "*You and Me*".

Jesus said that when we took this yoke of partnership with Him we could find rest in our souls (Matt. 11:28-30). This is the rest that we are exhorted to enter into, by ceasing from our own works (Heb. 4:10,11).

It is not easy to cease from our own works, for our self-life is so strong. That is why God has to arrange our circumstances so that we are broken. He allows our plans to be frustrated and our hopes to be shattered. Our scheming and planning come to ruin and we fall again and again into sin. Thus He teaches us to cease from our own works, so that we might do His.

The Old Testament sabbath was a picture of this rest for God's people in the new covenant (Heb. 4:9,10). It is rest in God that has to come first before we can do anything of eternal value.

When God made Adam on the sixth day, He sanctified the very next day as a day of rest. Though it was chronologically the seventh day, yet for Adam, it was his very first day. The law, which came 2500 years later, stated "Six days shalt thou work and the seventh day thou shalt rest". But for Adam God instituted first a day of rest and fellowship and then six days of work. That is grace. Under grace, the "day of rest" comes first. We have to enter into rest before we can serve the Lord. Then every day of our earthly life can be a sabbath. And that is God's intention for us.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus why Moses permitted divorce under the law, He replied that it was a temporary provision made for man as long as his heart was hard (Matt. 19:8). But, Jesus said that it was not God's *perfect* will from the beginning. Many things in the law were part of God's permissive will - not His perfect will. But now that the new covenant has been established, God desires that we live in His *perfect* will - as He intended man to live "*from the beginning*" (Matt. 19:8). And so for us, as for Adam, it is this rest that must come first. Life must be a perpetual sabbath of rest in God.

Only when we enter into rest can we joyfully testify that God's commandments are not burdensome (1 Jn. 5:3). Where God's commandments are considered to be a burden, and the message of denying oneself and obedience to all the commandments is considered to be bondage, it is evident that such a person has not yet come under the yoke of Jesus. He is still labouring under his own yoke, under the law.

In the Outer Court of the tabernacle and even in the Holy Place, there is plenty of activity. But in the Most Holy Place, inside the veil, there is no activity - only fellowship. Even service for God flows out of that fellowship. That is the difference between Old Testament service and New Testament ministry. This is clearly illustrated by Martha and Mary, in the incident described in Lk. 10:38-42. Mary was (symbolically speaking), in the Most Holy Place - at rest, fellowshipping with the Lord. Martha was in unrestful service ("for the Lord") in the Outer Court. Jesus said that what Mary had chosen was the one thing everyone needed.

The veil has now been rent by Jesus and we can boldly enter and dwell in the Most Holy Place - of fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, all our days. If only we could see this: That what God desires from man first of all, is not service, not Bible-reading, not fasting and prayer, etc., but *fellowship*.

Adam was created by God in His image - not because God wanted a gardener for Eden, but because He wanted someone with whom He could have fellowship. God did not save us out of the pit of sin in order that we might serve Him, but rather in order that we might have fellowship with Him. It is due to a lack of understanding of this, that multitudes of believers are weary and heavy laden today, just like Martha.

At the age of 95, having walked with God for over 65 years, the apostle John decided to write a letter - inspired by the Holy Spirit. The theme of his letter was '*fellowship*' (1 Jn. 1:3). Having seen churches and leaders who had left their first love (Rev. 2:4) and who now had a name that they were alive (with all their varied Christian activities) but who were in fact dead in God's sight (Rev. 3:1), John certainly saw that the great need was to lead Christians into the joy of fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, inside the rent veil.

There may be joy found in several fields of activity. Some find it in sport, some in music, some in their profession, and some even in Christian work. But the purest joy in the universe is to be found only in fellowship with the Father (1 Jn. 1:4). The psalmist says, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy" (Psa. 16:11). This was the "joy set before Him" that made Jesus willing to endure the cross daily (Heb. 12:2). The fellowship with the Father was Jesus' most prized possession. He did not value anything else in the universe in comparison with that. This fellowship was what Jesus knew would be broken on Calvary, when for three hours He would have to endure the agonies of an eternal hell for lost humanity (Matt. 27:45). Then the Father would have to forsake Him and the fellowship that He enjoyed with the Father from all eternity would be broken for three hours. He dreaded that break of fellowship so greatly that He sweated great drops of blood in Gethsemane. The cup that He prayed to be removed from Him was just this: A break of fellowship with His Father.

If only we could see this and be gripped by it! How lightly we speak and sing about following Jesus! To follow Jesus means to value fellowship with the Father like He did. Sin would then become exceedingly sinful to us, for it breaks our fellowship with the Father. An unloving attitude towards another human being would not even be tolerated, for it would break our fellowship with the Father, etc.

May the Lord give us revelation so that we see clearly that true Christianity is nothing less than a life of unbroken fellowship with a loving Father in heaven.

CHAPTER 7

JESUS - TEMPTED AS WE ARE

In His Person, Jesus was still God when He lived on earth in the flesh – for God can never cease to be God. The clearest proof of Jesus' Deity in the days of His flesh, is seen in the fact that He received worship. Seven times in the gospels we are told that He accepted the worship that men offered Him (Matt.8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; Mk.5:6; Jn.9:38). Angels and God-fearing men do not accept worship (Acts 10:25,26; Rev.22:8,9). But Jesus did – because He was God.

Jesus also forgave people's sins *on His own authority* (Mark 2:10). That is yet another proof that He was God even during the days when He lived on earth.

But at the same time, we are told that Jesus "*emptied Himself*" when he came to earth (*Phil.2:5*). What did He empty Himself of? Not of His Deity (as we have just seen) but of the privileges he had as God. One of the privileges that He emptied Himself of was the privilege of not being tempted.

God cannot be tempted (*Jas.1:13*). But Jesus allowed Himself to be tempted (*Mt.4:1-11*).

He allowed Himself to be tempted in order to be an Example to us as to how to overcome *when we are tempted*. The secret of living a godly life lies in *seeing* Jesus as One Who was tempted in every way as we are and yet Who never sinned even once in thought, word, deed, attitude, motive, or in any other way (See 1 Tim. 3:16 and Heb. 4:15).

Since it is only those who have come to a godly life who can live together without strife as one body in Christ, we could go one step further and say that a local church can be the expression of Christ's body only where believers have seen our Lord Jesus in this way. This is the truth of which the church is to be the pillar and support (1 Tim. 3:15,16).

Temptation is not the same as sin. Jas. 1:14,15 makes that clear. Our mind has to agree with the temptation before we sin. It is clear from Matthew 4 that Jesus was tempted. But His mind never agreed with any temptation even once. Thus He never sinned. He kept His heart pure.

Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit. He did *not* have the 'old man' that we were born with. We have *sinful* flesh, whereas Jesus did *not* have sinful flesh. He came only "*in the likeness of sinful flesh*" (*Rom.8:3*). But the Bible teaches that our Lord "*was tempted in all points as we are*" (*Heb.4:15*). We do not have to analyze this, even as we do not analyze the mystery of God becoming Man. We only have to believe it. At every point, in every temptation, Jesus obeyed His Father, unlike Adam.

God's Word says about Jesus, "*He learned obedience and was made complete*" (*Heb. 5:7-9*). The word "*learned*" is a word that relates to education. So what this verse is saying is that Jesus received an education in obedience as a Man. In each situation, He obeyed His Father and thus *completed* His education as a Man. Thus He became a Forerunner for us, so that we too can follow in His footsteps, overcoming temptation and obeying God (*Heb. 6:20*).

Our Lord can sympathise with us in our struggles against temptation, because He too was tempted like us (*Heb. 2:18; 4:15; 12:2-4*).

The purity of Jesus *as a Man* was *not* something that He received on a platter, but one that was acquired through *battle*. But those battles were not *endless* ones. Every temptation was conquered - one after another. Thus, over the period of His lifetime, He faced every single temptation that we are tempted by - and overcame.

All of us have lived in sin for many years, and our *sinful flesh* can be likened to a box full of poisonous snakes that have been well-fed – *by us!!* The names of these snakes are impurity, anger, malice, strife,

bitterness, love of money, selfishness, pride, etc. This box has an opening at the top from which these snakes put out their head whenever we are tempted. We have fed these snakes in plenty during our unconverted days. As a result, they are well-fed, healthy and strong. Some snakes have been fed more than others, and so those lusts have a greater grip on us than others.

Now that we have died with Christ to sin, even though these snakes are still hale and hearty, our *attitude* to these snakes has changed! We have now been made partakers of the Divine nature and "*those who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its lusts*" (*Gal. 5:24*). Unlike in the old days, now, when a snake puts its head out of the opening of the box (when we are tempted), we hit it on the head with a stick. It goes back into the box. When we are tempted again, the snake puts its head out again, and we hit it again. Gradually it gets weaker and weaker. If we are faithful in each temptation to hit the snake instead of feeding it, then we will soon find the pull of temptation weakening. The flesh cannot be '*shot*' or '*hanged*' in a moment. It can only be *crucified*. Crucifixion is a *slow* death, but it is a *certain* one. That is why we consider it all joy, when we are tempted (*Jas. 1:2*) - because it gives us the opportunity to hit the snakes and weaken them. This would not have been possible otherwise.

Consider the matter of dirty thoughts. If we are faithful in this area, we will find that death enters in after a while. This may take some years, if in our unconverted days, we have fed this snake for many years. But death will surely come if we are faithful. One result will be that our *dreams* will become purer too. Dirty dreams will become more and more of a rarity. If however dirty dreams increase in their frequency, that would indicate that we are becoming unfaithful in our thought-life once again. This is a good test by which we can gauge our faithfulness in our thought-life. Dirty dreams are *unconscious sins*, and so we need not feel guilty about them (*Rom. 7:25; 8:1*). *I Jn. 1:7* tells us that the blood of Jesus cleanses us automatically from all such sin, if we walk in the light.

Utter faithfulness will bring total victory. But utter faithfulness in the sexual area, for example, involves our not even admiring a good-looking face (in the opposite sex), even when no sexual thoughts are connected with such admiration. This is the faithfulness that *Prov. 6:25* ("*Do not desire her beauty*") calls us to. It is because very few are faithful in this area that very few come to purity in their dreams.

The subconscious part of us is affected a great deal by what we consciously think about during our waking moments - not by temptations that are flashed into our mind, but by our reactions to those temptations. If our subconscious part gets the message that we hate sin even in our thoughts and attitudes and that we are living before God's face, then it will 'fall in line' with our desire for purity (See *Psa. 51:6*). The important question therefore is not, "What do my fellow believers think of my purity?" but rather "What message has the subconscious part of me got?" Your dreams will usually give you the answer.

Those who are *not* seeking for *total* purity can never understand what we are saying here. Those who take their dirty dreams lightly do not realise that these are indicators of unfaithfulness in their conscious thought-life. Such believers will consider what we are saying as extreme and unrealistic, because *spiritual matters are foolishness to the natural mind*.

The good news however is that no matter how filthy your thought-life may have been, it can become totally pure, if you are faithful in seeking to walk the way Jesus walked. This in turn, will purify your dreams too - although this will take time; the time taken will depend on how much you fed the flesh in your unconverted days. But the strongest snake too can be put to death, through radical faithfulness.

Jesus invited only those who were *weary and heavy laden* to come to Him. It is only when you are sick and tired of your own defeated life that you qualify to come to Him for victory. The world is full of those who are sick and tired of *others* and the way that *others* behave towards them. Some Christians are also sick and tired of compromise and worldliness that they see in their *denominations*. But these are not the qualifications for victory. Only those who are sick and tired of *themselves* are invited by the Lord to come.

Only those who are *thirsty* for victory can come to Him (*Matt. 11:28; Jn. 7:37*). Those who weep each time they slip up in their thought-life and who mourn for their secret sins, will understand God's truth very quickly; while others will consider the doctrine to be heresy - for spiritual truths are not understood by the natural understanding, but rather by revelation that God gives to hearts that mourn over their secret sins. God whispers His secrets (including the secret of a godly life) only to those who fear Him (*Psa. 25:14*). The '*rest*' that Jesus promised to those who were sick and tired of their defeated life was the rest of total victory over sin.

In *Heb. 4*, this rest is equated with possession of the land of Canaan. The giants were slain one by one, over a long period of time (See *Joshua 13*). Rest and peace thus came over each area possessed for the Lord. The giants of Canaan are a type of the lusts in our flesh. The giants that were seen typify conscious sin. The giants hidden in the caves of the land are a type of unconscious sin.

Hebrews 4 also speaks of the '*Sabbath rest*' that God has prepared for His people. After six days of labour they could enter into God's rest. So too, God allows us to struggle in our own strength for 'six days' - and to fail and fail and fail again. When we have come to an end of confidence in our own abilities ('ceased from our own efforts' - *Heb. 4:10*), then we enter into God's sabbath rest - into life in the power of the Holy Spirit. No amount of self-effort (even "putting the flesh to death") can make our sinful hearts holy. Only the Holy Spirit can do that by making us *partake* of the Divine nature. We can live in this sabbath rest all our days, if we are faithful. If we are unfaithful, we go back to the "*labouring*" again.

It is not the will of God that we should be battling a particular sin all our life. God desires that "every giant in Canaan" be slain. At each stage of our growth - physically and spiritually - we are tempted in new ways. A four-year-old child is tempted to be angry, but not with sexual desire. That comes later, in his teenage years. However it is not the will of God that a man should remain defeated in the sexual area year after year, merely confessing his hope that one day he will be victorious. He can come to victory quickly, if he is wholehearted. Death can enter in, even in this area; and divine nature can take over.

Romans 6 speaks of the sequence of the life of victory. Knowing that we have died with Christ (v. 6 - accepting this fact by faith, even if we cannot understand it) we now consistently consider ourselves dead to sin (v. 11) and present our members to God alone for obedience and righteousness (v. 13-18). The result of this is increasing sanctification (v. 22). The final outcome is eternal life - which is just another expression for '*the divine nature*' (v. 22). So our ultimate goal is that we might *partake of the divine nature*. But this begins only when we accept our position as dead with Christ on the cross and consistently consider ourselves thereafter as dead to sin.

How was it in Jesus' life? He was tempted in all points as we are. But He was not forever battling with the same temptations. If Jesus was tempted as we are, He must have been tempted as we are in the sexual area too. But He must have finished with this area in His teenage years itself, through His utter faithfulness. As a result, He was *not even tempted in this area* by the time He entered His public ministry. Women could wipe His feet and He was not even tempted. Those who are not themselves faithful in their battle against temptation in this area cannot understand this truth.

When Satan tempted Jesus at the end of forty days of severe temptations in the wilderness, Satan knew very well that it was *futile* to try and tempt Jesus in the areas of sex and money, because Jesus had conquered those areas so thoroughly, many years earlier. The last three temptations in the wilderness were temptations of such a high order that we can understand their subtle implications only as we ourselves are faithful in walking the way that Jesus walked.

The school of temptation is just like any other school. We all have to start in the kindergarten class. Our Lord too must have been tempted with the most elementary temptations first. But He never spent more than the minimum time necessary in each class. By the time He was 33 years old, when He died on the cross, He could say, "*It is finished*". Every single temptation had been overcome. Every single

examination in the school had been passed successfully. He had been made perfect. His education as a Man was complete (Heb. 5:8,9).

For a person who is unfaithful in the kindergarten class of temptation (e.g. sexually dirty thoughts, anger, lying, etc.) to try and understand what temptations Jesus faced in the Ph.D. class is both ridiculous and presumptuous. If you are *faithful* yourself, you will understand (That is what Jesus said plainly in *Jn. 7:17*). If you are *unfaithful* in the moments of temptation however, you will never understand, no matter how many books you read or tapes you listen to. God's secrets are not heard through tapes or from books but directly from the mouth of God Himself through His Word.

There are some who teach that even though Jesus did not sin, yet He came in our *sinful* flesh and had "*sin in His flesh*". *This is heresy*. No-one can stand before God with any type of sin – even sin in his flesh - for God is so pure that He cannot look at sin. If Jesus had had sin in His flesh, He *could never have had fellowship* with His Father even for a single day of His life on earth. *This is the clearest proof that Jesus did NOT have sinful flesh*. The only reason why God can have fellowship with us (who have sin in our flesh) is because *we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ Who had no sin in Him*.

There are others who teach that Jesus may have sinned *unconsciously*. *This too is heresy*. Under the old covenant, a sacrifice had to be offered even for *unconscious* sin when a man became aware of it (Lev. 4:2,13,27, 28). So even *unconscious* sin has to be atoned for. Under the new covenant, the blood of Jesus immediately cleanses away *unconscious* sin as soon as it is done (1 Jn. 1:7), if we walk in the light as far as *conscious* sin is concerned. That is how our fellowship with the Father is maintained. No blood was however available for Jesus for unconscious sin, had there been even one unconscious sin in His life. *This is the clearest proof that Jesus did NOT sin even unconsciously*.

Unconscious sin is the result of our having lived for many years in selfishness and in pride. Jesus never lived like that even for a moment. He never had a dirty dream because all His conscious thoughts were pure. No sin was found in Him - in His conscious life or in His unconscious being.

We, on the other hand, have unconscious sin in us, because our attitudes, habits and practices in our past life have given a selfish and conceited bent to our soul. Now the Spirit has come to make our crooked soul straight.

Those who have come to a life of victory over sin need to be careful and honest here. There are unfortunately many who have a measure of victory who excuse many un-Christlike things in their behaviour, speech, etc., by calling them only '*mistakes*' or '*deeds of the body*'. If only they analysed the reason for those '*deeds of the body*' they would discover that the underlying cause was their conceit and selfishness. But Satan deceives them (and God allows Satan to do so), because God sees that such believers do not love the truth about themselves (*2 Thess. 2:10,11*) - even though they may be very righteous in external matters and have a good testimony in the church. The light is not getting brighter in their lives (*Prov. 4:12*) because they are forever excusing their actions! We should all walk in brokenness and honesty, lest we end up like that ourselves.

God does not demand that we *BE* like Jesus now. He knows that it is impossible, for *being* refers to our total personality. We can be like Him only when He returns. Today God only demands that we *WALK* like Jesus (*Compare 1 Jn. 2:6 with 3:2*). Walking is a conscious act and refers only to our conscious life. In this area alone can we follow Jesus.

The good news of the gospel is that because Jesus became a man and was tempted like us in all areas and overcame, we too can overcome as He overcame (*Rev. 3:21*). There is no more need for us to keep on sinning in our conscious life.

Hallelujah, for such a glorious gospel!

CHAPTER 8

TRUE SPIRITUALITY- SEEKING GOD'S INTERESTS

"I am afraid lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ ... for Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, and his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:3,14,15).

"Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law" (Rom. 11:31).

The Pharisees in Israel pursued righteousness, but they were led astray by Satan. This is a warning for all who are pursuing righteousness today. It would be conceit on our part to imagine that we are incapable of being deceived. Our protection from deception lies only in walking in the light and loving the truth as it is found in God's word and in the earthly life of Jesus (2 Thess. 2:10,11).

Sincerity alone *cannot* protect us from deception, if we do not make God's word our guide. Peter was quite sincere, yet he became the mouthpiece of Satan in suggesting a wrong course of action to Jesus (Matt. 16:21-23). When Jesus first spoke about the cross to His disciples, they could not understand this as God's way. They had been used to an Old Testament gospel that had promised God's people prosperity, health, many children and other earthly blessings. To suffer and to die was quite contrary to this Old Testament gospel.

The Old Testament was centred around personal blessing and earthly things. The New Testament gospel is centred around God's purposes and heavenly things. When John the Baptist came preparing the way for this New Testament gospel, his message was "Repent (turn around) ... for the kingdom of heaven (as opposed to an earthly kingdom and earthly blessings) and the kingdom of God (as opposed to the kingdom of personal blessing) have now come very near" (Matt. 3:2; Mk. 1:14,15). Jesus said that after John the Baptist's time, the kingdom of heaven and of God were being preached (Matt. 11:12; Lk. 16:16). But He also said that we had to be men of violence in order to get into this kingdom. The love of self and of earthly comfort, honour, convenience, wealth, etc, is so deeply rooted in our flesh, that only those who are prepared to do violence to such loves can ever possess God's kingdom.

When Peter suggested the way of ease and comfort to Jesus, He rebuked Peter saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests but man's" (Matt. 16:23). When we set our mind on our own interests, we become a stumbling block to Jesus and to the kingdom of God. It is then, that Satan succeeds in leading us astray.

The essence of salvation from sin is to be saved from "seeking our own". Lucifer sought his own, and sin came into the universe. Jesus never sought His own, and thus brought salvation. A righteousness that still leaves a man seeking his own, is a counterfeit righteousness. Yet this is the righteousness that one sees even in many groups proclaiming holiness. Man is basically 'business minded' - and so he would like to get heaven's best, with minimum inconvenience to himself. Thus he is forever prone to invent a convenient theology that does not disturb his comfort or his interests.

It is possible to have overcome anger, sexual sins and bitterness and also have made restitution in all matters (concerning one's past life) and yet to be seeking one's own - one's own comfort and convenience or one's wife's convenience and comfort, (In 1 Cor. 7:33, such pleasing of one's wife is called being occupied with 'the things of this world!'), or one's own honour (not perhaps in the world, but in the church and particularly the honour and esteem of the elder brothers), or one's own gain (in the pursuit of professional ambitions etc), etc.

It is possible to believe, to understand and even to be able to explain the mystery of *godliness*, and yet not to have understood the mystery of iniquity.

The secret source of all iniquity is the desire to seek our own. This is one of the most deceptive desires in our flesh. One can imagine himself to be spiritual, just because of having overcome a few superficial sins, when 'seeking one's own' may still be rampant in his decisions and actions. Such is the deception of Satan when he comes as a minister of 'righteousness'! Such is the *mystery of iniquity!*

We have no lack of biblical knowledge in our day. In fact, it is quite likely that the clever ones among us are able to explain the doctrines of the new covenant even better than Paul himself (who had the first revelation on it) could! Yet it is more than likely that our life is thousands of miles behind Paul's, in being freed from seeking our own!

The one thing that marks out a true man of God is not that he holds a particular doctrine - but rather that he does not seek his own. Paul says in Phil. 2:19-21 that most of his co-workers were still seeking their own, and that therefore he could not send them to Philippi. Timothy however was a glorious exception. Paul's co-workers had all their doctrines perfectly right, no doubt. Yet they sought their own. They may even have considered themselves righteous and spiritually superior to others around them. Yet Paul could see through the shallowness of their 'righteousness'. The same situation persists today.

The one thing that all truly great men of God have had in common, through the centuries of Christian history, is this: that they did not seek their own. It is not the finer points of doctrine that made them men of God, but rather this one common factor - that they did not seek their own. Some may not have had as accurate an understanding of the truth as we have. But their spirituality lay in the fact that they selflessly sought the kingdom of God, according to the light that they had, in their day and generation.

If we today have more light on some truths in Scripture than many godly men, then we must remember that to whom more is given, from them more will be required. We are in great danger then, if we think that righteousness consists merely in overcoming anger, sexual sins, etc. There are devout men of other religions who have conquered these sins (externally). One famous religious leader is reported to have stated that it was impossible for others to provoke him to anger. But that is not the righteousness of Christ. That is merely suppression! Many hermits also claim to have no attachment to material things. They certainly put many 'believers' to shame!

We can look at all these sins of the flesh as the Philistines that stood with their captain Goliath against Israel. Goliath himself, however, is the giant of 'seeking our own'. If David had merely killed the Philistine soldiers one by one, there would have been no victory - or at best, a long drawn out one that may have taken many years. But we read that when David killed Goliath, all the other Philistines ran away (1 Sam. 17:51). This is the secret. We are to concentrate all our attack on the giant, 'seeking our own', if we are to win a real victory. Then the other sins will automatically be overcome.

Jesus came to lay the axe to the root of the tree. The fruits of the tree are many - lying, stealing, coveting, anger, bitterness, etc. The root of them all, however, is to seek one's own. Here is where the axe must be laid. Otherwise we shall be deceived.

It is possible to imagine that we are walking in holiness, just because we are never seen losing our temper and because we speak a certain religious language. Yet our mind, energy and time may often be spent in the acquisition of more and more material things for our homes, pleasing our wives, making our children happy, and living a generally comfortable middle class life. To live like this and to imagine that we are holy is the height of self deception.

Paul was afraid that the Corinthians would be led astray from simple devotion to Christ. There is a real danger of our devotion to our wives becoming more than our devotion to Christ. The first commandment is not to love our neighbour as ourselves, but to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. It is when we do that first, that we shall be able to love our neighbour (including one's wife) aright.

Christians pursuing righteousness can be like a pendulum that swings to one extreme, and then, on seeing their error, swinging to the other extreme. There are cliffs on both sides of the narrow way - and Satan does not really mind which of the two cliffs you fall over!

But we praise God for the ministry of the Holy Spirit. "If you leave God's paths and go astray (to the right or to the left), you will hear a Voice behind you say, 'No, this is the way; walk here'" (Isa. 30:21 LB). This is the main purpose of prophetic ministry in the church - to let that Voice speak to us, keeping us right in the centre of the narrow way. The prophetic ministry in the church, and the written word of God are the means God uses to keep us in the centre of the narrow path that leads to life.

Having seen the unreality in much of Christendom that has emphasised external activity, neglecting their family life, we can now swing to the other extreme of thinking that Christianity consists of only loving our wife, children and other Christians who speak our 'language' in our ghetto! We must certainly live in love with our family and assembly members and also overcome sin in our personal life. But our devotion to Christ must also be expressed in seeking to promote His kingdom, even at personal cost and sacrifice. Inward purity and external sacrifice are not mutually exclusive - for Jesus had both in His life.

The apostle Paul could have settled down to a comfortable Christian life in Tarsus as a Christian businessman and lived a holy life. But he did not do that. His devotion to Christ compelled him so that he offered to the Lord that which cost him everything in this life.

Two hundred years ago, two of the Moravian brothers heard of a slave colony on an island in the West Indies and decided to sell themselves as slaves there for the rest of their lives, in order to preach the gospel to those slaves. Two others heard of a leper colony in Africa, where no one was allowed to enter and return, for fear that the disease might spread. They volunteered to go into that leper colony for the rest of their lives in order to present Christ to the inmates of that colony.

I do not know the minute details of doctrine that these men believed. But they certainly did not seek their own and they certainly offered to the Lord that which cost them everything.

Our petty self-denials today pale into insignificance in the light of what men like these have given up for the Lord. In eternity, we shall meet such men and we shall discover that the bride of Christ comprises of men and women who have the same nature as Christ - that is, "not seeking their own". Some of us are in danger of thinking that it is a doctrinal understanding that qualifies us to be in the bride of Christ. It is not. It is a life of seeking God's interests and not our own.

How shallow our lives and labours are, compared with those of men like these. What monumental conceit it is for us to think that we are following Jesus better than these men did, just because we know more of the truth! How much has it cost us to serve God - in terms of loss of money, comfort, convenience and health? Perhaps very little, or nothing. That should humble us and make us think. Perhaps we have conveniently avoided a life of sacrifice.

Every Christian who can read English should read and be challenged by biographies of men like Hudson Taylor, C. T. Studd, David Brainerd, William Carey, William Booth, Jim Elliot etc. The Holy Spirit has used the examples of many men in Heb. 11 and of Paul in 2 Cor. 11, to encourage our faith; and the examples of these modern day heroes also can challenge us out of our self-centred, family-centred, comfort loving, materialistic Christianity, into a life of devotion to Christ.

In Jesus' days there were those who sold sheep and doves and exchanged money in the temple in the name of religion. Jesus drove them out. Godliness had become a means of gain for them. Whenever godliness becomes a means of gain for ourselves - gain of money, comfort, ease, etc, we can be sure that we are on the wrong track even if we imagine ourselves to be pursuing righteousness. For Jesus, godliness meant the giving up of everything that this world holds dear. It will cost the same for us, if we are really wholehearted. (Read Matt. 19:29 for example, and see if you have had to give up the things that Jesus mentioned there).

Jesus said that the pearl of great price could be obtained only if we gave up everything that we had (Matt. 13:46; Lk. 14:33). Paul had to give up everything 'to gain Christ' (Phil. 3:8). If we today have succeeded in gaining Christ without giving up everything, then it must be another 'Christ' that we have '*gained*'. This is the fear that Paul had for the Corinthian Christians - that they would end up following 'another Jesus' who did not demand the forsaking of everything (2 Cor. 11:4). We can also deceive ourselves by theologically defining 'forsaking all' in such a convenient way that in actual fact we have to forsake nothing at all. If we do not face up to the truth in this matter, we shall end up being led astray by a spirit of delusion. God Himself will let us be deceived.

The mere admiration of saintly men of God will not make us spiritual. Many people admired Jesus when He was on earth; but they did not become spiritual. There were also many who believed in Him, but He did not commit Himself even to them (Jn. 2:24,25) - for He knew who were wholehearted and who were not. He knows even today.

Let us then stop gloating over the little Philistines that we have slain here and there, while Goliath still stands tall and erect. The stone in our sling must be aimed at this giant: seeking our own. This is the one whose head we must cut off, if true victory is to be ours. The life of ours that Jesus told us to hate is this life that seeks its own (Jn. 12:25).

If we walk in the light and seek to discover the self-centredness that defiles most of our actions and decisions, and judge ourselves ruthlessly in those areas, then little by little we shall see this giant overcome and slain.

Jesus once told Peter that he was expressing Satan's thoughts, soon after telling him about the building of the church (Matt. 16:18-23). The church that the gates of Hades cannot overcome is a church that is built on those who seek God's interests and not their own. It is not built with those who have merely given intellectual acknowledgment to evangelical doctrine and who have slain a few petty Philistines.

CHAPTER 9

SANCTIFICATION AND FELLOWSHIP

The word '*fellowship*' is a new covenant word. The fellowship spoken of in the new covenant is patterned after the fellowship that Jesus and the Father had with each other during Jesus' earthly days. Jesus' prayer was that the fellowship among His disciples would be of the same order.

Under the old covenant, although people could rise to great heights of holiness, yet they could come into fellowship with each other. There were godly men under the old covenant - Moses, Elijah, Daniel and John the Baptist, to name but a few. These men had a holiness that exceeded the holiness of most of today's believers. But that is because most of today's believers have not entered into the new covenant.

The new covenant leads the disciples of Jesus into an inward sanctification, that in turn leads to fellowship one with another. When we read of the great men of faith in Heb. 11, we see that they were all lonely individuals. This is how it was in Old Testament times. But as soon as we turn to the New Testament, we find Jesus sending out His disciples two by two. This was something new. Jesus came not only to lead us to an inward sanctification but also to fellowship.

If a believer comes to a life of victory over sin inwardly, and yet does not come into fellowship with others, there is something drastically lacking in his sanctification. Sanctification without fellowship is a deception. Many are travelling around the world today, preaching holiness; but they themselves are lonely individuals like those in Old Testament times. Such preachers are still under the old covenant. Invariably it will be seen that they have not built any fellowship in the place that they reside.

But it was not so with the apostles in the first century. Soon after the day of Pentecost, we read of Peter and John going out together. Peter told the lame man in the temple to look at both John and himself (Acts 3:4). Peter and John worked as a team. On the day of Pentecost, even though it was Peter who preached, yet we read that he stood up with the eleven (Acts 2:14). Fellowship is the one thing that stands out when we read Acts chapters 2 to 4.

Peter and John were *not* men of similar temperament. They were vastly different as human beings. Peter was the quick and active type - quick to boast that he would never deny the Lord, quick to jump into the sea of Galilee, as soon as he saw the Lord by the shore (Jn. 21), etc., John, on the other hand, was the quiet meditative type who loved to be alone and to see visions of heavenly things (as at Patmos). God always brings together people who are dissimilar (humanly speaking), in the church - so that He can demonstrate a unity in diversity that is far more glorious than the unity of two *similar* people becoming one.

In Acts 13:2, we read of the leaders of the church in Antioch fasting and worshipping the Lord, seeking His direction. The Holy Spirit then spoke to them to separate Saul and Barnabas for His service. Notice again, that unlike Old Testament times, the Spirit called two people and not one. This was the new covenant age and there was no place now for an individualistic ministry. There had to be an expression of Christ's body - and for this, a minimum of two people were required.

Here again the Spirit called two people of *dissimilar* temperaments to work together. Paul was a strict, uncompromising man who would not tolerate any halfheartedness in anyone. In Acts 15:36-39, when Paul and Barnabas had a discussion concerning asking Mark to accompany them on their second journey. Paul would have none of it, because Mark had left them half way through their first journey. Barnabas, (who was given that name because he had such an outstanding ministry of encouragement - Acts 4:36) on the other hand, wanted to give Mark one more chance. Paul and Barnabas stuck so much to their own view points on this issue that they separated from each other. Obviously, they were both still very strong-willed and had not yet come (in their own spiritual development) to the place where they had acquired the wisdom from above that is 'willing to yield' (Jas. 3:17).

The apostles were not ready-made saints. They too had to develop like all of us - and get light on their flesh, little by little. Later on Paul, Barnabas and Mark came into a glorious fellowship with each other (as is evident from 2 Tim. 4:11).

Paul and Barnabas had dissimilar temperaments. The Holy Spirit had called them together. Yet they did not know how to get along with each other. This is the condition with many believers even today. Such a condition is tolerable among the immature. But what shall we say when we see such a condition existing even among those who have been believers for over ten years. That is pathetic, to say the least.

Paul majored on '*truth*'. Barnabas majored on '*grace*'. If each had seen and appreciated the need for the other, the glory of God could have been seen in them, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14). *Together they could have produced something that neither of them could have done individually.* This is why the Holy Spirit called them together. If a church had only the ministry of a man like the young Paul, everyone would have been driven out, and only Paul would have been left! If, on the other hand, it had only the ministry of a man like the young Barnabas, it may have ended up as a jellyfish-like organisation without backbone, and full of halfhearted compromisers. But together, Paul and Barnabas could have built the true church. This is what Satan did not permit them to see in Acts 15. Thank God that they saw it later.

When Barnabas left Paul, the Holy Spirit prepared another co-worker for Paul. We read of this person immediately after the Acts 15 incident, in Acts 16:1 - Timothy. The Spirit was not going to let Paul minister alone. He prepared a co-worker for him, who again, was temperamentally the exact opposite of Paul. Timothy was a shy, retiring, timid type of person - an introvert, in contrast to Paul the extrovert. They were both totally alike in their devotion to the Lord, in their wholeheartedness, and in their freedom from 'seeking their own' (Phil. 2:19-21). But they were poles apart temperamentally. Yet Paul grew to

appreciate Timothy more than any of his other co-workers. They had glorious fellowship together, despite their different temperaments. At last the Holy Spirit was able to accomplish what He wanted to, in Paul.

It is folly to imitate the ministry of another - for then one's own ministry in the body is hindered. This is the folly of many young people. They admire the ministry of some men of God and try to imitate it, without having the same calling themselves. As a result, they drown in a sea of carnality and soulishness. In Heb. 11:29 we are told that while the Israelites could cross the Red Sea without any difficulty, because God had called them to do so, the Egyptians drowned in it, because they tried to *imitate* the Israelites. This is a warning to all who try to imitate the ministry of others.

Consider a few examples: Very few are called to a ministry like Jeremiah's, of plucking up, breaking down, destroying and overthrowing (Jer. 1:10). One without that calling, who tries to imitate that, can destroy not only his own unique God-given ministry in the body, but his soul as well. In the same way, we are also warned not to become teachers (Jas. 3:1). Those who are specifically called by God to be teachers in the church (1 Cor. 12:29; Eph. 4:11) will have the grace to fulfil their ministry triumphantly. Others who imitate them will not only be drowned themselves but may also succeed in drowning others in a sea of confusion and wrong teaching.

The new covenant is meant to lead people into the body of Christ. There was no '*body*' in the old covenant. This was because the Holy Spirit did not indwell men then. Therefore it was impossible for any two people to come into *fellowship* with each other. Under the old covenant, they were '*human*' in their behaviour; and therefore, it was impossible to have fellowship. Under the new covenant, we are to be '*divine*' in our behaviour, because we can now partake of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Thus fellowship becomes gloriously possible, and the body can be built.

When people living in this day and age, still cannot come into fellowship with each other, it is obvious that they are still carnal, babes and '*human*'. Paul reproved the Christians at Corinth for this, saying, "You are still fleshly ... Are you not walking like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:3). When people are '*human*' they seek to join together with people who are similar to them. The Malayalees will join together to form a church of their own, the Anglo-Indians will form another and the Tamilians yet another. These are *clubs*, and not the church of Jesus Christ!

The way God has planned the body, however, He has placed people of different backgrounds, communities, nationalities, temperaments, intellectual abilities, social and financial levels all together, so that through fellowship one with another, each one's rough edges can be rubbed off. Thus there is a simultaneous development of both sanctification and fellowship.

In Heb. 12:4 we are told to pursue after fellowship ('peace with all men') and sanctification. These two cannot be separated in the new covenant. They are like our two feet. If we put our left foot forward when walking, then we have to put our right foot forward for the next step. It must be thus with sanctification and fellowship. Very often, we find believers who are gripped by the message of sanctification who are not at all gripped by the necessity of fellowship. They are like people who have one lame leg and who are trying to hop forward with just one leg - sanctification. They are interested in cleansing themselves of impurity in thought, word and deed and perhaps even in attitude and motive. But they do not seem to value or cultivate fellowship with others in the body. We can then say that their pursuit of sanctification is a selfish pursuit that will finally lead them to the wrong destination - for holiness without fellowship is a counterfeit. We must never forget this.

There may be also some cases which are the opposite, where people seek for fellowship, but do not pursue after sanctification in their private lives. Such fellowship, without sanctification, is also a counterfeit.

Both our legs must be strong if we are to walk forward properly. In the *previous verse* (Heb. 12:12,13), we are told to strengthen that particular limb that is lame (whichever it is), so that it is healed. Here is

where all of us can profitably ask for God's light so that we can examine ourselves and judge ourselves rightly.

The oneness that we are to have is to be like the oneness that Jesus had with the Father during His earthly life. It was a oneness in spirit. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all exercise different ministries in our redemption. The Father sent the Son. The Son took a body and died for our sins. The Holy Spirit now works within us to make us like the Son. There is no confusion in these ministries. Yet all three are perfectly one. It must be thus in the church too.

God, in His sovereignty, has given a particular ministry to each and every member in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7,8). We could say that God has drawn a circle around each person. In some cases the circle is very large and in some cases it is very small (Matt. 25:15). Within your own circle, you can find God (Acts 17:26,27). Outside your circle, you can only destroy yourself, by being a busybody in other people's matters. Peter says that instead of suffering as a busybody in other people's matters, we should judge ourselves and suffer in our own flesh (1 Pet. 4:15,17,1).

For example: How another brother brings up his children or spends his money, is really none of our business. That is outside our circle. God has given us no authority in another's circle. Therefore we should take heed only to ourselves (1 Tim. 4:16).

When we were in the world, we could say that we had made a very large circle for ourselves that involved having opinions about many people and many matters. But now we must be careful to stay within the circle that God has drawn around us as individuals. In most cases, that is a circle that contains only one person - yourself! If you are a parent, the circle will take in your family as well. If you are an elder in a church, the circle will take in those in your church. But in almost all other cases, each person has to judge only himself.

It is when we transgress and go beyond the boundaries of our own circle that fellowship with others is destroyed; and our own sanctification is hindered as well.

We are commanded to "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Eph. 5:21). This means that the fear of Christ should make us afraid to tread into another's circle. We will restrain ourselves in our fellowship with each other, so as not to be a busybody in matters that do not concern us.

Curiosity is a deadly but undetected sin in the lives of many believers. This is one of the earliest manifestations of being a busybody in other people's matters. Children are usually curious to eavesdrop and listen in on the conversations of others. Paul said, "When I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). But most believers do not put away this evil habit even after growing up. Such curiosity finally leads them to the still more evil habit of gossiping. Those who practise this habit, that is characteristic of old women, will find that they are unable to discipline themselves to lead a godly life (See 1 Tim. 4:7). Pornography also is but Satan's way of satisfying the evil curiosity in the flesh to see the naked bodies of others.

Jesus was tempted like us to be curious too. But He steadfastly refused to go outside the circle that His Father had drawn around Him. Thus He never sinned even once in this area in His 33½ years on earth. When we see how weak we are in this area of curiosity, we can understand what a mighty accomplishment Jesus' victory was in this area alone. To be curious to know who is getting married to whom, and who is going to have a baby next, etc, is the pastime of ungodly people. No wholehearted brother or sister will ever engage in such a pastime.

Going beyond the boundaries of one's circle can also be seen in the way some elders, husbands and parents lord it over those who are to be subject to them. We must never terrify our children or put a pressure on our wife or on the other brothers in the church, in any way. The words of Elihu are very fitting here, "No fear of me should terrify you, nor should my pressure weigh heavily on you" (Job 33:7).

Each of us should be careful to ensure that those who are under our authority in any way (children, wife, servants, believers, etc.) never feel terrified or pressurised or threatened. It is very easy to go beyond our boundaries when we have power over others. Then fellowship is destroyed.

A husband can so dominate his wife, as to crush her personality. This is foolish. God has made a husband and wife different from each other, so that each can be a help to the other. In viewing any issue, you as a husband may view it from one angle, and your wife from another. That would be like your taking a photograph of a building from the north side and your wife taking a picture of the same building from the south side. When the two pictures are laid side by side, they may look completely different. But only thus do you get a complete view of the building. You would be a foolish husband then, if you demolished your wife's individuality, so as to make her take every photograph from your viewpoint alone! The loss will then be yours. If you had allowed her to be herself, you could have obtained another view of the matter that would have enlarged your own understanding of it, and made you wiser. Here is where many a husband has to cleanse himself of his folly.

Sanctification and fellowship belong inseparably together.

One step forward with the left leg of sanctification should be followed by the right leg of fellowship - in every relationship, whether of husband and wife, brother and brother, or sister and sister.

Those who walk in the light of God (1 Jn. 1:7) will use both feet to walk. Thus they will get increasing light on the evil that dwells in their own flesh; and in judging and cleansing themselves there, they will find that their fellowship with others who are walking the same way also becomes more and more glorious. Thus the church will radiate the glory of Christ to the world around.

CHAPTER 10

OVERCOMING THE SPIRIT OF THE ANTICHRIST

We are living in the days immediately preceding the emergence of the Antichrist on the world scene. But before he becomes manifest as Satan's chief representative on earth, there will be a gradual build-up of the world situation to pave the way for him - somewhat like the slope that leads to the summit of the mountain. The building up of this slope had commenced even in the first century - as John tells us in 1 Jn. 2:18 - "It is the last hour; and just as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen". The Holy Spirit states there that it was already 11 p.m. at the time when that was written - around 100 AD.

We are in the closing seconds of the age now. Things have come to the stage where the summit has almost been reached. We are to live as those who have understanding of the times in which we live (Matt. 16:3).

The kingdom of the Antichrist will be political, economic and religious. We want to consider just the religious aspect of it. The devil has accomplished his purposes far more through false religions than through atheistic governments; and also far more through counterfeit Christianity than through false religions. This is why John speaks about the antichrists as having sat in the Christian churches of the first century. They were however driven out through the strong preaching of the apostles. "They went out from our midst", he says (1 Jn. 2:19).

This spirit of the antichrist is now found in abundance in Christendom today. We need to identify it clearly for what it is, for only then can we drive it out of our own flesh and then out of our churches.

The characteristics of the Antichrist are described briefly in 2 Thess. 2:3-12:

- 1) He is called the man of sin (v. 3).
- 2) He is one who exalts himself, wanting to be like God (v. 4).
- 3) He is one who lies and deceives (v. 9,10).

These give us an indication as to what we can expect to find in the antichrists who sit in Christian assemblies today, as they did in the days of John.

Sin

The Antichrist is called the man of sin. His spirit will be manifested in Christendom by a casual attitude towards sin. Preaching against sin will become unpopular in this last generation before Christ returns. There may be plenty of preaching on social equality, on caring for the poor and the illiterate, on providing relief for flood victims, etc, - all of which are good. But there will be hardly any emphasis on sins such as the love of money and material things, sexually sinful thoughts, unforgiving attitudes, outbursts of anger, seeking the honour of men, backbiting, gossiping, etc, (the things that Jesus mentioned in Matt. 5-7). 'The mystery of iniquity' (2 Thess. 2:7) will be seen as a false grace that assures people that they are eternally secure just because they once 'accepted Christ', despite the fact that they continue to live in sin. Such preaching tickles the ears and therefore many believers will readily listen to it (2 Tim. 4:3,4).

In Rev. 13, where the reign of the Antichrist is described, we are told that he gives his followers the option of following him either *publicly* or *secretly*. They can receive his mark on their forehead (if they desire to serve him publicly) or on the palm of their right hand (if they desire to retain their reputation as believers in a Christian assembly, and yet want the privileges that can be theirs through receiving the mark of 'the beast') (Rev. 13:16,17). The followers of Jesus, who are described in the next verse, however have no such option. Their mark *must* be on their foreheads (Rev. 14:1).

In the reign of the Antichrist, it will not be possible to buy even essential foodstuffs without 'the mark of the beast'. We have not reached that summit yet, but we are fairly close to it. It is difficult to get employment and admission in many educational institutions in India today, without defiling your right hand with a bribe (one mark of the beast). Factory workers who do not contribute towards the 'Ayudha Puja' festival, each year, are punished by being given difficult tasks in some factories. Many so-called believers compromise in such situations, and yet come to the meetings on Sundays to worship the Lord as 'spiritual' believers. How is this possible? Because no one else in the assembly knows of the unrighteousness and sin that they have practised during the week. The mark of the beast is invisible on their right palm. They may even justify their actions by saying that one *has to* give in a little if one wants to survive. These are the ones who feel that bowing down to Satan is justifiable, if it is done in secret, in such a way that one does not lose one's testimony! Today, there are even elders of New-Testament-pattern assemblies who have received the mark of the beast on their right hands in secret. Thus the spirit of the Antichrist rules in such assemblies. Here lies the reason for so much strife and quarrelling and death in many churches.

Only those who have a radical attitude against sin in every form, and who seek to hate sin as Jesus hated it (Heb. 1:9), can have the power to expose and drive out sin from the assemblies of believers.

Self-Exaltation

Lucifer became Satan by wanting to exalt himself to become like God, so that he could receive the worship of his fellow angels. The desire for worship is found everywhere today - in political circles, business circles and religious circles as well. In false religions, there are so-called god-men who are actually worshipped too.

In Christendom too, we find men who desire to exalt themselves over others by titles such as '*Reverend Father*', '*Reverend Doctor*', '*Pastor*' - just like the Jewish '*Rabbis*', whom Jesus condemned. At the root of

all such titles lies the same Satanic desire for the worship of others. This is the same spirit that the Antichrist will have who will "exalt himself ... displaying himself as God" (2 Thess. 2:4).

This desire for the worship of others is also manifested in more subtle ways such as in the sending out of reports of one's work replete with statistics and photographs (usually with plenty of photographs of the leader preaching or praying, etc).

The desire to exalt oneself over one's fellow believers can also be seen in scheming to be an elder in an assembly, wanting to travel the world as a well known preacher, giving advice to others on various matters (even when they do not ask for advice!), criticising and passing judgment on the work of others as '*self-appointed censors*' (*Jas. 3:1 Amplified Bible*), preaching beautifully arranged sermons for the honour of men, trying to prove oneself as a better preacher than another, imitating the gifts and ministries of others, justifying oneself when one has fallen in sin (*Lk. 16:15*), and in other ways in which one seeks to get a name for himself.

We need to see clearly that all these desires and many more ugly ones lie dormant in our flesh, needing to be severely judged, if we are to be free from them. Only then can we have the authority and power to drive out this spirit of the Antichrist from the churches.

Lying

The Antichrist will deceive the world through "lying signs and wonders and the deception of wickedness" (2 Thess. 2:9,10).

Satan is the father of all lies (Jn. 8:44). The child of God who tells a lie through his tongue is actually offering his tongue as a womb for Satan to conceive a lie. Lying is the one sin that all of us are experts at. We "go astray from birth, telling lies" (Psa. 58:3). There are various forms of lying such as telling half-truths, presenting only one side of the picture (when we want to justify ourselves), exaggerating the reports about our work or in the fantastic relating of incidents (such as is found in many Christian biographies these days, which simple believers often swallow without any discernment), feigning pain and sickness to get pity and sympathy for oneself, pretending to be generous or inwardly pure (when one is not), or relating incidents connected with prayer, fasting or casting out demons in order to give an impression that one is an expert in these matters. There are hundreds of possibilities of lying.

If you are defeated by sin but are honest about it and are mourning over the matter, there is great hope for you. But if you claim to have victory over sin or give others that impression through your preaching, and yet are defeated by it inwardly or privately, then be assured that the words of Jesus apply to you, "You hypocrites, how can you escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. 23:33) - even if you claim to be a Spirit baptized believer.

Lying cannot be rooted out of our lives, unless we take a radical attitude against it every time we detect it in our lives. There are many who talk the language of holiness who have not taken a radical attitude against *lying* in their lives. The spirit of the Antichrist still has power over them, for they seek to justify themselves before men, but do not fear God who will bring every secret thing to judgment one day. Our assemblies must be places where liars of every sort must be ruthlessly exposed through the preaching of the word. It was thus that the antichrists were driven out in John's day and only thus will the antichrists be driven out in our day as well.

Deception

We saw that the Antichrist will deceive people through lying signs and wonders. Supernatural miracles have a great capacity to deceive people. In India, we have seen many instances of heathen religious leaders who have built up a following for themselves through doing miracles by Satanic power.

Supernatural miracles and healings however, are also a part of the equipment that God has given to His church, to fulfil its task on earth. Jesus, Peter and Paul did miracles of such magnitude, such as are not even heard of today. This was because of their faith. The accounts in the 'Acts of the Apostles' are a

standing rebuke to the smallness of our own faith today. A church without the gifts of the Spirit is like a man, who though alive, is yet blind, dumb, deaf and paralysed, according to 1 Cor. 12 (where the gifts are compared to the eyes, ear, hand, etc). We do not want to be like those unbelieving believers who say that the age of miracles has passed. That age has certainly passed for them, because of their unbelief! - but not for those who believe.

However, this does not mean that everyone who does miracles in the name of Jesus can be followed blindly. There are many who do such miracles, who will finally be rejected and cast out by the Lord Himself! (Matt. 7:22,23). Why then does God allow such people to do miracles in Jesus' name? The answer is given us clearly in Deut. 13:1-5. God allows it in order to test us to see whether we will be led astray by signs and wonders, or whether we will follow the plain commands of Scripture. It is important therefore to make sure that your spiritual leader is not one who will himself be cast out by the Lord in the final day. (Read Rev. 13:13,14 carefully at this point to see how the false prophet - who looks like a lamb (Rev. 13:11), a disciple of Jesus - deceives people through signs and wonders!).

How then shall we keep ourselves from being deceived? The answer lies in checking the Christian miracle worker by the three characteristics of the Antichrist mentioned above. Ask yourself the following questions and you will get the answer:

1. Is his life and ministry leading people to be free from sin's power, or only to the forgiveness of sins? Does he emphasise purity of heart and life?
2. Is he a humble, self-effacing man, like Jesus and the apostles were? Or is he interested in projecting himself, making you dependent on him, his advice and his prophecies, so that you cannot be connected to Christ as your Head? Does he have the spirit of a servant or of a boss who gives orders to others around him?
3. Have you found an honesty and a sincerity in his life - an uprightness and straightforwardness - particularly in money matters? (Beware of those who are always interested in your tithes and offerings).

Jesus, Peter and Paul would pass the test, but not many preachers and so-called "healers" today.

Through the spirit of the Antichrist, Satan has polluted Christendom. May God raise up many in our land with the power of the apostles to drive out this spirit from the churches of India.

CHAPTER 11

VICTORY THROUGH PRAISE

Our calling as disciples of Jesus is to live by faith. The chief mark of faith is praise and thanksgiving. "They believed His words ... they sang His praise" (Psa. 106:12). The Israelites referred to there could however, praise God only after they saw the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea. Then they believed God and praised Him. They walked by sight.

But we walk by faith. We can believe God's word even *before* we see our enemies drowned in the sea, and we can praise God even while our enemies are still before us. We believe that God will deal with them in His own way and in His own time. This is why we who are under the new covenant can praise God in all circumstances and at all times.

In Heb. 2:12,13 we read that Jesus Himself leads us in the midst of the church in praise to God our Father, because we "put out trust in Him". Trust and praise are two sides of one coin. Faith, without praise and thanksgiving, is a counterfeit faith - a dead faith. As 'younger brothers' of Jesus (which is what

He calls us in Heb. 2:11,12), we are called to follow the example of our Elder Brother in praising the Father - privately, as well as "*in the midst of the church*".

God is a great King, but the throne He sits on is not made of silver or gold. Such a throne would be too cheap for Him. "Thou art enthroned upon the praises of Thy people", says the psalmist (Psa. 22:3). Praise forms the throne on which God sits as a King. This is why heaven is a place of perpetual praise. The angels are constantly praising God. This is the throne on which God sits in heaven. When the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, He brings heaven down into our hearts and we too can prepare a throne of praise for our God to be enthroned upon - in our hearts, in our homes and in the church.

This is why it is so important to work out our salvation from all grumbling and complaining, with fear and trembling, for God (the Holy Spirit) is working in our hearts to prepare a throne for the Father (See Phil. 2:12-14 together). God is also working outside of us in all our circumstances to make them work together for our good. So there is really nothing to grumble or complain about - if we have faith in Rom. 8:28.

It is not possible to praise God effectively in the church, if we are grumbling and complaining at other times at home or in the office. True praise can only come from a crucified life. It is significant that the only verse in the Bible that tells us that God sits on the throne of the praises of His people is found in the midst of a psalm that vividly portrays the crucifixion (Psa. 22:3). The psalm begins with the cry of Jesus on the cross and it refers to His hands and feet being pierced (v. 16); and then in the midst of this very psalm, Jesus refers to us as His younger brothers and invites us to join Him in preparing a throne of praise for the Father (see v. 22,23). We too are crucified with Him on the same cross - and there, while crucified with Him to the world, and to our lusts, we sing the praise of the Father. Herein lies the hollowness of a lot of praise and worship that is found in many churches, where the word of the cross does not have the central place. Some who have seen this hollowness have reacted against praise and worship altogether and decided that it has no place in the new covenant worship. But this is to fall over the cliff on the opposite side!

On the cross, crucified with Christ, we prepare a throne of praise for the Father. Psa. 118 is another psalm of the cross and of Christ (see v. 11-14, 22). We lay ourselves on the altar and bind ourselves with cords to the cross (v. 27), and lying there we "give thanks to the Lord" (v. 28,29) and say, "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (v. 24).

Jesus has been anointed as our Head to give us "the oil of gladness and the garment of praise" (Isa. 61:1-3), instead of the spirit of heaviness and depression. If you are living under the spirit of depression, you can be sure that it is the work of Satan. Jesus has come to cast out that spirit from your life permanently, and to clothe and cover you with the garment of praise. It is never God's will for us to be depressed or discouraged or in a bad mood - for Jesus was never depressed, discouraged or in a bad mood at any time; and we are called to walk even as He walked (1 Jn. 2:6). But this is only possible if we take up the cross each day, as Jesus did.

In Psa. 8:2 we read that from the mouths of infants and nursing babes, God establishes strength to defeat the enemies. Jesus quoted this verse at the time when the chief priests criticised the children for shouting and praising God (Matt. 21:15,16). The chief priests, like many today, felt that in the house of God no one should shout or raise their voice in praise and worship. They thought that people should be long-faced and quiet in God's presence. But Jesus was thrilled to hear the noise of praise, for it reminded Him of His heavenly home where the angels praise God in voices that sound like loud thunders! This is one reason why Satan and his hosts cannot dwell in heaven - for they cannot stand the shouts of sincere praise to God. Neither can they stand it when such praise is found in any church here on earth. And so they will try one of two methods - either to rob the sincerity out of the praise or to stop the shouts of praise altogether. As one looks around at the various Christian denominations, one finds that Satan has succeeded almost everywhere with one of these two methods.

Why does Satan hate sincere praise to God? Jesus quoted Psa. 8:2 and said the 'strength' spoken of in that psalm was actually 'praise' (Matt. 21:16). Praise is the strength by which the enemy is driven out (Psa. 8:2).

Empty shouts of praise that do not come from a holy life, however, do not have any power. In Ex. 32, we read that the Israelites made a golden calf and even called it 'Jehovah' (v. 5) and danced and shouted to their 'Jehovah' with such a loud voice that Moses and Joshua heard it miles away (v. 17-19). But Satan was right in the midst of all that charismatic praise! There was immorality in their midst just as there is in the midst of many today who shout and dance in the name of 'Jesus'.

As we said earlier, our praise becomes powerful only when it comes from a crucified, holy life.

In Lk. 19:37,38, when all the disciples of Jesus began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice, the Pharisees were disturbed and asked Jesus to tell His disciples to keep quiet. But Jesus replied that if those disciples kept quiet, the stones would begin to cry out in praise to God (v. 40). Thus we see Jesus' opinion of loud praise and the opinion of the Pharisees. How is it in your church? Do you follow the Pharisees or Jesus? It is because we seek the honour of men so much (of Christian leaders particularly) that we are afraid to shout and praise God in the assembly. Religious tradition followed in a particular group may have frowned upon loud praise, and so everybody in that group blindly follows such a tradition. But we have to do violence to such traditions if we are to be followers of Jesus and possess the kingdom (Matt. 11:12).

Jesus had spent millions of years in the presence of His Father where the atmosphere was one of praise and worship. When He came to earth and lived among glum, sour-faced gloomy, religious people, it was quite a change from the atmosphere of heaven. It thrilled Him therefore whenever He saw a few who had something of the praising atmosphere of heaven in them.

In the book of Revelation, where many 'sevens' are found, we also have seven glimpses of praise in heaven. If you have the patience to look through those passages, it would revolutionise your idea of heaven altogether. The passages are: Rev. 4:8-11; 5:8-14; 7:9-12; 11:15-18; 14:1-4; 15:1-4 and 19:1-6. Every glimpse we have there of our future home is one of joyful praise that sounds like mighty peals of thunder (19:6). They praise God there for His sovereignty, His holiness, His judgments, etc. Not one word of complaint is heard there; and there is not one long-faced, gloomy angel! If we do not get acclimatised to this atmosphere now, we will get a culture shock when we get into the Lord's presence and hear people repeatedly saying "Hallelujah" and "Amen". Notice, however, that the hallelujahs and amens of heaven are not meaningless. They say "Hallelujah because ..." (see Rev. 19:1,2,6). It is meaningful worship and praise in the beauty of holiness. This is what the Holy Spirit has come to reproduce in our lives and in our churches.

We are told that the 144,000 learned this new song while on earth (Rev. 14:1-4). The old song that everyone on earth sings is the song of grumbling and complaining against people and circumstances. But a few who follow the Lamb wherever He goes (v. 4) - that is those who take up the cross daily - have learnt to hate themselves (Lk. 14:26) and thus have eliminated grumbling and complaining from their lives totally - and having faith in the sovereignty of God (Rom. 8:28), they have learnt to give thanks in everything (1 Thess. 5:18), for everything (Eph. 5:20) and for all men (1 Tim. 2:1). In all the trying situations that they faced on earth, they bore the dying of Jesus in their bodies and learnt the new song of praise and worship, in all circumstances and for all people. Thus they stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion in the final day.

It is not enough that we praise God in our hearts. We are to offer to God the sacrifices of praise (that is praise that comes from a crucified life) through our lips; and this is one of the few things in the New Testament that we are told to do continually (Heb. 13:15). What fills the heart overflows through the mouth, Jesus said (Matt. 12:34). So if praise does not flow from our lips, it is a clear indication that praise has not filled our heart. "With the mouth we confess, resulting in deliverance (salvation)" (Rom. 10:10).

In Psa. 50:23, we read, "He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honours Me and makes a way for Me to show him My deliverance (salvation)" (literal translation).

God is able to deliver us out of many situations, only when we begin to praise Him - for praise alone is the mark of faith. Prayer alone cannot deliver us out of many situations. We must keep praying until we reach the point where we have the assurance of the Spirit in our heart that our prayer has been heard. Faith is then born and we "believe that we have received", even though we do not see the answer yet. Then, and then only, did Jesus say that we could receive what we pray for (Mk. 11:24). But what is the evidence that such faith is born in our heart? We stop praying and start *praising* God. That, and that alone, is the clearest evidence of faith. Thus we make a way for God to show us His deliverance.

In 2 Chronicles 20, we see an example of this. There we see Jehoshaphat surrounded by a great multitude of enemies (v. 2). Jehoshaphat did the wisest thing that anyone can do when surrounded by problems like that. He fasted and prayed and sought the face of the Lord. His prayer is described for us in v. 6-12, and we notice seven things there.

- 1) He praised God for His sovereignty (v. 6).
- 2) He reminded himself of what God had done in past days (v. 7).
- 3) He reminded God of His promise in the word (v. 9).
- 4) He reminded God that they were God's own inheritance (v. 11).
- 5) He told God that they had no power at all to deal with the situation (v. 12).
- 6) He told God that they had no wisdom either (v. 12).
- 7) He told God that they were relying on Him (v. 12).

This is a good pattern for our praying too. God answered at once and said that He would deal with the situation. Jehoshaphat believed God and sent forth in front of the army, a choir of people who praised God with songs in a loud voice. Through that sacrifice of praise in the face of the enemies, Jehoshaphat made a way for God to show His deliverance. And God did just that. He routed the enemies thoroughly (v. 22).

In the book of Jonah we see another example of this. Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights, and he had not even prayed during that time (1:17). "Then", it says in 2:1 (that is after the three days and nights), Jonah began to pray. Maybe for the first three days Jonah was trying to crawl up to the fish's mouth - just like we try every possible method to get out of our problems. When all human help fails, then only do most people seek God. And then only did Jonah seek God - after his own best efforts had failed.

And God waits till we come to the end of ourselves. Jonah then prayed and prayed. But still nothing happened, until he began to offer "the sacrifice of thanksgiving" saying that deliverance comes only from the Lord (2:9). When Jonah began to praise God while still in the midst of his unsolved problem, he made a way thereby for God to show him His deliverance. Immediately (we read in 2:10), the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah out on the dry land.

How much longer are we going to stay in the stomach of the fish (our particular problem) before we offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving? God cannot deliver us because we do not honour Him by praising Him for all things; and so we do not make a way for Him to deliver us (Psa. 50:23).

One final example - from Acts 16. There we read of Paul and Silas being jailed for preaching the gospel. At midnight, instead of sleeping (and far less complaining or grumbling), they began to pray and praise God in song. They had no complaints. They believed perfectly in God's sovereignty, and praised God. Immediately God opened the prison doors for them. That was possible because Paul and Silas made a way for God to work for them through the sacrifice of praise that came from their lips.

The key to every fish's mouth and every prison door is in the hands of our wonderful Lord (Rev. 3:7), and when He opens a door, no one can shut it. And until He opens it, all human help will only fail. It is easy to praise God when everything is going according to our desires and plans. But when things go contrary to our expectations, then is the time that we have the opportunity to offer the sacrifice of praise - for it costs us something to praise God in such situations. Thus we can make a way for God to show us His deliverance.

Psalm 149:9 invites us to have the high praise of God in our mouth when lying on our bed (which is the place where we usually lie down and worry!) and says that with such praises we can bind the powers of darkness and execute on them the judgment that is written in God's word for them (Rom. 16:20). This is a privilege reserved for all of God's children)Psa. 149:9).

Let us then learn the new song of praise and thanksgiving in all circumstances, for all circumstances and for all people, during the rest of the days that are left us on earth - that we may honour God thereby and experience His deliverances all the days of our life. Amen.

CHAPTER 12

WHY CHRISTIANS FALL

Why do Christians fall into sin?

Before we consider the reasons for this, we must distinguish clearly between being tempted and sinning. Jas. 1:14,15 clearly states that everyone is tempted when he is lured by his own fleshly desires. Then when his mind consents to the temptation, a conception takes place and sin is born in his heart.

When we 'see' the glorious truth that our old man (this mind of ours that wanted to sin) has been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6), then we can put off the old man by faith. Then we will stop *committing* sin deliberately. We are born again (1 Jn. 3:9). We will still be tempted, but our mind (the new man) no longer agrees with our flesh.

But though we may stop committing sin, we may nevertheless fall into sin (or be 'caught in a trespass' - Gal. 6:1). There is a difference between *committing* sin and *falling*.

Even though our old man has been crucified (Rom.6:6), our *flesh* is still alive to entice us. We however are determined to be faithful to Christ our Bridegroom; and we have no intention of giving ourselves to the desires of the flesh. We do not commit *adultery* with the flesh, or else we would be adulteresses (Jas. 4:4) and thus become a part of the harlot (Rev. 17:5) and not a part of Christ's bride. But a woman may conceive through being *forced*, even when she does not voluntarily give herself to a man. In such a case, however, the woman herself is nobler than if she had given herself voluntarily. This symbolises the difference between *falling* into sin (where we are overcome by the desires in our flesh) and *committing* sin (where we *knowingly* choose what we know to be wrong, and give ourselves to the flesh).

But though falling into sin is not as bad as committing sin, it nevertheless produces the same result - a conception giving birth to sin. The New Testament promise is that Jesus can keep us even from falling (Jude 24). This is the life of victory - where we are kept from falling into sin as well.

If you have stopped committing sin, but still find yourself falling into sin, then these may be the reasons why you fall.

1. A Lack Of The Fear Of God

The fear of God is the beginning (alphabet) of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). This is the first lesson in the school of wisdom. If we do not learn the alphabet, we cannot proceed further. "To fear the Lord is to hate evil", because God Himself hates evil (Prov. 8:13). When we have heard the call of God to be holy because He is holy, and are gripped by that call, we shall hate sin.

Many believers find it quite easy to overcome some sins (anger, sexual sins, etc) when in the presence of other believers, for they are afraid of losing their reputation. But they sin in the same areas quite easily, when alone. Therefore it is not because they are not able to overcome these sins that they fall, but because they love their reputation more than they fear God. They value man's opinion more than God's. Such Christians need to mourn and repent for "worshipping the creature (man) more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25), and need to cry out to God with all their hearts that God will teach them His fear. The promise is that if you cry out and lift up your voice and seek the fear of the Lord as you would hidden treasures, then God will teach you His fear (Prov. 2:3-5; Matt. 5:6). He will be found only by those who seek Him with all their hearts (Jer. 29:13). Only those who mourn over their failures will be comforted (strengthened and helped - Matt. 5:4) by the Comforter.

We need to develop the habit of living before the face of God alone.

The reason why God has given each of us a private area - our thought life - is so that He can test us to see whether we fear Him or not. If we are concerned only about our external reputation before other men, then we shall be careless about sin in our thought life. Thus God makes a separation between those who are desirous of total victory and those who desire only an external victory over sin. If we mourn over sin in our thought life as over external sin, we shall enter into victory very quickly.

2. A Lack Of Faith

All progress in the Christian life is by faith. The righteous live by faith (Rom. 1:17) and then their path becomes like the light that shines brighter and brighter (Prov. 4:18).

We can have faith for the forgiveness of sins and even for putting off the old man, and thus stop committing sin; and yet we may not have faith that Jesus can also keep us from falling into sin. Like the Israelites at Kadesh Barnea, we can be so full of unbelief, looking at the giants in the land (our flesh), that we do not enter the promised land of victory.

One of the most important laws in the kingdom of God is that we receive according to our faith (Matt. 9:29) - no more and no less. There is no partiality with God; but He rewards those who diligently seek Him in faith (Heb. 11:6). Thus, some enter into a life of victory (like Joshua and Caleb who entered the land of Canaan), while many others remain defeated. The way to life is narrow and few find it because few really fear God and few have faith. Jesus could not do many 'works of power' in His own hometown because of their unbelief. He Himself was eagerly desirous to heal them. But their unbelief limited Him (Matt. 13:58). Thus it is even today. He desires to do great things for us, but is limited by our lack of faith.

Faith is more than intellectual belief. It is one thing to believe that Jesus has the power to keep people from falling and quite another thing to have faith that Jesus will keep you from falling. The former is a mental quality that even Satan has. The latter is a spiritual quality of the heart, that brings victory.

God's promise is, "Sin shall not be master over you" (Rom. 6:14). Believe that, and when you fall, remember that the word of promise does not change. That remains steadfast. Get up and confess your hope in God's word and press on again, until hope becomes faith one day and victory is yours.

3. Not Knowing The Weakness Of The Flesh

The flesh we have is totally impotent to do the will of God. Jesus taught this very clearly (Matt. 26:41). Paul realised this and said that nothing good dwells in his flesh (Rom. 7:18). The one who realises this thoroughly will do at least two things: *He will flee* from temptation and *he will pray* earnestly for help

from God. When a man does not do both of these, it is obvious that he is not yet convinced about the weakness of his flesh.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation" (Matt. 6:73). We pray that prayer wholeheartedly, because we are convinced that our flesh is weak. Even an outstanding man of God like Timothy was exhorted to flee from youthful lusts and from the love of money (2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Tim. 6:10,11). One would have thought that having advanced so far in the Christian life, Timothy could not possibly be tempted in these areas. But Paul knew he could. And so he exhorted Timothy to run away from temptation. The one who realises that his flesh is weak will obey this exhortation readily.

Further, the one who realises his weakness will also cry out to God for grace to help him overcome his weakness. All of us are weak, but not all are equally conscious of their weakness. The weak man will flee from danger when he sees it, but the strong man does not, because he has high thoughts about himself. He does not call out for help. Therefore he falls.

True humility is to recognise the weakness of our flesh and therefore flee from the temptation and to cry for help. Such alone receive God's grace, for God gives His grace only to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5).

4. Not Having A Mind To Suffer

There is pleasure in sin - but it is deceptive and short-lived (Heb. 3:13; 11:25). The opposite of pleasure is suffering. To suffer is to deny our flesh the pleasure of sin. We are told that if we arm ourselves with this attitude, we can cease from sin and do the will of God all our life (1 Pet. 4:1,2). To suffer in the flesh does not mean physical, bodily suffering, for no one ever stopped sinning that way. It refers to the pain caused to the flesh by the denial of its desires. We refuse to please ourselves, even as Jesus never pleased Himself (Rom. 15:13). Thus we share the fellowship of His sufferings.

A determined attitude to suffer in the flesh, Peter says, is our armour in the day of battle. But we must have the armour before the battle begins. To look for the armour *after* the onslaught of temptation has begun, is useless, for one will not usually find it then. No. One must be armed before the conflict begins. When one does not have this armour ('the determined mind to suffer in self denial rather than get the least pleasure out of even a sinful thought'), then one draws back in the moment of temptation and gives in (Heb. 10:38).

But if we are determined to die, rather than sin - that is, to be 'obedient even unto death' as Jesus was (Phil. 2:8), then this armour will be our strength and our protection in the day of battle.

If we love material things, for example, then we shall easily lose our peace and fall into sin when we face material loss or when someone else damages or loses some valuable possession of ours. But if we have chosen the way of 'suffering in the flesh', believing that God orders all things for our good (Rom. 8:28), then we shall take even the loss of our goods joyfully (Heb. 10:34).

5. Not Pressing Forward

Peter says that if we keep pressing on in our Christian life ('adding ... adding ... adding') we will never fall (2 Pet. 1:5-10). Many Christians fall into sin because they become content with their spiritual progress, instead of pressing on further towards perfection. Paul spent his life doing one thing - pressing on towards the goal of becoming like Jesus (Phil. 3:13,14). This kept him from stagnation and also from sin. He exhorted Timothy not only to flee from temptation, but also to pursue after godliness, love, gentleness, etc, (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22).

Many have stopped *committing* sin and are satisfied, even though they keep *falling*. Thus they never stop falling.

We are to judge ourselves in the light of God continually, in every situation, if we are to make any headway in discovering the latent evil that resides in our flesh. As we walk in the light, we can partake increasingly of the divine nature.

Thus we can keep adding to our faith virtue, brotherly kindness, love, etc. If we thus fill our mind with good thoughts at all times (Phil. 4:8), sin will not be able to enter our mind easily. It is the empty mind that falls an easy prey to temptation.

6. Not Dethroning The Soul-life

In all children of Adam, the human soul-life is lord. They live according to their reason and their emotions. When we are converted, and put away the sinful works of the flesh, we do not usually realise that our soul-life (our human way of thinking, reasoning and feeling) needs to be dethroned too. We consider these things quite innocent and harmless. Yet it is the enthroned soul-life that causes many a Christian to fall into sin.

The frenzied whipping up of the *emotions* in a Christian gathering, for example, leads to many abnormal excesses and also to sin. Living in the emotions is not the same as living in the Spirit. These two are as different as earth and heaven. An emotionally tense meeting is not necessarily a spiritual meeting, for many people have gone away thrilled from such an atmosphere only to commit sin immediately thereafter. Our emotions are deceptive.

Likewise, our *intellect* is deceptive too. Most Christians have enthroned their intellect and therefore seek to understand the things of God with their human reasoning and logic. The result is that they are soon puffed up with dead Bible knowledge and fall (1 Cor. 8:1). Their fall may not be apparent, for pride does not look as ugly as adultery, but it is, in reality, a greater fall. And it leads to many other falls too.

Humble yourself then, and dethrone your intellect and feelings, and become as a little child living in simple, unquestioning obedience to God's Word. Hate your soul-life and all that originates from it, and live in the Spirit, in helpless dependence on God's wisdom and strength. Thus you will preserve your soul and you will be kept from falling.

7. Not Valuing Fellowship

There is just no such thing as individualistic Christianity in the New Testament. The Old Testament prophets (like Elijah and John the Baptist) may have lived alone, but that was in the days when there was only a shadow and no body (Col. 2:17). But now we have the body of Christ, and it is as we find our place in it, that the Head (Christ) keeps us from falling. Paul clearly states that protection from error and Christian growth can come only as we hold fast the Head and also keep the lines of supply open to the other members of the body (Col. 2:19).

It is against the *church* that Jesus said the gates of hell would not prevail (Matt. 16:18). Satan will certainly prevail against a lone Christian who tries to live on his own. It is not enough, however, to go to meetings twice a week. We must *value fellowship* with the other members and be integrated into the Body. It is only as we find our place as functioning members of the body of Christ that we can share in the triumph of the Head. Then our fellow members in the Body become a strength for us in the hour when the pressure becomes too great for us by ourselves (Eccl. 4:9-12). Mutual exhortation in the body is God's means of keeping us from being deceived and from falling into sin (Heb. 3:13). Value such fellowship, and you will be spared many heartaches and failures.

We see therefore that there is no once-for-all experience that guarantees that we will never again fall. But if we obey these laws of the Spirit, they will set us free from sin's power and we will be kept from falling (Rom. 8:2). Then we shall be able to echo the cry of the apostle, "Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:14).

CHAPTER 13

DEAD WORKS

The New Testament speaks of the *works of the flesh* (Gal. 5:19) as well as of *dead works* (Heb. 6:1).

Those who indulge in the works of the flesh such as immorality, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, etc, will certainly not inherit the kingdom of God. These works are so obviously sinful that it would be difficult for a believer to practise any of them without being convicted in his conscience.

Dead works, however, are more deceitful. They are externally good works, but they spring from a corrupt source (for nothing good dwells in our flesh) and are therefore like a filthy garment in God's eyes (Rom. 7:18; Isa. 54:6).

We are therefore commanded to repent not only from sin but from dead works too. It is only after we have laid such a foundation, that we can press on to perfection (Heb. 6:1).

It is well known among believers that the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from all sin. What is not so well known is the fact that the blood of Christ must cleanse our conscience from dead works too before we can serve the living God aright (Heb. 9:14).

It is essential therefore that we have a clear understanding of what dead works really are.

1. Works Done Without Joy

God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). He also loves a cheerful doer of His will. He meets those who rejoice in doing righteousness (Isa. 64:5). When the Israelites did not serve the Lord with joy, they were punished by being made to serve their enemies (Deut. 28:47,48). The kingdom of God consists of righteousness accompanied by the joy of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). Only those who delight to do His will can bring joy to the heart of God.

Consider the matter of *tithing*, for example. This was a law under the old covenant. But it is never commanded by Jesus or the apostles to those under the new covenant. Yet multitudes of covetous pastors compel their congregations to tithe compulsorily either through promises of divine reward or through threats of divine judgment. The people pay up, but without joy. It is not spontaneous giving, but grudging, reluctant giving. The pastors are happy when the offering boxes are full, but God is not. Pastors love *large givers*, but God loves *only cheerful givers!*

The new covenant principle is *NOT*, "Give as much as you can give", but, "*Give as much as you can give cheerfully*". God does not want any more than that. Of course you will receive in the same proportion as you give (2 Cor. 9:7; Lk. 6:38) - but that is another matter. God does not, however, desire any labour or gifts that are unwillingly given. What we do without joy is a dead work.

2. Works Done Without Love

To love God and man are the two pegs on which every other commandment hangs (Matt. 22:40). Remove these pegs and everything falls to the ground. This was why the leader of the Ephesian church was rebuked. His works were no longer motivated by love for God and man (Rev. 2:2,4). If we obey the commandments of God without keeping their spirit, our works become dead works. If we are to be appointed by the Lord as shepherds of His flock, He will first test us (as He did Peter) to see whether we love Him supremely (Jn. 21:15-17). Otherwise our service would be worthless. Likewise, it is not enough just to bless those who curse us. We are to love them from our hearts too. Otherwise we keep the letter of the Word but not its spirit. Similarly, if we serve the brothers and sisters in the church, because we are taught to do so, but still criticise them (perhaps for not being thankful to us), then our service becomes a pile of dead works. All our sacrifice for the Lord's work are worthless dead works if they do not spring out of love for Him.

3. Works Done Without Zeal

"I know your works ... you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot ... be zealous therefore" (Rev. 3:15-19). Half-hearted works are dead works. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength (Mk. 12:30). Our worship and praise must be wholehearted, not lifeless and dead. Our praying must be with burden and our prophesying with zeal. We are to be "aglow with the Spirit" at all times (Rom. 12:11). The fire must burn on the altar perpetually (Lev. 6:13). We are to constantly fan to a flame the gifts of the Spirit that God has endued us with - not despise them or scorn them just because many have abused them (2 Tim. 1:7). Most Christian assemblies are today in a lifeless condition lacking the burning fire of the Holy Spirit. They are ready for being rejected by the Lord (Rev. 3:16) for their lack of zeal. We need to repent of such dead works in our own life.

4. Works Done Without Faith

As faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:26), even so works without faith are dead works. Many prayer meetings are dead because of the lack of faith. Five minutes of faith filled prayer is more living and powerful for the accomplishment of God's purposes than an all night prayer meeting that has been gone through as a feat of endurance. Jesus prayed all night and so must we, when there is a need for this - but certainly not as a dead work. Faith also means personal conviction (Rom. 14:22). What we do without personal conviction, is a dead work. Merely because some great man of God believes and teaches some particular doctrine, it does not mean that we are to imitate him. Yet Christendom is full of believers who blindly follow other men, without any personal conviction. Imitation always brings death. The Israelites crossed the Red Sea by faith. The Egyptians imitated them and were drowned (Heb. 11:29). This has been written for our warning. Do not imitate the actions or the ministries of others. We are not to prophesy according to the proportion of our own faith (Rom. 12:6). God wants each of us to be ourselves, for He has a unique contribution to make through our own distinct personality to the body of Christ.

5. Works Done For Personal Gain And Honour

"I know your works that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (Rev. 3:1).

Here was a man who was spiritually dead, but who was still satisfied because he had a *name* that he was alive. He sought the praise of man more than the praise of God (Jn. 5:44; 12:43); and as a result all his works were dead works. Anything we do to impress man is a dead work. Anything that we do, which we want others to know about, is also a dead work (Matt. 6:1-18). Living works are done in secret before God's face alone, with every possible attempt made to conceal it from the eyes of men. Whenever we glory in our accomplishments for God, we have begun to "worship the works of our hands" (Acts 7:41), and our works immediately become dead works. This is how Babylon is built, as Dan. 4:30 makes plain.

As soon as we are tempted to think about the opinion of others concerning ourselves or our work, we must throw those thoughts into the sewage system, where they belong. Even the opinions that great men of God have about us must be thrown out of our minds and sent into the sewage pipes. "Our righteousness in human eyes is an abomination (fit only for the sewage) in the sight of God" (Lk. 16:15).

Only one who is radical like this can hope to escape dead works. In the same way, work done for the Lord, for a salary, is a dead work. Work done for a salary is not Christian work. It is secular work - even if it takes the name 'Christian'. It is impossible to serve God and money.

6. Works Done Merely To Ease One's Conscience

The heathen are prompted to certain works such as fasting, praying and giving alms because of the accusations of their conscience (Rom. 2:15).

It is possible for Christians also to do such works merely to ease their conscience. Many read the Bible and pray daily, simply to relieve the accusations of their conscience. For the same reason, they go to meetings, pay their tithe, give alms to beggars, etc. All such works are dead works. There are preachers who capitalise on this weakness in believers and urge them to do something for the perishing millions

'without Christ'. "Either give or go", people are told. As a result, some give money, and others leave their jobs and go for Christian work. But both groups having acted without the leading of the Lord, but only on the emotion of the moment to relieve a guilty conscience, wind up in an endless round of dead works.

7. Works Done Out Of Fear Of Divine Judgment

To avoid sin because we fear the judgment of God is good, but that is certainly not the motive with which Jesus avoided sin. Jesus avoided sin because He wanted to please the Father. This is to be our motive too. Supposing there were to be no punishment for lustng after women, or for telling lies, or retaining a bitterness against another, would we indulge in those sins? Or would we still avoid them because our basic desire was to please God? Let each person answer that question for himself, and work out his own salvation from dead works with fear and trembling. To forgive others merely because we do not want to get some sickness as a judgment from God, or because we want God to forgive us, is a dead work - for it is motivated by a selfish fear of judgment. What shall we say then about those who read the Bible and pray in the mornings merely to avoid having any accidents during the day! That falls into the same class as the worst heathen superstition!

8. Works Done For The Sake Of Obtaining A Reward

While it is true that Jesus will reward the faithful ones (Rev. 22:12) and while it is also true that the ultimate desire of our life should be to please the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9) so that we can hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant" from Him one day, yet Jesus Himself warned us against the self-centred desire for even a heavenly reward, motivating us in our sacrifices and our service for Him.

When Peter compared himself favourably with the rich young ruler (who had just turned away from Jesus) and asked the question, "What shall we get for all that we have given up for you?" (Matt. 19:27), Jesus replied with the parable of the labourers (Matt. 20:1-16). There we find that those who worked for pay (reward) ended up last, while those who worked without any thought of reward ended up first (even though they had done only a small percentage of the work that the former had done).

Quantity versus quality - there we see the difference between dead works and living works. Works done with the hope of our ultimately being promoted above other believers and finding a place in the bride of Christ, will be exposed as dead works in the final day.

If you purify your thought-life, do good to others, and love your wife or submit to your husband, all with the thought of being exalted in some future day, then 'Self' is still at the centre of your life, and all your self-centred 'good' works are dead works!

Those who do get crowns in glory are quick to cast them down at the feet of the Lord, saying, "Thou alone art worthy" (Rev. 4:10). It is only when we have purged ourselves from motives other than the desire to glorify God, that we can be freed from dead works. If we keep a record in our memory of all the good works that we have done, those good works become dead works.

Jesus gave us two pictures of the final judgment day - one where people listed before the Lord all the good things that they had done in their earthly lives, "Lord, we prophesied in Your name, we healed the sick in Your name, etc" (Matt. 7:22,23). These people were rejected by the Lord. In the other picture we find the righteous surprised when they are reminded by the Lord of the good that they had done in their earthly lives. "Lord, when did we do that?", is their surprised cry (Matt. 25:34-40). They had forgotten about the good that they had done - for they had not done those works for reward. There we see a clear contrast between dead works and living works. Which category do we fit into?

9. Works Done Without Bearing The Dying Of Jesus

Living works are only those which flow from the life of Jesus within us. It is impossible to have this life of Jesus without first bearing the dying of Jesus - the daily cross (2 Cor. 4:10). If we merely control our tongues from speaking angrily or our faces from scowling, but are still boiling with anger and irritation inside, that is not victory – it is suppression. That is the teaching of yoga and not of Jesus Christ. Jesus

told us to take up our cross daily. That means to put the flesh to death daily (Gal. 5:24). Death by crucifixion is a long process - unlike shooting or hanging. The flesh cannot be shot or hung in a moment; it can only be crucified. But if we are faithful to keep this criminal on the cross, death will set in, in due course - and we shall one day cease from sin - even inwardly (1 Pet. 4:1). Then the living works of the Spirit will flow as rivers of living water from our innermost being (Jn. 7:38). Our inner attitudes will then correspond with our external appearance and works. There will then be no more need for artificial smiles or for any other form of external piety.

10. Works That Originate From Our Own Human Reason

Martha's unselfish and sacrificial work for the Lord and His people, is a good example of good works that are dead works (Lk. 10:38-42). She did that work merely because she felt that it was a good work to do. But "the most important thing about a servant is that he does what his master tells him to do" - not what he feels like doing himself (1 Cor 4:2 LB). Thus, Mary was wiser, in that she first sat at Jesus' feet to hear what He wanted her to do. Heb. 4:10,12 says that God's word divides between the soulish and the spiritual; and just as we are to cease from sin, we are to cease from doing our own works too. Soulish works are dead works. Jesus never did anything on His own initiative (Jn. 5:30). Even today God is looking not for those who have bright ideas about how to do His work (for such can only produce 'Ishmaels'), but for those who are humble enough to acknowledge their lack of wisdom and strength, and who will make themselves available for God to use, as it pleases Him. God looks, not for ability but availability.

Having heard about dead works now, the great danger for some of us may be that of backing away from the cliff of 'dead works', and falling over the cliff on the other side of the narrow way - the cliff of 'doing nothing'. That would be worse. The living works of the Spirit can be produced through us only as we cooperate with the Spirit in living a disciplined life - *not law, but discipline*.

Let us then cleanse ourselves not only from all defilement of the flesh, but also from that of the spirit (2 Cor. 7:1), so that our righteous deeds may become our wedding dress on the day of the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:8).

CHAPTER 14

GOD'S BLESSING OR GOD'S APPROVAL

There are two types of believers - *those who seek only God's blessing* and *those who seek God's approval*; and there is a world of difference between the two. In Rev. 7:9-14, we read of a great multitude of believers - so vast that they cannot even be numbered. Their testimony is that they owe their salvation to their God (v. 10) and that their robes are washed white in the blood of Christ (v. 14); or in other words, that God has blessed them. This is good, no doubt. But it is a vastly different testimony from that of the group of believers mentioned in Rev. 14:1-5.

There we read of a small group that can be numbered. In fact they are only 144,000 - a small number, when you consider that they have been selected out of the billions of people who have lived on earth. Their testimony is that they followed Christ totally on earth, no guile was found in their mouth, and they kept themselves from being defiled by 'women' (that is, the women mentioned in Revelation 17 - Babylon and her daughters). Or in other words, they pleased God.

Notice the contrast. The first group received God's *blessings*. The second received God's *approval*. We get what we seek. If we are satisfied with God's blessing, then that is all we will get. And if we are

satisfied with God's material blessings alone, then we will not even advance to getting His spiritual blessings.

Most believers are satisfied with being blessed by God - and that too mostly in the material realm alone. That is why Christian book stores are flooded with books on how one can be healed of one's sicknesses and become wealthy by tithing, etc. The emphasis is on physical and material well-being - health and prosperity. This is the clearest symptom of a self-centred life. And yet, we read in God's word, that Jesus died in order that we should no longer live for ourselves but only for Him (2 Cor. 5:15); or in other words, not to please ourselves but only Him. Or to put it in yet another way, Jesus died in order to deliver us from a self-centred life, and to bring us into a God-centred life.

One of the things that can puzzle us these days is the way God blesses a lot of Christian work that is so thoroughly compromising in its character. Does this mean that God is not disturbed by the compromises and the deviations from His word? No, it certainly does not mean that. God blesses many ministries that He cannot totally approve of.

Even when Moses disobeyed God's word and struck the rock (when God had told him to speak to it), God still 'blessed' that disobedient ministry. In fact, two million people were blessed through it. Yet God dealt with His disobedient servant severely afterwards (Num. 20:8-13). God blessed that ministry because He loved those two million needy people, and not because He approved of what His servant did. It is even so today.

Many ministries are blessed because God loves the needy people who need salvation, healing, etc. But He certainly does not approve of much that goes on in the name of Jesus today. He will certainly punish the compromising preachers in due time.

The only condition to be fulfilled in order to get God's material blessings is that one must be *either good or evil!* For Jesus said that God sends sunshine and rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:45). Material blessing is therefore no sign of God's approval on one's life. Two million Israelites disobeyed God for forty years in the wilderness - so greatly that God was angry with them (Heb. 3:17). Yet God gave them food and healing throughout all those years - and that too miraculously (Deut. 8:2). Even miraculous answers to prayer in the physical realm are therefore no indication that God is happy with a person's life.

God's approval, on the other hand, rested on Jesus when He was thirty years old, only because of one reason: Jesus had faithfully overcome temptation during all those years. He had lived a life centred in His Father and not in Himself. He never did what pleased Himself (Rom. 15:3). At His baptism, the Father testified, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" and not "This is My well-beloved Son whom I have blessed". The latter testimony would have meant nothing. It was the former, indicating God's approval, that meant everything for Jesus. To follow Jesus is to seek for the same testimony ourselves.

As children of Adam, we are all born self-centred. We grow up expecting everything to revolve around us and to serve us. When we get converted, we expect God also to serve us and bless us in various ways. We come to Him initially to be blessed with His forgiveness, and then go on to seek the blessing of healing, answer to prayer, material prosperity, employment, housing, marriage partner, etc. But it is possible for our lives to be self-centred still, even when we are deeply 'religious' in our own and other people's eyes. God becomes just one more person in our 'orbit', and we seek to get what we can out of Him. The prodigal son came back in order to get food from his father; but the father still received him. God receives us even when our motives are utterly selfish. He loves us so much that He longs to receive us even when we come to Him with an obviously self-centred motive. His hope however is that we will mature quickly to realise that true spirituality is to partake of His own nature, which is to give rather than to receive. With the vast majority of His children, however, God is never able to realise that purpose.

They live and die in their self-centredness thinking only of 'I', 'Me' and 'Mine' and of material and physical blessings.

To be mature is to have our mind renewed so that it is no longer centred on what we can get out of God, but rather on what God can get out of us in our one earthly life. This renewing of our mind is what brings transformation (Rom. 12:2). This is what qualified the 144000 (in Rev. 14) to stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion.

True spirituality is not just getting victory over anger, irritability, dirty sexual thoughts, love of money, etc. It is to cease living for oneself. It is to cease seeking our own - our own gain, our own comfort, our own convenience, our own will, our own rights, our own honour and even our own 'spirituality'.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He taught them a prayer that does not contain the words 'I', 'Me' or 'Mine' in it even once (Lk. 11:1-4). He taught us there to be concerned first about the Father's name, kingdom and will, and then to be concerned as much about our fellow believers (their material and spiritual welfare) as about ourselves ('us', 'us', 'us' and not 'me', 'me', 'me'). It is easy to learn that prayer 'by heart' and to repeat it like a parrot. But to learn that lesson in our heart requires that we truly forsake all and put God in the centre of our heart. The law that we will find most frequently in our members (Rom. 7:22), if we are honest in judging ourselves, will be the law of selfishness, that seeks our own convenience and rights all through life.

Jesus taught us to seek the kingdom of God first - that is to dethrone 'Self' and to put God and His interests in the centre of our life. Jesus gave up the comfort of heaven in order to do His Father's will on earth. Paul gave up the comfort of being a Christian businessman living luxuriously in Tarsus, in order to be an apostle facing hardships for the Lord. Every one of the apostles lived that sacrificial God-centred life. They gave their all for the promotion of God's kingdom on earth, unlike many of today's 'tourist preachers'.

A holiness that still leaves us seeking our own comfort and convenience is a false holiness - even if we have overcome anger and dirty thoughts. This is what many have not realised; and hence Satan has been able to deceive them. Many Christians travel or migrate to different countries seeking conveniences and comfort and wealth. They can still have God's blessings upon their lives, but not God's approval - for no one can serve both God and mammon (that is, wealth, pleasure, comfort, etc.). If we think that God's blessing on our lives and on our children is an indication that He is also happy with us, then Satan has truly deceived us. God's blessing and God's approval are two totally different things. At the end of our earthly lives, the testimony that we have should be the testimony that Enoch had before he left the earth: "He pleased God" (Heb. 11:5). Only three words - but no one can have a more powerful testimony to his earthly life. This is the testimony that Jesus and Paul had. To merely have a testimony that 'He was blessed by God' is worth nothing, for millions of unbelievers too can have that testimony.

God looks for those who will seek His approval, and not just His blessing.

CHAPTER 15

ANOTHER "JESUS" AND HIS MINISTRY

Imagine that you were in Palestine over 1960 years ago and that you heard of the ministry of someone called "Jesus of Nazareth" who was healing the sick. Not having seen Him yourself, you are delighted when you come across a large crowd attending a healing meeting in Jerusalem, with someone called 'Jesus' as the speaker.

As you draw near, you find that up on the platform, along with 'Jesus' (the speaker), Pilate and Herod, and Annas and Caiaphas are also seated. 'Jesus' then comes forward and addresses the crowd saying how honoured they all should feel that day because the two greatest secular rulers of Palestine, "the most honourable Herod and Pilate had graciously come to honour the meeting with their presence". And not only that, but "two great men of God, the Right Reverend Annas and Caiaphas were also there to bless the gathering".

Having spoken these words of introduction, 'Jesus' then invites Herod and Pilate to inaugurate the meeting and to speak a few words. Herod and Pilate both praise 'Jesus' by saying what a lot of good he is doing to the community by his ministry and that he deserves the support of all people. "The Right Reverend Annas and Caiaphas" are then invited by 'Jesus' to say a few words and to "open in prayer". They also praise 'Jesus' highly and invite all the people in their denomination to support 'Jesus's ministry wholeheartedly.

Then 'Jesus' invites Judas Iscariot to say a few words about the financial needs of the ministry. Judas speaks about the tens of thousands of denarii needed to meet all the needs of the ministry. He states that 'forms' are available with the ushers for those who contribute more than 1000 denarii saying that 'Jesus' has promised to pray special prayers for such people (it does not matter whether they are believers or unbelievers - all the rich are welcome and the richer the better!). Herod then gets up and offers to give a tax deduction to all those who contribute to this ministry. The collection is then taken. Then 'Jesus' gives a brief message, demonstrates a few of his miraculous powers that astound the simple people, and heals a few sick people. And then before anyone can meet him, he rushes off with Herod, Pilate, Annas, Caiaphas and Judas Iscariot (and the bags of money) in the royal Roman chariot to the archbishop's palace in central Jerusalem to feast with them.

Somehow, at the end of all this, even though you are only a new convert, with little discernment and experience, you still feel a bit uneasy. All that you saw does not seem to fit in with the accounts that you had heard about Jesus from some of His apostles like Matthew, Peter and John.

Satan, however, is nearby to whisper in your ears, "It is written, 'Do not judge'" (Matt. 7:1). But you tell him, "It is also written, 'Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world'" (1 Jn. 4:1).

Finally, you come to a definite conclusion: "This is not the Jesus that I heard about. This is certainly "another Jesus" (2 Cor. 11:4).

And you are right. It was another 'Jesus'.

How did you come to that conclusion? Because the anointing within you told you the following facts (1 Jn. 2:19,20,27):

1. The real Jesus would not seek any sponsorship from secular rulers or any recommendations from unconverted religious heads for His ministry. Neither would He flatter any of them. When a bishop once came to Jesus, He told him that he needed to be born again (Jn. 3:1-10). Jesus called King Herod 'a fox' (Lk. 13:31,32) and even refused to talk to him when He met him (Lk. 23:8,9).
2. The real Jesus would never ask for money from anyone - not even for His ministry. He made His needs known only to His Father. The Father would then move the people or even a fish (in one instance) to supply Jesus' need (Lk. 8:1-3; Matt. 17:27).
3. The real Jesus would never 'sell' His prayers for any price. Simon the Samaritan magician once offered money for Peter's prayers and Peter rebuked him for such wickedness as to imagine that a divine gift could be bought with money (Acts 8:18-23). Simon repented immediately. But his unrepentant followers have been many through the centuries. The Roman Catholic Popes (claiming to be the successors of the Peter who rebuked Simon) have always sold their prayers for money. Martin Luther stood against all this wickedness in his day, like Peter. But some of the successors of Luther (today's Protestants) have again

gone back to selling their 'prayers' and their 'prophecies' for cash; and alas, many like Simon are willing to pay for them!

Jesus specifically warned us that in the last days, deception would be so subtle that even the elect would almost be deceived - particularly through signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24). If there is any ministry that the elect are to beware of and examine most carefully today, it is the 'sign and wonder' ministry. Jesus told us not to believe it when people say that He came to their room to talk to them (See Matt. 24:26). The resurrected body of Jesus has never left the right hand of the Father in all these (more than 1900) years since His ascension. Paul and Stephen saw Him only there (Acts 7:53; 9:3). Even John did not see Jesus' physical body on Patmos but only symbols representing Jesus (Rev. 1:13-16). When Jesus does leave heaven, it will be for His second coming to earth.

Therefore when they say today that He came to their rooms, *do not believe them*.

Living in the midst of gullible believers, we must not remain without discernment. The Word of God gives a clear light for all who desire it in these last days. If we follow that light alone, we will never be deceived.

CHAPTER 16

THE MARKS OF CULTISM

"Let no one defraud you of salvation's victory prize, no one who indulges in assumed (false) humility and the cult of messenger-worship ... instead of keeping hold on the Head from which the whole body grows with God's increase" (Col.2:18,19 - Berkeley version).

"A people who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, who say, 'Keep to yourself, do not come near to me, for I am holier than you'" (Isa. 65:2,5).

"From among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert" (Acts 20:30,31).

To be cultistic is to be devoted to a person or to a doctrine in addition to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to make tabernacles for 'Elijah' and 'Moses' along with one for the Lord as well. This always brings a cloud that hides the presence of God. The will of God is that our lives be centred in Jesus only (Matt.17:1-8).

The last days will see an increase of cults in Christendom. Many will fall a prey to these, because they will worship the Lord's messengers instead of having a close personal relationship with Christ the Head.

In order to be saved from this danger, it is good to know some of the marks of cultism, so that we can be on guard against it at all times.

There is a difference between being part of a cult and being cultistic.

It is possible for you to be in a church where the doctrines are all basically Scriptural, and the leaders are all godly men, and yet to be cultistic in your attitudes towards your leader, your group and towards other believers in other churches. Cultism is seen, not only in a wrong doctrine, but also in wrong attitudes.

Those who are right in their doctrines and upright in their lives are often unaware of the cultism that there can be in their attitudes.

1. Christ Plus Another Man

The primary mark of cultism is that it has a leader (usually the founder of the group) who is so highly respected that his life is considered to be perfect, and his teachings equal to God's word.

The Holy Spirit called the Jews at Berea "noble minded", because "they examined the Scriptures daily" to check whether Paul's teaching was Scriptural. Paul was a great apostle. But even his teachings needed to be checked with the Scriptures, to see if they tallied (Acts 17:11).

The Bible says that even when prophets speak in a meeting, "the others must judge" (1 Cor. 14:29). What must the others judge? Just what the Bereans judged - whether what the prophets are saying is founded on God's word or not. This is the greatest safeguard against cultism.

Cultistic believers however, respect their leader so much that they accept everything he teaches without checking to see whether it has a sound Scriptural foundation. They are not noble minded like the Bereans.

In a cultistic group, after the founder's death, a successor normally takes over the leadership and he is then recognized as the head of the group. All members of the group are expected to acknowledge their current leader as being the greatest of all living men of God. The result of such an attitude leads to unquestioning submission to the authority and teaching of such a leader. His authority over all members of the group is as absolute as the Pope's and his word is law.

In many cultistic groups, if the leader has a son, he is gradually trained to take over some of the leadership responsibilities within the group. All members of the group then gradually begin to respect the son just as they respected the father.

2. The Bible Plus Another Book

The second mark of cultism is that it has one book in addition to the Bible (usually written by the leader of the group), which is considered for all practical purposes, to be as infallible as the Bible itself.

Many cultistic groups may deny that they give such a place to the writings of their founder. But their attitude towards that one book indicates that they do place it on equality with the Bible. Their actions speak louder than their words.

In the early stages of the formation of a cultistic group, there may have been much sincerity and real devotedness to the Lord. In some cases, the founder himself may have been a godly man. But it is usually at some later point in time, that the followers of the founder codify his writings and teachings into an organized system of doctrine that is given the same authority as the Bible itself.

The founder's personal opinions thus become God's Word for his followers. Where the founder is a godly man, he will never permit such a thing to take place during his lifetime. If however the founder is not a man of God, then he will claim divine authority for his sayings during his lifetime itself.

Members of a cultistic group will read and re-read and re-read the one book written by the founder. Many of them will carry that book with them wherever they travel, and quote from it even in their meetings, with the same authority with which they quote from the Bible. If that book interprets any verse, or explains any doctrine in a particular way, then that is the only possible understanding that the members of the group are expected to have of that verse and of that doctrine.

Constant reading of such a book brainwashes the cultistic believer's mind, so that he gradually begins to interpret God's Word only in the way it is interpreted in the book. Thus, due to the conditioning of his mind, he becomes incapable of receiving any fresh light from the Spirit on many portions of Scripture - because each time he reads such portions, he has already made up his mind as to what they mean. Thus his mind is programmed forever, beyond the reach of the Spirit.

This is similar to the way Roman Catholic priests teach their followers that the Bible should be interpreted only in the way that the Roman Catholic theologians have interpreted it.

Any questioning of the doctrines of the group or of the teachings of the leaders is totally discouraged.

3. Exclusiveness In Fellowship

A third mark of cultism is exclusiveness in fellowship.

Cultistically-minded believers feel that fellowship with other born-again believers outside of their own group has little or no spiritual value. A cultistic group will therefore discourage you from having any contacts with other believers unless it is to make converts for their group. Such a group usually considers itself to be the only true church and believes that all those who belong to Christ's bride will ultimately find their way to them. Their conceit is truly unimaginable!

Such exclusiveness in fellowship, invariably turns many cultistic believers into religious snobs and legalistic Pharisees. The "superior insights" into God's word that they claim to have, develops in them a conceited "We" and "They" attitude towards all other believers. Such cultistic believers are usually totally unaware of their Phariseeism, and would consider themselves as truly devoted and humble followers of Jesus! Such is the power of the human mind to deceive itself! Others outside their group however see their Phariseeism plainly.

True holiness is the product of the grace of God (as Rom. 6:14 makes very plain). And God gives his grace only to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5). Therefore the primary characteristic of genuine holiness has to be humility. Where humility is lacking, the 'holiness' that cultists may appear to have will only be a righteousness of the law (produced by human effort). This is the reason why most cultists tend to boast of their 'holy lives' and their 'holy homes'. If their 'holiness' had been the product of God's grace, they could not possibly be proud of it.

Cultistic believers usually read only those books that are written by the leaders of their own group. Their magazines will have articles written only by their own group members. Most cultistic groups will warn you strongly against reading literature written by other believers - for in their reckoning, Christianity has not seen any other godly men since the days of the apostles, other than the leaders of their own group! Such is the power of cultism to deceive people!

Cultistic believers will sing only those songs that are written by members of their own group. Their song-books will contain only such songs. Other hymns will be considered as having a wrong spirit and therefore dangerous!

Thus cultistic groups preserve their members within their man-made cocoons, keeping them all completely ignorant of what God has done through other godly men in other centuries, or even through other godly men in other Christian churches in their own day.

When one lives in isolation from other God-fearing believers, it is easy to lose contact with reality and to begin to live in a world of self-deception and conceit.

If we cut off *even one* child of God, whom our Heavenly Father has accepted, from the circle of our fellowship, for any reason, it is we who will stand to lose - for God has ordained that it is only "along with *ALL* the saints that we can understand the love of Christ" and attain to "the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:18,19).

This is not to encourage ecumenism or compromise. We may not be able to *work together* with many believers who are in Babylonian systems. We must have nothing to do with such systems, and must always encourage believers to come out of such groups (Rev. 18:4). But our hearts must always be open to fellowship with all God fearing disciples of Jesus. If our Lord Himself has accepted someone, what right have we to reject him, even if he does not agree with us (Lk. 9:49,50)?

Paul and Barnabas are a good example of how it is possible to fellowship together as individuals, without necessarily working together in the same team (Acts 15:36-41). They disagreed strongly on an issue and saw no way of working together any longer. But they did not break fellowship with each other or hate each other or call each other names. If they had done any of these, then they would have become cultists. But they loved one another and worked separately, and no doubt prayed for one another. Cultists find such an arrangement impossible. They can fellowship only with those who are totally subservient to them.

4. No Burden For Evangelism

A fourth mark of cultism is that it has no burden to take the gospel to the unconverted heathen in the world.

While there may be some cultistic groups that engage in evangelism on a limited scale among the heathen, generally speaking, most cultistic believers work only among other Christians. They do not have any desire to preach the gospel to every creature, as Jesus commanded (Mark 16:15). Instead, they major only on making disciples to their own group from among other believers.

Because cultistic groups are usually very close-knit fellowships, many believers find a security within their fold. Those in cultistic groups care for one another, help one another and are very good to one another in many, many ways. Insecure Christians, who are disappointed with the loveless Christianity that they have encountered, and who are now looking for security and acceptance, not in God, but in a community of believers, are often drawn to these groups to find love and fellowship therein. But they are usually unaware of the dangers they will face later on in their Christian life, by being so exclusive.

Cultistic believers will give a lot of attention and affection to a new 'contact', so as to get him to be an integral part of their group. They know that once he has joined them, the new recruit will gradually accept all of their teachings, including the "divine authority" of their leader.

After some years in such a group, most believers will not even consider leaving the group, for fear of being left alone and isolated. This fear coupled with the thought that they may be "falling away from the true church" ensure that weak-minded, cultistic believers are trapped for life.

Cultistic believers will not normally make the sacrifices that God-fearing missionaries have made throughout the centuries, to live in primitive conditions amidst the heathen for many years, in order to bring them to Christ. Cultists usually speak lightly of such missionary work - quite naturally so, for such missionary work is difficult to engage in!

Cultistic preachers, if at all they go to heathen lands, will usually do so only as visiting preachers. They prefer the easy way of appointing local representatives in the heathen lands that they visit, in order to further the work of their group in that region and to arrange meetings for them during their annual visits. In return, such local representatives will be rewarded with gifts, or bribed with an expense-paid trip to the headquarters of the group, once in a while.

The apostles of Christ could not offer such bribes to anyone, because they were poor. Therefore they did a genuine work for God in heathen lands.

5. Devaluation Of Justification By Faith

A fifth mark of cultism is that it devalues justification by faith and teaches works as the means of justification.

Scripture *does* speak of works as the proof of our faith (Jas. 2:24). But Scripture also teaches that "to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Rom. 4:5).

The danger here is not just one of imbalance, but of heresy - for when one biblical truth is carried to an extreme, to the exclusion of other biblical truths, it can become a heresy. And further, if we hold a biblical doctrine, but never teach it in our churches, it will become equivalent to our not believing in it at all. For unspoken truth, like an unused muscle, loses its function gradually and is finally lost altogether to the church.

"The truth does not lie in one extreme or the other. Much less does it lie in the middle. The truth lies in both extremes held together."

We must be careful that our teaching is not a reaction to the extremes that others have gone to. Many preachers have indeed turned the teaching of justification by faith into licence for sin. But that should not make us throw away this Scriptural truth, and go to the opposite extreme of teaching justification by works.

Cultistic believers, generally speaking, preach justification by good works alone. All non-Christian religions do that too. If at all a cultistic believer speaks on Romans 4, it will be in such a way as to prove that Rom. 4 also teaches justification by works! Cultistic believers usually play down the truth of "Christ becoming our righteousness" (1 Cor. 1:30), and major on "the righteousness of the law being fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:4), without realising that the former is the foundation for the latter.

Cultistic believers also devalue the blood of Christ and never speak much about it, except in a mystical, super-spiritual way.

The songs that are sung in any church are usually a good indication of the main beliefs of that church. If you look at the song books of cultistic groups, you will find that there are hardly any songs in them about the forgiveness of sins, or about justification by faith, or about the cleansing of sin by the blood of Jesus.

The blood shed on the cross of Calvary, which Jesus and His apostles spoke about (Lk. 22:20; Eph. 2:13), and which we shall sing about for eternal ages in heaven (Rev. 5:9), finds little or no place in the song-books of cultistic groups.

While it is true that many cultistic believers live very good lives externally, it is also true that many in their midst are weighed down with the heavy burdens that are placed on them by the teachings of their leaders. Many in their midst are perpetually unsure of whether God is happy with them or not, and as a result live under a permanent sense of guilt, and the perpetual condemnation of Satan, the accuser of the brethren. But most of these people would be very reluctant to admit these problems, lest they be dubbed as unbelieving and faithless.

It is through perpetuating such feelings of guilt that cultistic leaders retain their control over most believers in their group. Hence a lot of preaching in cultistic groups tends to be directed towards making people feel *guilty*. And in many cases this sense of guilt is a vague thing, without any specific sin being identified.

While there are many strong-minded believers in such groups, who are able to overcome these feelings, the weaker ones are taken captive by Satan. This is a direct result of the neglect of teaching on justification by faith.

6. Secrecy About Beliefs

A sixth mark of cultism is secrecy about its beliefs.

Cultistic believers are usually evasive in their answers, when questioned by other believers outside their group, about those beliefs of theirs that have no clear Scriptural foundation.

When they cannot prove any of their doctrines from the Scriptures, their standard reply to any questioning believer invariably is, "You need the revelation of the Holy Spirit!" Thus they claim to have some special revelation from God that is not taught in Scripture and that other believers do not have.

Cultistic believers delight in speaking about 'mysteries' that they claim have been 'revealed to them by the Spirit', and which they say are revealed only to the 'wholehearted' - by which term of course they mean those who have accepted their leader and joined their group!

They do not believe that there are any wholehearted believers outside their own group. Thus they entice curious believers to join this "elite inner core" of those who have "light on the truth".

There is a great lust in man's flesh to imagine that he is a special favourite of God - one of His inner circle - to whom God reveals secret 'mysteries' that other believers know nothing about.

Cultism caters to this lust that is found in everybody's flesh.

But what is the truth?

The truth is that every mystery of God has been plainly revealed in the Scriptures.

Ephesians 3:4-6 makes it clear that the mystery of Christ was a mystery only in Old Testament times - not now. Col. 1:26,27 states that God has now manifested this mystery to *all* the saints. There is nothing secretive about any mystery now - for the New Testament has made everything plain. Cultistic believers however will have you believe that there are still some hidden mysteries.

The two *great* mysteries mentioned in the New Testament are concerning godliness and the church (1 Tim. 3:16; Eph. 5:32).

Both of these mysteries are plainly written and taught in the Scriptures. If people have not seen them, it is either because they have not read the Scriptures carefully, or because they are too proud and prejudiced to change their views. But there is certainly no mystery that God has revealed secretly to anyone that is not plainly revealed in the Scriptures.

Beware then of the 'mysteries' that cultists constantly speak of.

7. Uniformity Stressed

A seventh mark of cultism is that it demands uniformity from its adherents.

Cultistic believers feel that unity can exist only where there is uniformity as well. They will misquote 1 Cor. 1:10 - "that you all agree" ("that ye all speak the same thing" - KJV) - to prove their point. Even a minor variation from the accepted norm is therefore frowned upon. They fail to realise that that verse is speaking of an agreement in spirit, and not of an agreement in every little detail.

Cultistic believers do not know how to "give a warm welcome to any brother who has different ideas from yours about what is right and wrong" (Rom. 14:1 -LB). Their warm welcome is reserved only for those who agree 100% with them. In fact, there is no place for the teaching of Rom. 14 in cultistic groups at all, for there is no place for diversity in their midst.

Everything in a cultistic group - including the pattern of the meetings - has to be exactly according to the mould that is found in the headquarters of the group. Many cultistic believers imitate even the cultural mannerisms of their leaders!

There is a sub-conscious pressure exerted constantly on members of a cultistic group to conform in all matters to the pattern laid down by its headquarters, and practised there.

All believers who are willing to be poured into such a mould like dumb zombies (mindless people) or robots, without asking any questions, are considered to be humble and wholehearted and a part of 'the elect'.

All others are considered as being proud and 'without light!!!'

Allegiance to the group is obtained by veiled warnings of the consequences of rebellion against the leaders. Frightening tales are told to group-members of "how badly it has gone" with those who dared to disagree with the leaders of the group. Thus, weak-minded believers are put under pressure to conform. Thus they gradually lose their discerning faculties and become enslaved to the group.

Jesus came to set people free. But cultism imprisons people. Many believers need to be freed from the prisons that cultistic preachers have locked them up in.

The Jews in Jesus' day were slaves not only to sin, but also to the traditions and opinions of their religious leaders. Jesus had to set them free from both these slaveries. Many who accepted Jesus' message of freedom from sin, were still afraid of their religious leaders, and so did not break away from "the

traditions of the elders", even where they saw these to be unScriptural, lest they be excommunicated from their group (Jn.12:42,43).

We see how strong such a slavery to the opinions of religious leaders can be, from the fact that even after twenty years of living a Spirit-filled life, Peter was afraid of publicly breaking away from Jewish traditions, for fear of offending some Jewish Christian leaders. Paul, who was only a junior apostle at that time, was the only one who had the boldness to confront Peter publicly on that occasion, and to expose Peter's following of "the traditions of the elders". Even the senior apostle, Barnabas, did not have the boldness to do that (Gal.2:11-21).

God does not desire that anyone should conform to an external form or pattern, under pressure, without personal conviction. The only obedience that God ever asks for, is one that is given cheerfully and freely - for "God loves a cheerful giver" - of obedience as well as of money (2 Cor.9:7). He hates compulsion.

God never interferes with our free will. He always gives us freedom of choice -to obey Him or to disobey Him - the same freedom that He gave Adam and Eve in Eden. For God knows that it is only in such an atmosphere of perfect freedom that true holiness can develop and flourish.

The holiness that is genuine is one that is perfected in the fear of God and not in the fear of men (2 Cor.7:1).

The obedience that God desires is one that is prompted by love and gratitude to Him, and not by fear of judgment or hope of reward.

All obedience that arises from the pressure to conform to a pattern, or that is done in order to gain acceptance in a group is a dead work. It has no value before God. It will only get you the honour of others in your group.

And this is where God will test all of us to see what we desire - His approval or the approval of our fellow-believers.

Staying Free

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of bondage." (Gal. 5:1).

The greatest battle in the Christian life is not the battle against anger or against dirty thoughts. It is the battle against the desire to obtain the approval of men. This is where we must determine to live before God's face alone, if we want to stay free.

You may live a good life, even if you have a cultistic attitude. But you will never be able to fulfil all of God's purpose for your life on earth with such an attitude. The kingdom of God can be possessed only by those who do violence to the prison-bars that have been erected around them by cultistic preachers.

We must break free from all slavery to the opinions of men, at any cost, if we are to enter into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

CHAPTER 17

SIGNS THAT POINT TO THE RETURN OF CHRIST

The world has never been the same since 1939. Something happened at that time that started a chain reaction in many areas that will end only with the second coming of Christ.

Jesus said that no one but the Father knew the exact day and hour when He would return. But He also said that it would be possible for us, if we were observant of the signs that He predicted, to know when His coming was near (Matt. 24:33,36).

It is essential therefore that we should take note of these signs.

1. Wars

(Matt. 24:7). Jesus said that the last days would be like the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37). Violence was one of the pre-eminent characteristics of Noah's day. "The earth was filled with violence" (Gen. 6:11,13). That sounds almost like a description of the days in which we live. Terrorism, hijacks, riots, murders, arson and wars between nations are now an every day occurrence. There are many reasons for this. The abolition of the death penalty for murder (which God instituted in Gen. 9) in many countries has increased the murder rate. Violence openly and unashamedly depicted and glamourised on the cinema screen has educated people from childhood onwards to be violent. The advent of television in the '50s and of the video tape in the '70s has helped spread the cult of violence far and wide. The popularity of '*karate*' and other forms of martial arts (all of which expose people to demon possession) has also spread the message of violence. All of this has come like a flood since 1939 - when Satan unleashed World War II on this earth. The hatred and bitterness that was let loose at that time opened the door for a flood of evil spirits to invade humanity. Wars have been a constant feature of world history ever since 1939. The atom bomb exploded in 1945 ushered in the nuclear age with all its consequences.

The world has never in man's history, seen such violence or such a spate of wars as we have seen, since the Second World War.

2. Famines

(Matt. 24:7). There have always been famines throughout man's history. But with the increasing world population, famines have, since World War II, slain millions - more than ever in world history. Drought and crop failures have become common since 1950, in many lands. These will be more common as we approach the end.

3. Natural Calamities

(Matt. 24:7). Earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and erupting volcanoes are also some of the natural calamities that we can expect to see increasing as we approach the end. These also have increased greatly since World War II. And it will be more so in the days to come.

4. Increase Of Knowledge

(Dan. 12:4). Daniel prophesied that knowledge would increase at the time of the end. All the scientific knowledge that man accumulated since the time of Adam and up to 1939, (that is, in over 5900 years) has increased by twenty times since 1939. A graph of man's increase in knowledge would show a very flat gradient for 99% of his history and then a sudden sharp rise upwards to twenty times the height in the last period of his history. Here is another clear pointer to the coming of Christ.

5. Worldwide Travel

(Dan. 12:4). For 5800 years, man travelled at almost the same pace - mostly on animal-back. Even in 1900, the fastest speed at which man could travel was just 50 miles per hour. But today man has travelled in space at 24,000 miles per hour. Worldwide tourism and travel have become popular only after World War II. Daniel predicted this as one of the signs of the end - "many will travel to and fro".

6. Love Of Pleasure

(2 Tim. 3:4). Paul specifically stated here that men would be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God in the last days. Along with violence, sex was the other major preoccupation of people in Noah's day (Gen. 6:2). This is what we see in the world today too. There has always been sexual immorality among

men since the earliest times. But never in human history has it been practised so openly and unashamedly as today. Here again there has been a progressive deterioration in moral standards worldwide since World War II. A flood of unclean demons have invaded the earth. Television, the cinema and video tapes have all served Satan's purposes in promoting the cult of pleasure seeking.

Paul said that one of the doctrines of demons in the last days would be the forbidding of marriage (1 Tim. 4:1-3). This is seen today in two extremes. One is the extreme asceticism of some groups that teach that one must remain unmarried to be holy. At the other end of the spectrum are those who no longer believe in getting married but in just living together. Since man would be "without natural affection" in the last days, it is not surprising that he feels that abortion also is perfectly right (2 Tim. 3:3). The hands of most doctors today are more bloodied with the blood of murdered babies, through abortions, than Herod's in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16).

Jesus said that the last days would be like the days of Lot (in Sodom). Homosexual relationships are now accepted as normal. "They declare their sin as Sodom. They do not hide it" (Isa. 3:9). And so God has given them up. The terrible disease of AIDS is a part of God's judgment on this sin (Rom. 1:26-28).

The ruining of millions of young people through drugs is another evidence that this pleasure-loving generation is rushing headlong to the pit of destruction.

7. The Spirit Of Rebellion

(2 Tim. 3:2). The world has never seen rebellion on such a scale, by children against their parents, students against their teachers and servants against their masters (in offices, factories, etc), as it has since World War II. Higher education has made today's young people arrogant and discourteous to their parents and to older people in general. This spirit of rebellion has penetrated Christendom too. Hence we see the spectacle all over the world, of pastors and elders at the mercy of young people in their congregations, having to please them in everything.

Women have started going to work outside the home - more than ever in human history, since World War II. They have started earning on their own, and this has made the average woman today arrogant and independent and unwilling to accept her God-appointed place under man's headship. This spirit has penetrated into Christendom too. All this but goes to show how widespread and deep-rooted the spirit of rebellion against authority is.

Women today, no longer desire to be mothers primarily. Just as women have become prime ministers around the world, since World War II (a thing that was almost unheard of prior to that time), even so, women have also started becoming elders and priests and teachers in Christendom. This is the spirit of Jezebel (Rev. 2:20) and must be opposed in the church by the spirit and power of Elijah, as in the Old Testament times (1 Ki. 20:21-23).

8. Falling Away From The Faith

(1 Tim. 4:1). This is a very significant verse, particularly when read in its context. The Spirit *emphatically* states that some will depart from the faith in the latter times. The previous verse refers to the secret of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16). It is godliness that Christendom has fallen away from first of all. This has led to Christendom falling away from obedience to the commandments of Jesus (particularly the ones listed in Matt. 5-7). This in turn has led to the preaching of false grace. All this was present even in the first century. But it has increased tremendously since World War II.

The ecumenical movement, false cults, counterfeit gifts of the Holy Spirit, etc, have all multiplied greatly in the last forty years.

Jesus spoke thrice of deception in relation to the last days (Matt. 24:5,11,24). He spoke there of how false prophets would try to deceive even the elect with signs and wonders. There has been a spate of signs and wonders by various so-called 'healing-ministries' in Christendom since 1945 - much of which has been a part of this counterfeit working that Jesus specifically warned us about. We see today that even many

believers are deceived by these signs and wonders - because they are done in the name of Jesus. They do not bother to verify if the man doing them is God-fearing and leading others to obedience to all of Jesus' commandments like the apostles did. This is why they are deceived (Read Deut. 13:1-4).

9. Israel

(Lk. 21:29-32). Jesus spoke here about all the trees putting forth leaves (nations becoming independent). This has never happened in the history of the world on the scale that it has happened since 1945. India became independent in 1947. Many other nations also gained their independence after 1945. But above all, Jesus told us to watch the fig tree, Israel (Lk. 21:29). Jesus came to Israel, looking for fruit on that fig tree. All that He saw however, were the leaves of empty religious rituals; and He cursed the fig tree and it withered up (Matt. 21:19). Forty years after the crucifixion of Jesus, God allowed the Roman army led by General Titus, to enter Jerusalem and destroy the Jewish temple. The Jews were then scattered to the uttermost parts of the earth. For nearly 1900 years, this fig tree remained withered.

But Jesus said that we were to watch for the time that the same withered fig tree would put forth leaves again. The slaughter of millions of Jews in World War II set aflame world sympathy for the Jews, that ended with their coming back to their homeland in May 1948. In June 1967, they recaptured Jerusalem as well. The fig tree had begun to put forth its leaves. Jesus had stated that Jerusalem would be ruled by Gentile (non-Jewish) nations until the "times of the Gentiles" were fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). We are now living in that time of which Jesus spoke.

God's Time Table

God gave man six days to labour and ordained the seventh day to be a day of rest. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years (2 Pet. 3:8). This gives man 6000 years to labour. The seventh millennium (1000 year period) will be the millennium of rest, when Jesus rules on earth as King. From Adam to Christ's coming was about 4000 years. Now we are nearing the end of the 2000 years since Christ came, that completes man's 'six days'.

The Israelites were given two days in the wilderness to sanctify themselves and then on the *third day* the Lord came down into their midst (Ex. 19:10,11,16). The church also has been given 2000 years (2 days) to sanctify and prepare herself for the coming of the Lord. "On the *third day*, He will raise us up" (Hos. 6:2).

Our Responsibility

To be ready for Christ's return, you must first of all turn from all the sin that you know of, and acknowledge to God that you are a guilty sinner. Then believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died to take punishment for all your sins, and that He rose again from the dead and is living in heaven today. Ask Him to come into your life as your Saviour and Lord, to forgive your sins and to make you a child of God.

"Everyone who has the hope of Christ's return will purify himself just as He is pure" (1 Jn. 3:3). According to this verse, the only evidence that we have the hope of Christ's return is that we purify ourselves. And we do not stop purifying ourselves until we attain our Master's standard of purity. This is why the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost - that He may show us the glory of Christ in the mirror of God's Word and progressively transform us into that likeness from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18).

The Two Calls Of The Holy Spirit

The Bible closes (in its final book) with two calls of the Spirit:

1. *To the world of unbelievers: "Come" (Rev. 22:17), repent and believe in Christ.*
2. *To believers: "Overcome" (Rev. 2:7 to 3:21), and be a part of Christ's bride.*

CHAPTER 18

BEING READY FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD

When we think of the return of Christ to this earth, the important thing is not to know the exact date, but to be spiritually ready for His return. Many who are familiar with the prophecies concerning His coming, are not purifying themselves daily to His standard of purity. Thereby they prove that the hope of Christ's coming is a dead hope in them and not a living hope (1 Jn. 3:3). On the other hand, even though we may not understand all the details of Biblical prophecies or the interpretation of the symbols in the book of Revelation, yet it is possible for us to be 100% prepared and ready for His coming, if we concentrate on what Jesus told us to concentrate on.

When Jesus told His disciples about His return in Matt. 24, He emphasised more than once that they should be on the alert (Matt. 24:42,44; 25:13). To be spiritually alert and ready at all times is then the all important thing - not the knowledge of prophetic facts.

In Matt. 25 (which follows on from the prophecies of Matt. 24), Jesus deals with three areas where we are called to be alert and faithful in order to be ready for His coming.

Faithfulness In The Hidden Life

(Matt. 25:1-13). In this parable, Jesus spoke of ten virgins. Notice that none of them were harlots (See Jas. 4:4 for a definition of spiritual harlotry). They were all virgins. In other words, they had a good testimony before men. Their lights were all burning (Matt. 5:16). Their good works were seen by others. Yet among all these virgins, only five were wise. But this was not obvious to everyone at the beginning. Only five had taken oil with them in their flasks (v. 4).

That oil in the flask was not visible in the night, like the light was, and speaks of our hidden life before God that men cannot see in the darkness of this world. All of us have a flask. The question is whether we have any oil in it or not.

Oil is used throughout the Scriptures as a symbol of the Holy Spirit and refers here to that life of God that the Holy Spirit communicates to our spirit. The outward manifestation of that life is the light (Jn. 1:4). The inner content is the oil. Many are taken up with their outward testimony alone. This is their folly. It is in times of trial and testing that we find that the outward light alone is insufficient. One needs an inner content of the divine life to carry us through triumphantly.

"If you are weak in a crisis, you are weak in reality" (Prov. 24:16). The crises of life show us how strong or weak we are. In this parable, the crisis was that the bridegroom delayed his coming. It is time that proves the reality of our spirituality.

He who has faith endures until the end and is saved. It is time also that proves who has an inner content in his life and who does not. Many are like the seed that sprouted up immediately, but have no inner life. There is no depth of soil in their hearts (Mk. 4:5).

This is why it is difficult to assess new believers concerning their spirituality, or their wholeheartedness. Time will reveal everything, if we have the patience to wait. The way to be ready for Christ's coming, then, is to have an inner life of purity and faithfulness before God's face - in our thoughts, attitudes and motives, that people around us cannot see. If we do not have this, we are deceiving ourselves if we think we are ready for Christ's coming.

Faithfulness In Our Ministry

(Matt. 25:14-30). In the second parable, the emphasis is on the faithful use of the talents that God has given us. These talents represent material possessions, money, natural abilities, opportunities in life, spiritual gifts, etc.

Not all are equal in this area - for we see in the parable that one got five, another two and another only one. But all had equal time to be faithful with what they had received. To whom more is given, from him more is required. Therefore the one who multiplied his two into four got the same reward as the one who multiplied his five into ten.

Judgment however fell on the one who buried his talent 'in the ground' (v. 18) - that is the one who used his God-given talents for this world and not for God.

No one can say that he has received nothing - for all have received some talent or other from God. The question is what we use these talents for. What we use for ourselves is equivalent to the talent buried in the ground. What we use for the glory of God alone is what will be counted as eternal riches. By this standard we can see the poverty of the vast majority of believers.

Our motto should be "All for God and nothing for self". Then we will be ready for Christ's return. We cannot be Jesus' disciples if we have not forsaken all that we have.

One who is not using all his God-given possessions and gifts for the Lord is only deceiving himself if he claims to be ready for Christ's return.

Faithfulness In Serving Our Fellow Believers

(Matt. 25:31-46). In the last section, it is our attitude towards our fellow believers in need that Jesus deals with. That need may be spiritual or physical.

Here we see that some inherit the kingdom because they served their fellow believers as unto the Lord. Their service was so much in secret that their left hand did not know what their right hand was doing (Matt. 6:3). So much so, that when the Lord reminds them of the good that they did, they do not even remember it! (Matt. 25:38).

Jesus also taught here that any service that we do to the least of His brothers is considered as service done to Him (Matt. 25:40). It is significant that He speaks of the least here, for our tendency is to serve the most important believers and to ignore the poor and the despised! Those who are occupied with eating and drinking, buying and selling, and building and planting for themselves alone, will certainly be left behind when Jesus returns (Lk. 17:28,34).

Only those whose service for the Lord involved a loving concern to serve their fellow believers, will be taken up. In another passage, Jesus spoke of another group of people - who are a contrast to this group. These are the ones who remember all the good things that they have done in the name of the Lord. They are also at the judgment seat, and they remind the Lord that they have expelled demons, preached, healed the sick in Jesus' name, etc. But they are rejected by the Lord, even though they did all these things, because they lacked the very first requirement, of a hidden life of holiness before God. They were taken up with the greatness of their gifts.

It is interesting to see the contrast.

Those who healed the sick are cast out (Matt. 7:22,23). But those who merely visited the sick inherit the kingdom! (Matt. 25:34,36). God does not ask us to heal the sick if we have not been given the 'talent' of the gift of healing. But we can visit the sick and encourage them and bless them in the name of the Lord. We shall then find that we are ready for Christ's return, while many who healed the sick are left behind! To serve others in this way, we have to be willing to be inconvenienced.

Those who never want their daily plans to be disturbed by interruption from needy people, will certainly be left behind when Jesus comes. We have to sacrifice time, money, and above all, our own plans and our will, if we are to serve others in the name of the Lord.

Selfishness is so rooted in our flesh that even when we have cleansed ourselves of the sins of lusting with our eyes, anger and covetousness, it is still possible to live just for ourselves. There can be a holiness, like the holiness of the Pharisees, which is occupied only with ourselves, and which does not deliver us from self-centredness. This is a counterfeit of the true holiness; yet it is easy to be deceived by it.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us ... Forgive us ... Deliver us ..." (Matt. 6:11-13). A sanctification that does not give us a concern for others who are still in their sins and need, is a worthless counterfeit that is fit for only being thrown into the garbage bin.

We need to re-orient our way of thinking ('renew our mind' Rom. 12:2) so that we put ourselves 'in the shoes of others' and try and understand what they are going through. This is Christ-like thoughtfulness that prepares us to inherit the coming kingdom. One who thinks only of his own and his family's need, however 'holy' he may be, is only deceiving himself if he thinks that he is ready for Christ's coming.

CHAPTER 19

EVANGELISM AND MAKING DISCIPLES

It is a common mistake among Christians to be taken up with one Scripture on a subject, to the exclusion of other Scriptures on the same subject.

Satan's first attempt (as we see in the temptation that came to Jesus in the wilderness) is to get us to act on the basis of our need ("You are hungry, so turn the stones to bread") or by ourselves apart from the will of God. Jesus rejected that temptation by saying that He would act only according to what God told Him (Matt. 4:4). This is what we must do too.

But when Satan sees that we, like Jesus, take our stand on the word of God ("It is written ..."), his next wile is to quote the word of God itself to us. He came to Jesus in the second temptation with the words "It is written ..." (Matt. 4:6). If Jesus had not known the whole counsel of God, He would have been deceived by Satan's quotation of Scripture just as many believers are deceived today. But Jesus effectively rejected that temptation too, by saying, "It is also written ..." (Matt. 4:7).

So it is essential that we know the whole purpose of God. The whole truth is found in "It is written ..." and "It is also written ...". It is written, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mk. 16:15). It is also written, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19 NASB). In a careful consideration and obedience to both the above commissions, we can find the way to fulfil the will of God for us in this day and age.

Evangelism

The first step obviously is to go into all the world, as Jesus has commanded in Mk. 16:15. This command is not a command to the individual believer, but to the whole body of Christ. It is humanly impossible for any single individual for any local church all by itself, to preach to every human being in the world. Each of us can, at best, have but a small part in this task.

But that part, however small it be, we must fulfil. Here is where Acts 1:8 comes into the picture. Each believer must have the Holy Spirit coming upon him and enduing him with power, if he is to be an effective witness for Christ. Note that all are not called to be evangelists (for Christ has given only some as evangelists to His body, the church - Eph. 4:11), but all are called to be witnesses.

An evangelist has a wider field of work than a witness. A witness has to proclaim Christ in the circle in which he moves and works - to relatives, neighbours, fellow workers in his office and to the others he

comes across daily, to whom he may happen to be led to while travelling, etc. Here is where we can all be witnesses, whatever our earthly occupations may be.

But Christ has also given to the church evangelists, not however for 'winning souls' or for 'bringing people to Christ' as is commonly heard, but for 'building up the body of Christ' (as Eph. 4:11,12 makes plain). Here is where the biggest failure of much evangelism lies. Today's evangelism, unfortunately, is generally speaking not related to building up the body of Christ, but only to the saving of individual souls. These souls are then usually sent back to their dead, denominational 'churches' where they soon get lost all over again, or at best, become lukewarm, fit for being spat out of the mouth of the Lord (Rev. 3:16). Either way, they are not built into the body of Christ; and thus only Satan's purposes are accomplished, for the person has then become twofold a child of hell (Matt. 23:15) - first because he was lost to start with, and secondly because now he has been deluded by some evangelist into thinking that he is saved! The only thing that is built up through such evangelism is the evangelist's private empire; and the only reason for such evangelism usually is the seeking of the honour of men.

Jesus called evangelists 'fishers of men'. But evangelism that is done in cooperation with unconverted bishops and pastors is like fishing with a net full of holes. One cannot imagine Jesus or Peter inviting Annas or Caiaphas to sit on the platform and inaugurate their evangelistic meetings! Yet today's evangelists do just that - and not just that, they even praise these unconverted bishops. Such evangelists are compromisers of the first order.

Further, the fish that are caught in the net are allowed to go back into the sea (dead denominations), to be caught all over again at the next evangelistic crusade, only to be let back into the sea again. This process is repeated again and again by the many evangelists conducting interdenominational crusades these days, with each evangelist counting hands, decision cards, etc. This type of evangelism brings joy, not to the angels of heaven but only to the hosts of Satan! For, after all, how can angels rejoice over those who are made twofold the children of hell?

Signs and wonders may accompany the proclamation of the message that Jesus forgives sins and heals diseases. But the question that remains is how many have been built into the body of Christ as a result of such evangelism.

The apostles (in the first century) never engaged in this type of evangelism. With them, the converts were placed in local churches to be made into disciples and built up. Unfortunately, the 20th century has seen the emergence of the ministry of the healing-evangelist as the pre-eminent ministry in Christendom. This is but another indication of how far Christendom has drifted from the teaching of God's word.

The five ministries mentioned in Eph. 4:11 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers) are listed in their order of priority in 1 Cor. 12:28. There we are told, "*God has appointed in the church: First, apostles: Second, prophets: Third, teachers: then miracles, then gifts of healing (that is, evangelists, for all evangelists in the New Testament had the gift of healing); and (in the same category, again) helps (helpers of the weak), administrations (literally, 'the ones who steer the ships') (that is, shepherds or pastors).*" This makes it clear that in God's eyes, the ministries of the apostles, prophets and teachers are more important to the building up of the body of Christ than that of the evangelists. The evangelist can find his proper place in his ministry only as he takes his appointed place beneath the ministries of the apostle, prophet and teacher. Then and only then can his ministry serve to the building up of the body of Christ. Here is where twentieth century evangelism has gone astray from the word of God.

Making Disciples

The purpose of evangelism (as commanded in Mk. 16:15) can be understood only as seen in the light of the commission to make disciples in every nation of the world (Matt. 29:18). This is the whole plan of God for the unconverted.

The convert must be made into a disciple. Unfortunately today even the so-called convert is not often a *true* convert, for in many cases he has not repented properly. In the evangelistic meeting he was told *only to believe*, without even a word being mentioned about repentance. Most of today's converts are therefore like premature babies, pulled out by impatient midwives ('evangelists') in their lust for statistics, when the babies were not yet ready to be born. These premature babies then either die, or live as problem cases for the rest of their lives. The angels rejoice over sinners who repent, not over sinners who merely believe (Lk. 15:7,10).

But even where there has been a thorough repentance, and a person has been truly converted, he must then be led on to discipleship, to fulfil God's will for him.

Evangelism that does not lead on to discipleship is an incomplete job. Often, it is the evangelist's desire to build his own kingdom that prevents him from working together with those who can make his 'converts' into disciples.

We do not have to judge such preachers, for we are told not to judge. But they will certainly have to answer to the Lord for hindering their converts from becoming disciples.

Let us look at the commission in Mk. 16:15 along with the one in Matt. 28:19,20 and try and understand the whole purpose of God.

The first step of leading people to repentance and faith must culminate in water baptism (as Jesus made plain in Mk. 16:16). Those evangelists who do not preach water baptism for fear of offending unconverted bishops etc, are not preaching the way Peter preached it on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38).

Further, in Matthew 28:19, the Lord commands us to make disciples. This involves leading these converts to be detached from an inordinate love for their relatives that hinders them from following the Lord (Lk. 14:26), to be detached from material possessions (Lk. 14:33) and leading them to take up the cross daily for the rest of their lives (Lk. 14:27). These are the three minimum requirements for becoming a disciple.

Matt. 28:19 then repeats the necessity of water baptism. Although baptism is repeated in both commissions, it is rare indeed to find an evangelist today who has the courage to preach it. They fear men more than they fear God; preferring to be interdenominational and thus great in the eyes of men, rather than preach the whole counsel of God and be great in His eyes.

Matt. 28:20 goes on to say that this disciple must then be taught every single thing that Jesus commanded - and not only that, but be taught to obey and practise every single command of Jesus. One has to only look through Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7 to see some of the things that Jesus commanded - which most believers do not even bother to obey.

So we see what a tremendous task it is to fulfil *both* commissions together.

The need now in our land is for those who have been gripped by the necessity of proclaiming the whole counsel of God, and who are wholeheartedly obedient themselves (as far as they have light) to all that Jesus commanded, and who passionately desire to build the body of Christ.

Jesus said that His disciples would be identified by one mark - their love for one another.

Mark that! It is not by large numbers that the disciples are identified, or by their wealth, but by their fervent mutual love. The evangelistic healing meeting that draw thousands to hear the message must lead on to the establishment of a local church in that locality, where the disciples love one another.

Yet the sad thing is that in the places where repeated evangelistic, healing crusades are held year after year, it is difficult to find even one church about which it can be said that the members therein do not fight with one another or backbite against one another, etc, leave alone love one another. One can understand if the new converts are still unable to live a victorious life. But what shall we say if strife and immaturity characterise even the elders of the churches in our land?

This is the clearest indication that the great commission of Matt. 28:19,20 - discipleship and total obedience to the commandments of Jesus - has been totally ignored. The commission of Mk. 16:15 (faith and water baptism) alone is obeyed, and that too in many cases only partially (water baptism being left out).

In Mk. 16:15-20, the emphasis is on evangelism, the message being confirmed by signs and wonders done by the Lord. In Matt. 28:19,20, the emphasis is on discipleship, the disciple's life being manifested by total obedience to Jesus' commandments. Multitudes of Christians are taken up with the former; very, very few with the latter. Yet the former without the latter is as incomplete and worthless as half a human body. But who has eyes to see this?

In Jesus' ministry, we read that great multitudes followed Him, because of His evangelistic, healing ministry. He immediately turned around and taught them about discipleship (Lk. 14:25,26). Would that today's evangelists would do the same, either themselves or along with apostles, prophets, teachers and shepherds who can complete the work they have begun.

When Jesus preached discipleship to the multitudes, it soon dwindled down to a handful of eleven disciples (Compare Jn. 6:2 with 70). The remaining folk found the message too hard, and left (Jn. 6:60,66). But it was with those eleven disciples that God accomplished His purposes in the world and carried on the work that Jesus began.

Today we are to carry on the same ministry as His Body on earth. After the evangelist has gathered the multitude, we are to lead the converts to discipleship and obedience. Thus and thus alone will the body of Christ be built.

CHAPTER 20

OUR DISTINCTIVE CALLING AS A CHURCH

What is our distinctive calling as a church in the different localities in our country where God has placed us?

There are at least *seven areas* where our emphasis is to be different from what is currently the norm in much of Christendom, if we are to be uncompromisingly true to God's Word.

1. Not Greatness But Holiness

Babylon (the false church) is called 'the great' eleven times in the Book of Revelation. Jerusalem (the bride of Christ) on the other hand is called 'the holy city' (see Rev. 12-21).

If we seek to be great in the eyes of the world as a 'church', then we drift towards Babylon. Jesus said that what men esteemed highly was an abomination in God's sight (Lk. 16:15). We have therefore to check up constantly whether there is anything in our church (even if it be music or the preaching) that is said or done to impress men. Numbers are always impressive in men's eyes. If we are keen on presenting the statistics of the growth of our church to others, that is one sure mark of Babylon. This does not mean that God is not interested in adding to our numbers. He certainly is - if He finds that we are a flock that He can recommend to others of His sheep (who are wholehearted). But growth in numbers is not necessarily an indication of God's blessing - for the heretical cults are also growing in numbers and so are heathen religions. And very often their statistics are more impressive than those of many Christian groups!

Holiness is the characteristic of the true church (Jerusalem). So growth in Jerusalem is measured by growth in holiness - which includes love for one another. Jesus said that the way to life was narrow and that few would find it. Those who proclaim the narrow gate as narrow as Jesus made it will find that very

few join their church (Matt. 7:13,14). If, on the other hand, we make the gate broader than Jesus made it, we shall increase in numbers easily. This is where much of today's Christendom has gone astray. Jesus spoke about the narrow gate and the narrow way in the context of the 'sermon on the mount' (Matt. ch. 5-7). The content of those chapters is therefore what constitutes the narrow gate and the narrow way.

1 Cor. 3:13 makes it clear that it is the quality of our work that will be assessed by the Lord in the final day - and not the quantity. A ministry of quality can come only out of one who lives in constant self-judgment - "who lives with the consuming fire and the everlasting burning" (Isa. 13:14).

Here, the church is to be different from all the denominations around us. Once this distinction is lost, we will end up as another dead denomination.

2. Not The External Life First But The Internal

In the old covenant, the emphasis was always on the external - "because of the hardness of men's hearts" (Matt. 19:8). The law emphasised cleanliness in the external. The new covenant, in contrast, emphasised cleanliness "inside the cup" first (Matt. 23:25,26). Jesus said in that verse (v. 26) that once the inside was cleansed, the outside would automatically become clean, so that there would be no need to clean the outside at all. One can see this clearly from Matt. 5:21-30. If one has cleansed his heart from anger, there would be no danger of his committing murder externally. Likewise, if he has cleansed his heart from sexually dirty thoughts, there would be no danger of his committing adultery externally. Clean the inside of the cup and the outside will automatically become clean.

Where the emphasis in a church is primarily on the externals - avoiding cinema going, smoking, drinking, gambling and wearing ornaments etc., - such a church will only become an old covenant church! The way to get rid of external evils is *not* by concentrating on them first, but rather on the *internal* worldly attitude of mind which produces those external evils.

There can be no inward cleansing without self-judgment. It is impossible to build the church unless this inward cleansing is constantly preached. The Bible tells us to exhort one another daily in the church to avoid being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13; 10:25). Most Christian 'churches' have no interest in such preaching, except perhaps occasionally. Certainly not daily!. Hence they breed Pharisees with cups clean on the outside only. Here the bride of Christ must be different.

3. Not Restless Activity But Obedience

The emphasis in denominational Christianity is always on 'activity' - street preaching, house to house visitation, missionary work, etc. All this is good. But unfortunately it has taken the place of total obedience to God's word in the minds of most believers.

Jesus said that we were to teach all Christians to obey all that He had taught (Matt. 28:20). God requires obedience more than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22). It is a heathen concept that God requires us to go through various forms of physical suffering in order to prove our love for Him. This is very prevalent in the heathen culture in India and has unfortunately pervaded Christianity in our country as well. Spirituality is therefore seen as giving up one's job and going out to some difficult place, undergoing various hardships, etc. All this may involve much sacrifice, but it can never be a substitute for obedience to God's Word.

Our love for Jesus is not proved by sacrifice but by obedience to His commandments - as Jesus Himself said in Jn. 14:15. To obey everything that Jesus has taught us in Matt. 5-7 is a far greater proof of our love for Him than even giving Him 50% of our salary or giving up our job and becoming a missionary.

Denominational Christianity is clearly pictured in the restless activity of Martha (Lk. 10:39-42). She was sincere, sacrificial, unselfish and zealous in her service for the Lord in the kitchen. Yet the Lord rebuked her. Her spirit was sour and critical of her sister Mary who apparently was not doing anything sacrificial for the Lord. Mary was sitting quietly at the Lord's feet waiting to hear His word before doing anything for Him.

This is to be our attitude - not restless activity but hearing what the Lord has to say to us and then *obeying that* - not doing what our own reason suggests but doing the will of God.

4. Not Evangelism Without Disciple-Making

Some believers consider God's Word as having almost only one command - to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15). This command must certainly be obeyed by the total body of Christ worldwide - particularly by those who are given by Christ as evangelists to the body (Eph. 4:11). But the work will still be unfinished, if this command of Christ is not balanced by His other command to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19).

We thank God for all those who, at much personal cost, have gone out into all the world and preached the gospel to those who have never heard the name of Jesus. But it is a sad fact of twentieth century evangelism that the threefold command of Matt. 28:19,20 - to make disciples, to immerse them in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to teach them obedience to all of Jesus' commands - is almost totally ignored.

When multitudes of believers are emphasising evangelism without making disciples, it becomes our task to restore the lost emphasis - to make disciples - and to complete the unfinished task.

Many think only of the unfinished task of various areas of the world yet to be reached with the gospel. God gives that burden to those who have that evangelistic calling. But to others God gives the equally important task - the more difficult task - of making these converts into disciples.

This can be illustrated by a carpentry shop engaged in making tables where multitudes of carpenters are busy making just the four legs and very few are employed in making the table tops to complete the tables. The result is that the shop is piled high with unfinished tables and the carpenters are still busy producing more half-finished jobs. We can be sure that Jesus, in the carpentry shop at Nazareth, always finished a table before moving on to the next one. He always believed in finishing a task begun (even as He cried, "It is finished", on the cross) and He is the same today. We are co-workers with Him and must also believe in a finished job. All converts must be made into disciples.

5. Not Old-Testament Giving But New Testament Giving

Most believers are totally ignorant of the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. This has led to preachers taking advantage of them by imposing on them the Old Testament 'tithe' as a command.

When Jesus spoke to the Pharisees, who were still under the old covenant, He told them to tithe - for Moses had commanded this (Matt. 23:23). But when speaking to His disciples and introducing them to the new covenant, He never spoke a word about the *percentage* of their gifts but only about their *motive* (Matt. 6:1-4). The *quality* of our giving is what is emphasised in the new covenant and not the *quantity* (See 2 Cor. 9:7 also). The only question that now remains is whether we want to be Pharisees or Jesus' disciples!

Christian magazines these days are full of exhortations to believers to tithe and to support various ministries and preachers. Almost all Christian magazines have become polluted by this commercial spirit of Babylon - begging for money for various projects in the Name of Christ.

The apostles never once engaged in this type of begging for money for their own ministries. Jesus never did it either. What we see today is in direct contrast to the examples of Jesus and the apostles. Yet most believers are totally ignorant of this fact, and continue to blindly support this type of begging, thus polluting themselves as well.

The New Testament speaks much more about giving our bodies to the Lord than our money (Rom. 12:1). And this is what we must always emphasise in the church. Our financial needs will be taken care of by the Lord if we seek His kingdom first (Matt. 6:33).

6. Not The Power Of Man But The Power Of God

Human soul-power has become a deceptive counterfeit of Holy Spirit power in Christendom today. Much of charismatic Christianity today is riddled with soul-power masquerading as the power of the Holy Spirit. To discern between soul and spirit is the great need of the hour if we are to escape deception; and this is where we have to focus the light of God's Word strongly in these days in the church.

God works through human weakness. He has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise (1 Cor. 1:27). God's truths are hidden from the wise and the intelligent and revealed to babes (Matt. 11:25). Where theologians preach with human cleverness, there you certainly have Babylon - even if those theologians are evangelical in their doctrines. Babylonian Christianity has discarded God's method of using foolish people to do God's work.

The exaltation of human intellect is the surest way to build Babylon. This danger is ever prevalent in the church too, if intellectually-minded people, who have not understood the necessity of pouring out their soul to death, depend on their clever minds to do God's work. In the church, the one who depends on his cleverness is actually a hindrance. God does not do His work through proud scholars, but through humble, God fearing men.

Eldership in the church must therefore always be on the basis of a person's life and never on any other basis. The power of God is always manifested through the Holy Spirit and the word of the cross (See 1 Cor. 1:18 and 2:4) - not through domineering human personalities.

Where a church fails to emphasise the power of God's Spirit and the way of the cross, the door is invariably left open for human soul-power to manifest itself. Human cleverness and ability, instead of the revelation and power of the Spirit, then take the stage and Babylon is built - even if they preach holiness!

7. Not Gathering A Congregation But Building The Body Of Christ

In the Old Testament, it was impossible for God's people, the Jews, to become one body. That became possible only after Jesus ascended up to heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit to indwell man. Now, two can become one. In the Old Testament, Israel was a congregation. The nation grew in size, but it was still a congregation. In the New Testament, however, the church is to be a body, not a congregation.

If two do not become one, then all that you have there is a congregation. The important thing in Christ's body is not *size* but *unity*. And by this standard it becomes difficult to find a 'church' that is not a congregation. Everywhere one finds congregations that are increasing in size - but not in unity. Strife and jealousy and competition are found even at the leadership level.

God desires to have an expression of Christ's body in different places all over the world. Babylonian Christianity cannot accomplish this. But God's work still goes on through a remnant who realise that the mark of Jesus' disciples is fervent love for one another and not largeness of number.

In the body of Christ, each person is valued, even if he is not gifted. He is valued because he is a member of the body. In fact, it says that God gives greater honour to the member who lacks gift so that there may be unity in the body (1 Cor. 12:24,25). In the church, we have to follow God's example and honour even those who have no gift at all, if they are God fearing and humble. In Babylon, the gifted preacher, the gifted singer and the converted astronaut are honoured. But in the church (God's tent), we honour those who fear the Lord (see Psa. 15:1,4).

There is a world of difference between Babylon and Jerusalem.

Today God calls us to come out of Babylon and build Jerusalem (Rev. 18:4).

CHAPTER 21

BREAKING OF BREAD - A COVENANT

When Jesus instituted the 'breaking of bread', He used a word that He never used before - the word '*covenant*'. A proper understanding of this word is essential if we are to partake in the Lord's table meaningfully.

A Covenant Relationship With God

The first mention of the word 'covenant' is found in Gen. 6:18, where God promises to establish a covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:9,11). God had judged the whole world because of man's sin and now He made a covenant with Noah that He would never again judge the world with a flood as He had just done. God gave a sign to mark the covenant that He then made. It was what we now call the 'rainbow'. God, however, called it 'My bow in the cloud' (Gen. 9:13). The word used for 'bow' there is exactly the same word as is translated elsewhere in the Bible for the weapon, the bow. A bow is always aimed in the direction of the one who is to be shot with the arrow. The significance of the bow in the cloud pointing upwards (instead of downwards) is that God who dwells in the heavens was Himself going to receive the arrow released by that bow and take the judgment for man's sin. The bow would not be aimed at man but God Himself. The world has never since been judged by a flood. Psalm 69:1,2 states that the floods of God's judgment went over Jesus on the cross. This was the fulfilment of the sign of the bow in the cloud.

The next person in the Scriptures with whom God made a covenant was Abram. This is first mentioned in Gen. 15:18. Notice there, how God entered into the covenant with Abram. Abram was told to bring three animals and two birds, to slay them and spread them out on the ground (15:9,10). The animals were to be cut into two and laid each half opposite the other. At night, God came down and as a smoking fire-pot and a flaming fire passed between those halves of the dead animals. Thus it was that the Lord made a covenant with Abram. The significance was again clear - that God Himself would lay down His life (as those dead animals) for Abram. As in the case of the sign of the covenant with Noah, death was the way that the covenant was established - a death in which God Himself took the initiative.

This method of establishing and confirming a covenant later became a practice in Israel (as is seen from Jer. 34:18,19). Whenever two people entered into a covenant, they would slay a calf, divide it into two and walk between the two halves, thus symbolically stating that each was prepared to lay down his life for the other in being true to the covenant. It was a serious offence to make such a symbolic vow and not to keep it. Hence God told the people of Judah through Jeremiah that He would judge them severely for making such a covenant and then breaking it.

In Genesis 17, we find God re-confirming the covenant with Abraham. Again God gave a sign to mark the covenant - this time, circumcision. Circumcision is a cutting off of the flesh and symbolises (as Phil. 3:3 and Col. 2:11 make plain) death to the flesh. We notice that the symbol of the covenant is again something that speaks of death. This time, it was Abraham and his seed who had to signify their willingness to be faithful to the covenant unto death. The external circumcision was but a sign of God's desire to circumcise the hearts of the Israelites to love Him wholeheartedly (See Deut. 30:6; Rom. 2:28,29). This teaches us that there can be no wholehearted love for God apart from death to the flesh.

The next time we read of a covenant is when God made a covenant with the nation of Israel through Moses - what we call the 'old covenant' or the 'Old Testament'. We read this is Ex. 24:4-7. Moses wrote God's words in a book (the book of the covenant), slew young bulls as a sacrifice to the Lord and sprinkled the blood of the bulls on the people saying, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you" (Ex. 24:8). The covenant was sealed by the blood of the slain animals.

This is the first time in the Bible that the phrase '*the blood of the covenant*' occurs. This is the same phrase that Jesus used when passing the cup around, at the last supper, to His disciples (Matt. 26:28). Under the old covenant, the blood was only *sprinkled* on the people. Under the new covenant, Jesus

invites us to *drink* of the cup. This symbolises the fact that under the old covenant, the law could only cleanse a person's external life whereas under the new covenant, we can be purified inwardly.

Again, the covenant is entered through death. In Heb. 9:13-22, this contrast between the blood of bulls and the blood of Christ is brought out; and we are told there that "where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. ... it is never in force while the one who made it lives" (v. 16,17). This is why every symbol of every covenant that God made with any man symbolised death.

The only way that Jesus could establish the new covenant with us was through His own death; and the only way that we can enter into that covenant and its privileges is through death to ourselves. This is the meaning of eating the bread and drinking the wine at the 'breaking of bread'.

In Heb. 13:20, we are told that God brought up Jesus from the dead through the blood of the eternal covenant. What does this mean? The blood shed by Jesus on Calvary's cross was shed as a result of resisting sin unto death (Heb. 12:4). Jesus was determined to obey the Father and never to sin. His attitude to His Father was, "Father, I would rather die than disobey You in one small point" (See Phil. 2:8 - "obedient unto death"). This was Jesus' covenant with His Father.

Now Jesus invites us at His table to drink of the cup which is the blood of this new covenant. Are we willing? Can we drink of the cup which He drank of? Do we long, like the apostle Paul, to know "the fellowship of His sufferings being conformed to His death in order that (we too) may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10,11).

Most believers come to the Lord's table so lightly, without any understanding of what it implies and what the covenant is all about. Only one who is determined to strive against sin even unto blood can take part of the Lord's table worthily.

The word '*covenant*' could be likened to a solemn agreement signed in a court. No one would sign an agreement in a court, without carefully reading and understanding the terms of the agreement. But how lightly believers take part of the bread and wine at the Lord's table! No wonder, as in Corinth, even today many believers are weak (physically and spiritually), sick (physically and spiritually) and a number of them die before God's appointed time (1 Cor. 11:30) - all because they come to the Lord's table lightly.

In Lev. 26:14-20, God had warned the Israelites that if they made a covenant with Him and then broke it, they would become sick and diseased and defeated and there would be no profit in their labours or in their businesses.

It is a serious thing to break a covenant. "Do not be hasty in word in the presence of God. When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it. ... It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay it" (Eccl. 5:2-5).

Anyone who is repeatedly plagued by sickness and weakness should carefully consider whether he has carelessly broken his covenant with God. This is why James tells us to confess our sins in order to be healed (Jas. 5:16).

The bread that we break symbolises the body of Christ. First of all it symbolises that physical body that Jesus took when He came to earth, in which He never did His own will but His Father's (see Heb. 10:5-7). Thus His body was a broken, yielded body all through His earthly life. His body was like bread - easily broken when touched even slightly. Such was His yieldedness to His Father's will at all points. When we break the bread and partake of it, we are testifying thereby, very solemnly, that we too desire to go the same way of yieldedness and brokenness. It is a serious thing therefore to say that to the Lord at the Lord's table, and then live as though we never made a covenant with God. We may not be perfect, but the Lord expects even the newest believer to have a willingness to go the way of death to self, no longer to live for oneself, but for Him alone (2 Cor. 5:15). Otherwise we partake of the bread unworthily, not discerning the Lord's body rightly.

A Covenant Relationship In The Brotherhood

The bread that we break symbolises not only the physical body of Christ but also the church, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16,17), for there is but one loaf, and we who are many are one body. Those who "eat the sacrifices are sharers in the altar" (1 Cor. 10:18). If we eat at the Lord's table, we are to share His death on the cross (the altar) - death to our self - not only in our relationship with God, but also in our relationship with others in the body of Christ.

"We ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 Jn. 3:16). This is another aspect of our testimony at the Lord's table. It is not only with the Lord that we enter into a covenant, but also with our fellow believers. And here too the covenant is entered through death to self.

As the two parties entering into a covenant in Israel passed between the two halves of the slain ('broken') calf, even so today we enter into a covenant with one another through the broken bread. This is just as serious a matter as the first aspect that we considered earlier, of making a covenant with God.

In 1 Sam. 18:1-8, we read of Jonathan entering into a covenant with David. This is a beautiful picture of what the covenant relationship should be like in the body of Christ. It says there that Jonathan's soul was knit to the soul of David. The 'knit' used here is the same word used in Neh. 4:6 where it refers to the wall being built in such a way that there was no gap at all in it. So too was Jonathan's heart was knit with David's - there was no gap between their hearts for the enemy to come through. It says further that Jonathan loved David as himself. This is our calling in the body of Christ too - to be joined together as *ONE*, such that there is no gap between us (no gap of misunderstanding, jealousy, suspicion, etc) whereby the enemy can come through and bring a division.

Jonathan should have been the one person in Israel who should have been most jealous of David, for he was a threat to Jonathan succeeding Saul as the next king of Israel. Yet he overcame jealousy and loved David as his own self. How Jonathan puts New Testament believers to shame!

Jonathan then made a covenant with David; and as a symbol of the covenant, he took off his royal robe and put it on David. This was symbolic of Jonathan's desire to die to himself as the next king of Israel and to make David king. We are commanded in the body of Christ to "outdo one another in showing honour" (Rom. 12:10 margin). We are to do die to ourselves that we sincerely and earnestly long that our brothers will be greater and higher and more regarded than ourselves. And we take our robe, if necessary, to cover a brother's nakedness wherever it is seen. Thus we can make our brother glorious in the eyes of others. This is what it means to enter into a covenant relationship with the brothers in the body of Christ.

It is impossible to enter into such a covenant without dying to self persistently. All the problems that riddle almost every assembly of believers arise because the believers therein have not entered into such a covenant relationship with one another. Everyone seeks his own. The net result of this is that Satan triumphs. But such assemblies are not the church that Jesus is building, for Jesus said that the gates of hell would not be able to prevail against the church that He builds (Matt. 16:18).

Jesus is building His church in this world today. If we are to be a part of that church and to have a part in building that church, then we need to take to heart covenant relationships and should seek to learn with all our hearts what it means to make our brother glorious.

Then we read that Jonathan also took his armour, his sword, his bow and his belt and gave them to David. Entering into a covenant with our brothers, we surrender every possible weapon with which we can harm them in any way. This is the meaning of Jonathan's action.

The weapon with which the maximum damage has been done in Christendom is the tongue. Are we willing to lay down this weapon in a covenant relationship with our brothers in such a way that we will never again speak evil or backbite or gossip against another, even once.

This surrender of our weapons also implies a trust in our brother such that we can afford to be defenceless before him, because we know that he will never harm us. It is through such trust and confidence that the brotherhood is built.

In 1 Sam. 19:20, we see Jonathan's steadfast loyalty to David even at the cost of having to stand against his own father. Jonathan stood by his brother David in the presence of carnal relatives. Truly he is a worthy example for all of us to follow. We are to love the brotherhood more than our blood relatives.

In Amos 1:9,10, we see how seriously God viewed a breaking of the covenant of brotherhood. Tyre had made a covenant with Israel in the days of Hiram. Yet in the moment of Israel's need, they betrayed Israel and delivered them over to their enemies and thus broke the covenant that they had made. God told Amos that He was going to judge Tyre severely for this.

In 2 Sam. 21:1,2, we read another example of this. For three years there had been a famine in Israel. When David sought the Lord for the cause of this, the Lord told him that it was because Israel had broken the covenant that they had made with the Gibeonites in the days of Joshua. King Saul had killed the Gibeonites, disregarding that solemn covenant. Years later, long after Saul had died, judgment caught up with Israel. God may delay His judgments, but where He does not see repentance, those judgments will surely come. One may ask why God delayed so much in sending the famine. No doubt it was because He gave Israel time to repent. When they did not repent, judgment fell on them.

Paul told the Corinthians that if they judged themselves, God would not judge them. But since they had not judged themselves, therefore many of them were sick and weak and many died before their time (1 Cor. 11:30,31). All believers who are perpetually weak and sick should seek God to see if the reason for it is perhaps a broken covenant of brotherhood - taking part in the table of the Lord and then betraying their brothers and sisters, behind their backs, by slander, gossip, etc. This was the chief crime of Judas Iscariot - that he had partaken of the covenant meal with Jesus and then gone out and betrayed Him. As the psalmist prophesied, "Even my close friend, whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me" (Psa. 41:9).

May the Lord enable each one of us to examine ourselves and partake of the Lord's table meaningfully in future. Let us repent wholeheartedly of the sin of breaking covenant with the Lord and with our brothers and sisters; and let us take heed to the voice of the Spirit that has come to us.

CHAPTER 22

THE CHURCH AND THE TRIBULATION

We are told in Eph. 3:10 that in the new covenant, God desires to manifest His wisdom through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. From Eph. 6:12, we know that these rulers and authorities in the heavenly places are Satan and his hosts of wickedness who dwell in the *second* heaven (where they dwell ever since being cast down out of the *third* heaven, where God dwells - 2 Cor. 12:2).

We know that we are to be Christ's witnesses unto all men. But here we are told that we have to have a testimony to the evil spirits too. What testimony is this? It is a testimony to the wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10). It is the joyful confession of our spirits that God has ordered everything in our lives according to His perfect wisdom. It is the testimony of lives that have partaken of the wisdom that is from above.

In the book of Job, we read of the witness that Job was to Satan, by his life. When Satan came into the presence of God, after touring the earth, God asked him if he had observed the uprightness of Job's life (Job 1:8). Satan's reply was that Job feared God because of the three hedges that God had put around Job. Satan knew that there was a hedge around Job's person, another hedge around his family and a third hedge around Job's possessions (v. 10). Many believers do not know about this threefold hedge that God has put around the disciples of Jesus. Those who fulfil the threefold condition of discipleship mentioned

in Lk. 14:26-33 will find that God puts a hedge around each area surrendered to the Lord - possessions, loved ones and one's own life.

But then we read that God opened up these hedges around Job, one by one, so that Satan could go through them and attack Job's possessions, his loved ones and his body. This was in order that Job's character could be demonstrated by God to Satan.

From this we learn that Satan cannot touch a disciple of Jesus or anything that he has, without first getting God's permission. This is a very important truth for us to be established in - and we shall see the need for this even more in the days to come. The true church of Jesus Christ will be called to suffer in the coming days, as in the early centuries. Before that time comes upon us, we must be established in this truth first of all - that there is a threefold hedge around the wholehearted disciples of Jesus that no one can come through, unless God Himself opens up that hedge and permits Satan to do so.

The other lesson that we can learn from Job is that our own loved ones and religious Christians will criticise and condemn us. In Job's case, his wife and three religious leaders (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar) misunderstood and criticised him. That too was permitted by God. Our loved ones will become our foes and religious people will misunderstand and criticise us - because God has opened the hedges and allowed them to do so.

Job humbled himself and said - "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). He was a true disciple - for he possessed nothing. He recognised that everything he had belonged to the Lord rightfully and that the Lord had as much right to give them as to take them away. Those who are not disciples think of blessing only in terms of God giving them things. Those who are disciples recognise that it is just as much blessing - perhaps even more - when God takes them away. Thus we can know whether we are disciples or not.

The sad thing was that Job could not endure in this bold confession until the end. After a while, he wilted and weakened under the continued pressure of trial, and began to complain against God. From chapter 3 to chapter 31, we see the sad spectacle of Job going up and down - sometimes rising to great heights in his confession of faith and at other times sinking down to the depths of despair, grumbling and self justification. This is the experience of old covenant people.

But now God has promised us something better in the new covenant - as we read in Heb. 11:40. That is described in the succeeding verses of Hebrews 12:1-13) that we can follow Jesus who endured until the very end triumphantly.

Today we are followers, not of Job, but of Jesus - and whatever the trial, we can be overcomers until the very end, through the power of God's grace and be a witness to Satan. We cannot criticise Job, for he lived in a time when grace had not come and the Holy Spirit had not been given, The new covenant had not been established, etc. Considering the limitations of the time he lived in, he did extremely well - so well that God commends him three times (Job. 1:8;2:3;42:7).

We however can follow Jesus - the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Jesus passed through the university of suffering and there obtained the certificate of perfect obedience. And now He has become a Professor in the same university to teach obedience to all who are willing to enroll (Heb. 5:8,9). There is no compulsion here, as there was under the old covenant, with its 'Thou shalt's. No. But the Spirit and the bride say, "Come, join this university". No one can be a disciple who does not join this university - for this is the only place where disciples are trained.

Jesus told His disciples very clearly that in the world they would face tribulation. But they were not to fear this, for He had overcome the world and its ruler; and therefore they could be overcomers too (Jn. 16:33).

Jesus has many *admirers* today but few *followers*. He never called people to admire Him but only to follow Him. And if we follow Him, then we shall no longer belong to this world. And then the world will surely hate us.

Jesus said that the world would love only those who belonged to it (Jn. 15:19).

One clear and unmistakable mark of our being the disciples of Jesus is that the world hates us. "If they have persecuted Me", Jesus said, "then they will persecute you as well" (Jn. 15:20).

The second clear mark of the disciples of Jesus is that they love those who hate and persecute them (Matt. 5:44-48). By these two marks all those who have ears to hear God's truth can examine their own position, and know the truth concerning themselves.

If you are popular with worldly people or with religious Christians (who are not wholehearted disciples), you can be absolutely certain that you are a compromiser. It could even be that you are not converted.

Why did the world hate Jesus? Not because He paid His taxes and washed people's feet; not even because He lived a holy life. The world hated Him because He exposed its hypocrisy. He also exposed unScriptural traditions among God's people. So those who wanted to preserve "the traditions of the elders" hated Him too. That will be our fate as well, if we speak as He spoke. If we seek the honour of men and of religious elders, we shall keep quiet and remain popular. We can each choose the way we would like to go.

In Rev. 12, we read of Satan being enraged with certain people. There we read of him first trying to devour the Man-child (Jesus Christ) that the woman (Israel) had brought forth into the world. Satan could not succeed there, and the Man-child grew up, completed His ministry and ascended up to the throne of God (Rev. 12:4,5). Satan's fury is now directed against the younger brothers of this Man-child. These are described as those "who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 12:17 b). These are the disciples of Jesus whose life is characterised by total obedience to the commandments of God and who boldly hold fast to the testimony of Jesus. They open their mouths, speaking about everything that Jesus Himself testified to - for this is "the testimony of Jesus". There are very few like these on earth today, for there are very few churches in the world now preaching total obedience to God's commandments.

Rev. 12 is referring to the last days of this present age, when Satan will be cast down from the second heaven to earth for the last three and a half years just before Jesus comes again (v. 9). At that time there will be on earth those who keep God's commandments and hold boldly to the testimony of Jesus and who overcame Satan (v. 11). These are God's 'commandos' - the elite troops of His army on earth.

It will be a tremendous privilege and honour to be among them - most of whom will have to lay down their physical lives for Jesus' sake. Rev. 13:7 makes it clear that the Antichrist will be permitted by God to kill the disciples of Jesus. But remember that it is God who opens the hedges. Otherwise no one could touch us. This is why we do not fear.

Job could say, "God knows every detail concerning me" (Job 23:10). Under the new covenant, we can go even further and say, "God plans every detail concerning me" - for this is the plain meaning of Romans 8:28. It is also true that even at such a time, God being faithful will never allow us to be tested beyond our ability. With every trial, He will make a way for us to overcome and escape from sinning and denying Him (1 Cor. 10:13). His grace will prove to be sufficient even then (2 Co. 12:9); otherwise none of us could stand. It is not the naturally courageous who will stand in that day - but the naturally fearful, who trust in the Lord to strengthen them.

Those will be the days of great tribulation, when the Antichrist is ruling. But Jesus said that God has limited the duration of that period "*for the sake of His elect*" (Matt. 24:21,22). God's elect (the church) will therefore obviously be here on earth at that time, witnessing for the Lord. "Immediately after the tribulation", Jesus said, "the Son of Man will appear in the sky and He will send His angels with a great

trumpet and they will gather together His elect" (Matt. 24:29-31). The trumpet that Jesus referred to here is the one mentioned in 1 Thess. 4:16,17; at which the dead in Christ will rise, and together with the living disciples of Jesus will be raptured to meet the Lord in the air.

Jesus made it clear that the church (the elect) would experience this rapture only after the great tribulation. Then we shall welcome the Lord in the air at His second coming and return with Him to earth to reign with Him for one thousand years. God's Word is clear as to who will reign with Christ for 1000 years. Those "who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and who had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand" (Rev. 20:4). This clearly shows that the overcomers (the bride of Christ) will be on earth, standing true to the Lord, during the reign of the Antichrist.

Tribulation is something that comes from men who are instigated by Satan against the church. This must be distinguished from God's wrath which is reserved for the ungodly. We shall not face the wrath of God, but we shall certainly face great tribulation from men. The blessing for God's people under the old covenant was prosperity and ease. Under the new covenant, it is adversity - suffering and tribulation.

When Jesus faced death He did not say, "Father, save Me from this hour", but, "Father, glorify Thy name" (Jn. 12:27,28). The song of the harlot is, "Father, save me from tribulation". The song of the bride is, "Father, glorify Thy name". "We exult in tribulations". "Through much tribulation we enter the kingdom of God" (Rom. 5:3; Acts 14:22).

Jesus specifically prayed to the Father that we should not be taken out of the world, but that we should be kept from sin (Jn. 17:15). Jesus never desired that His bride should be raptured away to escape tribulation.

About 150 years ago, a new doctrine arose in Christendom (which was not heard of in the days of the apostles) that Christ would come secretly and take away all believers so that they would not have to face the great tribulation. This doctrine made it look as though persecution from men was a punishment from God! Not surprisingly, this doctrine arose, not in countries where Christians were being persecuted, but in a Western country that had not seen any persecution of Christians for centuries. Scripture was then twisted by many to fit this doctrine. Thus Satan succeeded in lulling Christians into a false comfort, so that they would be unprepared for the tribulation when it does come upon them.

Since the prayers of most Christians are basically of this order, "Lord, make my life more comfortable on earth", it is not at all surprising that multitudes of Christians around the world happily accepted this teaching about escaping tribulation. Those who have absorbed the teaching of Jesus however understand clearly that there is no virtue in escaping persecution or tribulation. On the contrary, Jesus constantly told His disciples that they would face tribulation and persecution in the world.

There are some who teach that Christ will take away the wholehearted, leaving the halfhearted to face the Antichrist. This seems to imply that escaping persecution is a reward that God gives to the faithful! No sensible General would send his second class troops to the battle front and keep his first class troops at home! It is unimaginable that God would take away His best soldiers from earth at a time when He needs their witness the most.

It is clear from Scripture that those who oppose the Antichrist are those "who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 12:17). These are certainly not the halfhearted. On the contrary, they are the overcomers, whose names are in the book of life (Rev. 13:8;2:5). Satan is not enraged at halfhearted Christians, but at the wholehearted. Today, Satan is furious with those who preach total obedience to the commandments of God. His prime targets are those who obey all of God's commandments and who preach and teach such obedience to others. This is why Paul earnestly requested all believers to pray for him - for he knew that he was one of Satan's prime targets. We too must pray today for those who preach total obedience to God, that they may be protected.

In the first three centuries, when fierce persecution raged against the Christians, God did not take them out of their tribulations. They were eaten by lions and burnt at the stake. There was no secret rapture in those Roman arenas when the disciples of Jesus were slain. The God who shut the lions' mouths and took away the power of the fiery furnace in Daniel's day did not do such miracles for the wholehearted disciples of Jesus in the first three centuries - for these were new covenant Christians who were to glorify God in the fire. It will be the same for the disciples of Jesus in the last century, before Jesus comes. God's first class troops stood true to Him in the first century - until the very end. They did not ask for, or expect, twelve legions of angels to come and snatch them away. God watched the bride of His Son being torn to pieces by lions and being burnt at the stake, and He was glorified in their testimony - for they had followed the Lamb wherever He went, even unto a violent physical death. The only word that Jesus spoke to them was, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life".

This is what He speaks to us now too. But in order to be faithful in that future day of the Antichrist, we have to learn to be faithful in the little temptations and trials that come our way today. This is why it is essential that we learn faithfulness in the hidden life - when we are tempted in the secret places of our life, in our thoughts, attitudes, motives, in money matters, etc. These are little matters; but only if we are faithful in the little, will we be faithful in the great things, one day. If we are unfaithful in the little things, we will be unfaithful to the Lord in the day of tribulation as well. If we cannot run with men now, how will we run with horses then? If we are not faithful in a time of ease, how will we be faithful in a time of trouble? (Jer. 12:5). God seeks to train us today to be His commando troops in that soon coming future day.

CHAPTER 23

THE TRUTH THAT WE BELIEVE

We are commanded in the Scriptures to pay close attention to ourselves and to our teaching, for only thus can we ensure salvation for ourselves and for those we preach to (1 Tim.4:16).

Our life and our doctrine are like two legs that give stability to our Christian life. Both legs should be equally long, as in normal human beings. Generally speaking in Christendom, we find most believers over-emphasise one or other of these two 'legs'.

When it comes to doctrine, we are commanded to "handle the Word of truth accurately" (2 Tim.2:15). Many are careless in their study of the Scriptures and so are imbalanced in their understanding of doctrine.

The truth of God is like the human body. It is perfect only when every part is found in its correct size. Not all truths in Scripture are equally important. To give but one example: To speak in tongues is not as important as loving other believers. If any one doctrine is overemphasised at the cost of another, then the truth that we proclaim will be as ugly as a body with an oversized eye or ear!! Besides, such overemphasis will also lead us to become heretical in our beliefs. It is important therefore that we handle God's truth accurately.

It would have been simple if we could have just said that we believe the truth as it is found in God's Word (in the 66 books that comprise the Bible). That is the truth. But since the truth of God's Word has been twisted and corrupted by the cunning of Satan and men, it becomes necessary to amplify and explain what exactly the Bible teaches.

God's Word, unlike mathematics and science, cannot be understood by mere intellectual study, apart from the revelation of the Holy Spirit. This revelation, Jesus said, is given only to babes (the humble) and not

to proud intellectuals (Matt. 11:25). This was why the Bible scholars of Jesus' day could not understand His teaching. Most of today's Bible scholars are also in the same boat - and for the same reason!

At the same time, we must use our minds too, for we are commanded to be "mature in our understanding" (1 Cor.14:20).

So it is only a mind that is totally submissive to the Holy Spirit that can understand God's Word aright.

God wants all His children to be totally free in every way. But many believers are in bondage to so many sinful habits and human traditions. One reason for this is that they read God's Word so carelessly.

The more diligent we are to understand God's Word, the more the truth will set us free in every area of our lives (See Jn. 8:32).

Most believers are very careful when it comes to investing their money. But they are very careless when it comes to studying the Scriptures. This shows that they value money more than God. Such believers will obviously go astray in their understanding of God's Word.

We are told clearly that all Scripture has been given in order to make us 'perfect' (2 Tim. 3:16,17 KJV). So, we could say that those who are not interested in Christian perfection will also not be able to understand God's word aright (see Jn. 7:17 also).

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and God reveals His secrets only to those who fear Him (Psa. 25:14).

The Truth Concerning God

The Bible teaches that God is One and also that there are three Persons in this One God.

Since numbers belong to the material world, and since God is Spirit, our finite mind cannot grasp this truth fully, even as a small cup cannot contain the water in an ocean.

A dog cannot understand multiplication - how three ones when multiplied can still be one: $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. Neither can we understand how God can be Three Persons and yet One God. A dog can understand only another dog. He cannot understand a man fully. In the same way, a god that could be explained and understood by our human reason would only be another man just like ourselves. The very fact that the God of the Bible transcends our reason is the clearest evidence that this is indeed the truth.

The truth of the Trinity is clear from the first verse of the Bible, where the word for 'God' is plural in the Hebrew - 'Elohim'. We also see it in the use of the words 'Us' and 'Our' in Gen. 1:26. The light is focused more clearly at the baptism of Jesus, where the Father (voice from heaven), the Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit (in the form of a dove) are all present (Matt. 3:16,17).

Those who say that Jesus Himself is Father, Son and Holy Spirit cannot explain how He could then have done His Father's will on earth, while denying His own will (Jn.6:38). Unitarians who believe that God is just One Person, and who therefore baptise in the Name of "Jesus only" are actually denying that Jesus came as a Man.

The Bible says that the one who has the right teaching has both the Father and the Son, and that those who deny either the Father or the Son have the spirit of the Antichrist (2 Jn.9; 1 Jn.2:22).

In Christian baptism, Jesus commanded us specifically that we were to baptize in the threefold name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19), the Son being identified as the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38).

The Truth Concerning Christ

The Scriptures teach that Jesus Christ existed as God and was equal with God from all eternity (Jn.1:1) and that when He came to earth as a Man, He voluntarily chose NOT to exercise some of those powers that He had as God. This is what is meant by the expression, "He emptied Himself" (Phil. 2:6,7).

Consider a few examples that prove this: God cannot be tempted by evil (Jas. 1:13). But Jesus allowed Himself to be tempted (Matt. 4:1-10). God knows everything. But Jesus said when He was on earth that He did not know the date of His own second coming (Mt. 24:36). He also had to go near a fig tree in order to see if it had any fruit (Mt. 21:19). If He had used His power as God He would have known that the tree had no fruit from afar! God's wisdom is unchanging and eternal. Yet, it is recorded twice about our Lord Jesus that "He grew in wisdom" (Lk. 2:40,52).

All these verses indicate that Jesus had "emptied Himself" of many of the powers of God, when He came to earth.

But even though Jesus emptied Himself of these powers when He came to earth, yet in His Person He was still God. Obviously it is impossible for God to ever cease being God, even if He wanted to do so. A king can go and live in a slum giving up his rights as a king. But he would still be the king. So with Jesus.

The clearest proof of Jesus' Deity when He was on earth, is seen in the 7 recorded instances where He accepted worship from others (Matt. 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; Mk. 5:6; Jn. 9:38). Angels and God-fearing men do not accept worship (Acts 10:25,26; Rev. 22:8,9). But Jesus accepted it - because He was the Son of God. The Father revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Son of God even while on earth (Matt. 16:16,17).

Concerning Jesus' humanity, Hebrews 2:17 is very exact when it states that Jesus "was made like His brethren in all things". He was NOT made like the children of Adam, for then He would have had an 'old man' like the rest of humanity. ('Old man' is the Scriptural phrase for which many unfortunately use the unScriptural expression 'sinful nature').

Jesus did NOT have a sinful nature, for He did not have a human father. Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit, and was holy from conception (Lk. 1:35).

Jesus' spiritual brothers are those who do the will of God (Matt. 12:49,50) - who are born of the Spirit (Jn. 3:5) and who have put off the old man and put on the new (Eph. 4:22,24). But we, the brothers of Jesus, do have a will of our own and Jesus was made like us "in all things". He had a will of His own too, which He denied (Jn. 6:38).

When we were born, as Adam's children, we were all born with an old man. The old man can be likened to an unfaithful servant who opens the door of our heart to the desires of the flesh (that can be likened to a gang of robbers) that seek to enter it. When we are born again, this old man is killed by God (Rom. 6:6). But we still have the flesh through which we are tempted (Jas. 1:14,15). The old man is now replaced by a new man who resists the desires of the flesh and seeks to keep the door of the heart shut against this 'gang of robbers'.

Jesus was tempted in all points as we are, and overcame (Heb. 4:15). However He did not come in "sinful flesh" but only "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3). We have lived for many years in sin. The sinful habits that we have acquired through many years of sinning cause us to sin unconsciously even after we are born again.

For example, those who have used many swear words in the past may find such words coming out of their mouths unconsciously when they are under pressure; whereas those who never used swear-words in their unconverted days do not find themselves using such words even unconsciously. Similarly, those who have read much pornography find that they have a greater problem with dirty thoughts and dreams than others who did not indulge themselves to that extent.

Jesus never sinned and He did not have any unconscious sin in His Life either. If He had sinned even once unconsciously, He would have had to offer a sacrifice for that sin (as we read in Lev. 4:27,28). Then He could not have been a perfect sacrifice for our sins.

The doctrine of the Person of Jesus has been the point of controversy throughout church history and many a heresy has been proclaimed concerning it. Some have overemphasised His Deity, to the point where

they cannot see Him as a Man who was tempted exactly like us. Others have overemphasised His humanity, to the point where they have cancelled out His Deity.

Our only safeguard to avoid either of these heresies is to stand with the whole revelation of God in the Scriptures and to stop where it stops, lest we "go too far" (2 Jn.7,9).

Jesus coming to earth as a Man is a mystery. It is foolish for us to try and analyze this truth, beyond what we are told in the Bible. To do so would be as foolish and irreverent an action as the Israelites curiously peeping inside the ark of God (a type of Christ) - an action for which God smote them down (1 Sam. 6:19).

Jesus said that He had come to earth in order to deny His own will and do His Father's will (Jn.6:38). This shows that Jesus had a human will that was opposed to His Father's, (Matt.26:39). Otherwise He would not have had to deny that will.

Jesus too was tempted in all points exactly like us (Heb. 4:15). But because He never consented in His mind to any of those temptations, He never sinned (Jas. 1:15). Every temptation that we can ever face was faced and overcome by our Lord Jesus during His earthly life.

We all know how difficult it is to live without sinning for even a single day! So we could say that the greatest miracle Jesus ever did was to live without sinning for more than 33 years - even though He was tempted exactly like us at every point, daily. He resisted sin unto death, and He received grace from the Father because He sought for it with loud crying and tears (Heb. 5:7 and 12:3,4).

As our Forerunner, He now calls us to follow His example in taking up the cross - in putting our self-will to death (Lk. 9:23).

We fall into sin because we do not resist sin seriously enough, and because we do not ask the Father for grace to overcome. Today, we are not asked to follow Jesus in the external aspects of His life - being a carpenter or a bachelor - nor in His ministry - of walking on the water or raising the dead - but rather in being faithful as he was in overcoming sin.

The Holy Spirit inspires us to make two confessions concerning Jesus Christ - one, that He is Lord, and the other, that He came in the flesh (1 Cor. 12:3; 1 Jn. 4:2,3). Both confessions are equally important, but the latter even more so, because we are told that the identifying mark of the spirit of the Antichrist is that he does not confess that Jesus came in the flesh (2 Jn. 7).

Today, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5) is the "first born among many brothers" (our Elder Brother), and His Father is our Father too (Rom. 8:29; Jn. 20:17; Eph. 1:3; Heb. 2:11).

Jesus did not cease to be God when He came to earth (Jn.10:33). He did not cease to be Man when He went back to heaven (1 Tim.2:5).

The Truth Concerning Salvation

The word of God speaks of "salvation" in three tenses - past (Eph. 2:8), present (Phil. 2:12) and future (Rom. 13:11) - or in other words, of justification, sanctification and glorification.

Salvation has a foundation and a superstructure. The foundation is forgiveness of sins and justification.

Justification is more than the forgiveness of our sins. It also means that we have been declared righteous in God's eyes, on the basis of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. This is not on the basis of our works (Eph. 2:8,9), for even our righteous deeds are like filthy rags in God's sight (Isa. 64:6). We are clothed with the righteousness of Christ (Gal. 3:27). Repentance and faith are the conditions for being forgiven and justified (Acts 20:21).

True repentance must produce in us the fruit of restitution - returning money and things and taxes due, that are wrongfully in our possession (that belong to others), and apologising to those we have wronged,

as far as possible (Lk. 19:8,9). When God forgives us, He also requires that we forgive others in the same way. If we fail to do this, God withdraws His forgiveness (Matt. 18:23-35).

Repentance and faith must be followed by baptism by immersion in water, whereby we publicly testify to God, to men and to demons that our old man is indeed buried (Rom. 6:4,6).

We can then receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, whereby we are endued with power to be witnesses for Christ by our life and our lips (Acts 1:8). The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a promise to be received by faith, by all of God's children (Matt. 3:11; Lk. 11:13).

It is the privilege of every disciple to have the witness of the Spirit that he is indeed a child of God (Rom. 8:16) and also to know for certain that he has indeed received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2).

Sanctification is the superstructure of the building. Sanctification (meaning 'being set apart' from sin and the world) is a process that begins with the new birth (1 Cor. 1:2) and that should continue throughout our earthly life (1 Thess. 5:23,24). This is a work that God initiates in us through the Holy Spirit, writing His laws upon our hearts and minds; but we have to do our part, working out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12,13). It is we who are to put to death the deeds of the body through the power that the Spirit offers us (Rom. 8:13). It is we who have to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1).

Where a disciple is radical and wholehearted in cooperating with the Holy Spirit in this work, the work of sanctification will progress rapidly in his life. The work will obviously be slow or stagnant in the life of one whose response to the Spirit's leadings is sluggish.

It is in times of temptation that our wholeheartedness in desiring sanctification is truly tested.

To be sanctified is to have the righteousness of the law fulfilled inside our hearts - and not just externally as under the old covenant (Rom. 8:4). This was what Jesus emphasised in Matt. 5:17-48.

The law's requirements were summed up by Jesus as loving God wholeheartedly and loving our neighbour as ourselves (Matt. 22:36-40).

It is this law of love that God now seeks to write in our hearts, for that is His own nature (Heb. 8:10; 2 Pet. 1:4). The outward manifestation of this will be a life of victory over all conscious sin and of obedience to all of Jesus' commandments (Jn. 14:15).

It is impossible to enter into this life without first fulfilling the conditions of discipleship that Jesus laid down (Lk. 14:26-33). These are basically to give the Lord the first place above all our relatives and our Self-life and to be detached from all of one's material wealth and possessions.

This is the narrow gate that we have to go through first. Then comes the narrow way of sanctification. Those who do not pursue after sanctification will never see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

While it is possible to be perfect in our conscience here and now (Heb. 7:19;9:9,14), it is not possible to be sinlessly perfect until we have a glorified body at Jesus' return (1 Jn. 3:2). We can be LIKE Him only then. But we must seek to WALK as He walked even now (1 Jn. 2:6).

As long as we have this corruptible body, unconscious sin will be found in it, however much we may be sanctified (1 Jn.1:8). But we can be perfect in our conscience (Acts 24:16) and be free from conscious sin (1 Jn.2:1a), even now, if we are wholehearted (1 Cor. 4:4).

Thus we wait for the second coming of Christ and for our glorification - the final part of our salvation, when we will become sinlessly perfect (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21).

The Truth Concerning The Church

The church is the body of Christ. It has only one Head - Christ; and it has only one headquarters - the third heaven. In the body of Christ, every member has a function (Eph. 4:16). While some members may

have a more important or visible ministry than others, every member has something valuable to contribute.

Christ has given to His church apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers to build His body (Eph. 4:11). These are ministries and not titles. Apostles are those called and sent by God to plant local churches. They have the first place in the church (1 Cor. 12:28) and are thus elders to the elders of the churches within their sphere (2 Cor. 10:13). Prophets are those who uncover and minister to the hidden needs of God's people. Evangelists are those who are gifted to bring the heathen to Christ. They must then bring these converts into the local church, which is Christ's body. (Here is where a lot of modern evangelism fails). Shepherds are those who care for and guide the young lambs and sheep. Teachers are those who can explain the Scriptures and its doctrines. These five gifts are for the church worldwide; and from among them, shepherds are the mainstay of every local church. The other gifts can be itinerant (from other localities).

The leadership of the local church should be in the hands of elders. The New Testament clearly teaches this (Tit. 1:5; Acts 14:23). 'Elders', being plural, implies that there must be at least two in every church. A plurality of elders is necessary for a balance in the leadership of the local church and also for binding the activities of Satan through the power of the Lord's presence (as we read in Mt. 18:18-20).

One-man leadership of a church is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. One among the elders may however be the 'messenger of the church' (Rev. 2:1), if he is gifted with the Word.

Jesus forbade His disciples from having titles (Matt. 23:7-12). It is against the word of God therefore to be called Rabbi, Father, Pastor, Reverend, or Leader. The title of 'Reverend', in fact, is used only for God in the Bible (Psa. 111:9 KJV); and one who uses it can be guilty like Lucifer, of wanting to be like God (Isa. 14:14). Everyone in the church, great or small, is to be just a brother and a servant.

The meetings of the local church must be open for all disciples to prophesy in (1 Cor. 14:26-40), unless it be a meeting for teaching (Acts 20:9,11) or prayer (Acts 12:5,12), or evangelism (Acts 2:14-40). The gift of prophesy must be desired by all who want to exercise it in the meetings (1 Cor. 14:1,39). The gift of tongues, although primarily meant for personal edification (1 Cor. 14:4,18,19), can also be exercised in the meetings of the church, but should always be followed by an interpretation (1 Cor. 14:27). The interpretation of a tongue can be a revelation, a word of knowledge, a prophecy, a teaching, or a prayer to God (1 Cor. 14:2-6). All the gifts mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:8-10,28 and Rom. 12:6-8 are needed for the building up of the body of Christ. A church that despises or ignores the gifts of the Holy Spirit will never have them.

Women are permitted to pray and prophesy with their heads covered in the meetings, but they are not permitted to exercise authority or teach men (1Cor.11:5; 1Tim.2:12).

The church also has a responsibility to preach the good news by all means possible, to all whom it can reach, with the aim of making disciples of Christ in all nations (Mk. 16:15 with Matt. 28:19). Evangelism without disciple-making, however, is a hindrance to the testimony of Christ on earth.

Every local church must also proclaim the Lord's death through the 'breaking of bread' (1 Cor. 11:22-34). The frequency of this testimony is a matter on which the Word of God gives freedom to each church. But it must never be allowed to degenerate into an empty ritual.

Regarding offerings, God's Word is clear that it is wrong to receive money from unbelievers for God's work (3 Jn.7). Offerings must therefore not be taken in meetings where unbelievers are present. All giving by believers must also be voluntary and secret (2 Cor. 9:7). It is wrong to send reports of the work to others, with the intention of obtaining money from them (even if such reports are called 'prayer letters').

The church can be unshakable only as it leads the disciples to the obedience of faith - to obedience to all of Jesus' commandments, particularly the ones listed in Matt. 5-7. The smallest commandments in the

New Testament must also be obeyed and proclaimed with zeal. This is what makes a person great in God's eyes (Matt. 5:19).

There are many matters on which the New Testament is silent. In such matters we are not to be dogmatic but must give freedom to other disciples to hold their own convictions, while holding our own convictions firmly ourselves (Rom. 14:5).

It is easy to love those who see eye-to-eye with us in all matters. Our love is however tested by our attitude to those who disagree with us. God has not intended that all His children hold the same view on every minor point. Neither has He intended that every local church have the same external form in non-Scriptural matters. The glory of God is meant to be seen in a unity in the midst of diversity. Uniformity is man-made and brings spiritual death. God does not desire uniformity but unity.

Finally we must remember that the clearest mark of the disciples of Jesus is their love for one another (Jn. 13:35). Thus the church must seek to be one as the Father and the Son are one (Jn. 17:21).

All this, in a nutshell, is the truth that we must be firmly founded on.

We know that this is the truth, for it has liberated all those who have accepted it wholeheartedly (Jn.8:32)

CHAPTER 24

CHRISTMAS AND EASTER - CHRISTIAN OR PAGAN?

Men are likened to sheep. And sheep have a tendency to follow the crowd without questioning. Jesus however came and taught us to examine everything by God's word. The Pharisees exalted human traditions. Jesus exalted God's word. Man was to live by every word that proceeded from God's mouth (Matt. 4:4).

The battle that Jesus was constantly engaged in with the Pharisees was the age-long battle of God's Word versus the traditions of men. In the church, we are engaged in the same battle today. God's word is the only light that we have on earth. And when God created light initially, He immediately separated it from the darkness. The darkness is both sin as well as human traditions. We also are called to separate both these from the pure word of God so that there is no mixture in the church.

Christmas

Consider Christmas, which is celebrated by many as the birthday of Jesus Christ. Shopkeepers of all religions look forward to Christmas, for it is a time when they can make much profit. It is a commercial festival, not a spiritual one. Millions of rupees are spent on Christmas cards and gifts. Sales of alcoholic drinks go up at this time. And the traffic police around the world are kept on their toes, for there are never so many accidents on the roads as during the Christmas season. More people go to hell through road accidents at this time, than any other time of the year.

Is this really then the birthday of the Son of God, or of another 'Jesus'?

Let us look at God's Word first of all. The Bible tells us that there were shepherds with their sheep out in the fields of Judea, on the night that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The shepherds in Palestine did not keep their flocks out in the open fields at night after October and until February - the weather being both

rainy and cold. So the real Jesus must have been born sometime between March and September. December 25 then must be the birthday of another 'Jesus' that has been foisted on an unsuspecting Christendom by Satan!

Further, even if we *did* know the exact date of Jesus' birth, the question would still be whether God intended His church to celebrate it. Mary, the mother of Jesus, would certainly have known the exact date of birth of Jesus. And she was with the apostles for many years after the day of Pentecost. Yet there is no mention anywhere of Jesus' date of birth. What does this show? Just this - that God deliberately hid the date of Jesus' birth, *because He did not want the church to celebrate it.*

In the Bible we read of earthly kings celebrating their birthdays publicly - Pharaoh (Gen. 40:20) and Herod (Mk. 6:21). God never intended Jesus to be in that category.

An understanding of the difference between the old and the new covenants will also enable us to understand why God does not want His children to celebrate any special holy days now. Under the old covenant, Israel had been commanded to celebrate certain days as specially holy days. But that was only a shadow. Now that we have Christ, the will of God is that every day of our lives be equally holy. Even the weekly sabbath has been done away with under the new covenant. This is why no holy days are mentioned anywhere in the New Testament (Col.2:16,17).

How then did Christmas and Easter make their entry into Christendom? The answer is: in the same way that infant baptism, priestcraft and a host of other human traditions have made their entry - by the subtle working of Satan.

When the emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion of Rome in the 4th century, multitudes became Christian 'in name', without any change of heart. But they did not want to give up their two great annual festivals - both connected with their worship of the sun. One was the birthday of the sun-god on *December 25*, when the sun which had gone down to the southern hemisphere began its return journey (the winter solstice). The other was the spring festival in *March/April*, when they celebrated the death of the winter and the birth of the warm summer that their sun-god had brought. They renamed their sun-god 'Jesus' and continued to celebrate their two great festivals, now as Christian festivals and called them Christmas and Easter.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (an authority in secular history) has the following to state about the origin of Christmas:

"December 25 was the Mithraic feast of the unconquered sun of Philocalus. Christmas customs are an evolution from times that long antedated the Christian period - a descent from seasonal, pagan, religious and national practices, hedged about with legend and tradition. The exact date and year of Christ's birth have never been satisfactorily settled, but when the fathers of the church in A.D. 440 decided upon a date to celebrate the event, they wisely (?) chose the day of the winter solstice which was firmly fixed in the minds of the people and which was their most important festival. As Christianity spread among the people of pagan lands, many of the practices of the winter solstice were blended with those of Christianity"

These pagan customs originated with the Babylonian religion begun by Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-10). After he died, his wife Semiramis had an illegitimate child, which she claimed was Nimrod come back to life again. Thus began the worship of the mother and child, which the Roman Catholics took over centuries later and transferred to 'Mary and Jesus'.

The birthday of this child-god was celebrated by the ancient Babylonians on December 25. Semiramis was the queen of heaven (Jer. 44:19), worshipped centuries later in Ephesus as Diana or Artemis (Acts 19:28).

Semiramis claimed that a full grown evergreen tree grew overnight from a dead tree stump. This symbolised Nimrod's coming back to life, and bringing heaven's gifts to mankind. Thus began the practice of cutting down a fir tree and hanging gifts on it. *That is the origin of today's Christmas tree!*

Thus says the Lord, "Do not learn the way of the heathen. The customs of the people are futile. One cuts a tree from the forest with the axe. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails so that it will not topple!" (Jer. 10:2-4).

Easter

The word 'Easter' comes from one of the titles of the queen of heaven, 'Ishtar' or 'Astarte' (see 1 Kin. 11:5) - one of the idols that Solomon worshipped. There were slightly different forms of that name in different countries.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states,

"The English word 'Easter' corresponding to the German 'Oster' reveals Christianity's indebtedness (!) to the Teutonic tribes of central Europe. Christianity, when it reached the Teutons, incorporated in its celebration of this great Christian feast day, many of the heathen rites and customs that accompanied their observance of the 'Spring' festival. That the 'festival' of the resurrection occurred in the spring that it celebrated the triumph of life over death, made it easy for the church to identify with this occasion, the most joyous festival of the Teutons, held in honour of the death of winter, the birth of a new year and the return of the sun. Eostre (or Ostera), the goddess of the spring, gave its name to the Christian holy day. The conception of the egg as a symbol of fertility and of renewed life goes back to the ancient Egyptians and Persians who had also the custom of colouring and eating eggs during the spring festival. This ancient idea, of the significance of egg as the symbol of life, readily became the idea of the egg as a symbol of resurrection. According to old superstition, the sun rising on Easter morning dances in the heavens; this belief has been traced to the old heathen festival of spring, when the spectators danced in honour of the sun ... The Protestant churches also followed the custom of holding sunrise services on Easter morning" - (1959 edition, Vol. 7, pages 859, 860).

The Babylonians believed that a great egg fell from heaven into the River Euphrates and that Astarte came out of it. Thus began the distribution of eggs in connection with the worship of the sun in the spring festival. The 4th century Christians took this over, and even today Easter is celebrated with eggs, supposedly symbolising Christ's coming out of the grave as the chick comes out of the egg!!

Sacred bread cakes called '*bouns*' were offered to the queen of heaven by the heathen, many centuries before Christ (see Jer. 7:18). These became the 'hot cross buns' of Good Friday, when Christians took over these pagan customs!

The death and resurrection of Christ are the central message of the gospel. The only way that Jesus intended us to commemorate this was through the '*breaking of bread*' which we are to take part in together as a church. This was certainly not to be just once a year at Good Friday/Easter time, and certainly not with eggs and buns!

When we break bread, we testify not only of Christ's death, but also our death with Him. The emotionalism of Good Friday and sentimentality of Easter turns the attention of men away from the necessity of following Jesus, to empty ritualism.

God's Word Or Man's Tradition?

Behind the celebration of Christmas and Easter lies the far more deadly principle of following the traditions of men even when they have no foundation in God's Word. So strong is this power of tradition that many believers who follow the Scriptures in other areas still find it difficult to give up celebrating Christmas and Easter.

It is amazing that many believers are not willing to accept what even secular writers (like the authors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*) have understood clearly - that Christmas and Easter are basically pagan festivals. You can call an ass a lion, but it is still an ass. Changing the names has not made these festivals Christian! There is no difference between Christmas and Easter and Ganesh Puja and Dussera.

It becomes clear from what we have seen that what Christians are celebrating on Christmas day is the birthday of another 'Jesus' - Nimrod of Babylon. And at Easter time they are actually celebrating the resurrection of another 'Jesus' too - the sun-god that has brought summer to the northern hemisphere! Behind Nimrod and the sun-god stand Satan who actually receives that worship. The Israelites called their golden calf 'Jehovah', but it was Satan who received that worship (Ex. 32:4,5). Let all those who celebrate Christmas and Easter remember that and beware!

As we said at the beginning, Jesus was engaged in a constant battle with the Pharisees over this very issue - *man's traditions versus God's Word*. He faced more opposition for opposing the empty traditions of 'the fathers' than for preaching against sin. We shall find our experience to be the same, if we are just as faithful as He was.

It is the calling of the church today to expose these empty Babylonian celebrations that Satan has promoted in Christendom and to refuse everything (however innocent looking) that has no foundation in God's Word.

Some may quote Rom. 14:5,6 about those who keep a day as unto the Lord. This is referring to the sabbath-day, which some converted Jews still did not have light on to give up. Paul exhorted those who had the light of the new covenant to bear with these weaker Jewish brethren. But this certainly cannot be applied to the celebration of Ganesh Puja or Christmas or Diwali or Easter by Christians today!

God's Word alone is our guide and not the example of even godly men in those areas where they do not follow the Word of God. "Let God be found true even though every man be found a liar" (Rom. 3:4). "Check (their) words against the Word of God, says the Lord. If their messages (teachings) are different from Mine, it is because they have no light" (Isa. 8:20 LB). The Bereans searched the Scriptures to check up even on Paul's teaching, and the Holy Spirit commands them for it (Acts 17:11). That is a good example for all of us to follow.

David was a man after God's own heart. Yet, for forty years, he permitted the Israelites to worship Moses' bronze serpent without realising that this was an abomination to God. He did not have light even on such obvious idolatry. It was a much lesser king, Hezekiah, who was given light to expose and destroy this idolatrous practice (2 Kin. 18:1-4). We can follow godly men in the saintliness of their lives and not in their lack of light on human traditions. Our safety lies in simply following the teaching of God's Word and not in adding to or subtracting from it.

True spirituality is to follow Jesus in all aspects of life. This involves primarily a taking up of the cross and obeying God's word in the power of the Holy Spirit in daily life. It also involves a forsaking of all human traditions that are not found in the New Testament. God desires a pure testimony in every place - a church that is not only free from all sin, but also free from Babylonian traditions.

CHAPTER 25

GOD'S PERFECT PLAN FOR THOSE WHO HAVE FAILED

There are many brothers and sisters who feel that because they have sinned and failed God at some time in their past lives, therefore they cannot fulfil God's perfect plan for their lives now.

Let us look at what the Scriptures have to say on this matter, and not lean on our own understanding or our sense of logic.

Notice first of all how the Bible begins.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). And the heavens and the earth must have been perfect when God created them, for nothing imperfect or incomplete can ever come forth from His hand.

But some of the angels whom He had created fell away, and this is described for us in Isa. 14:11-15 and Ezek. 28:13-18. It was then that the earth came into the condition described in Gen. 1:2, "formless, empty and dark".

The rest of Gen. 1 describes how God worked on that shapeless, empty, dark mass and made something so beautiful out of it that He Himself declared it to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31). We read in Gen. 1:2,3 that the Spirit of God moved over the earth, and God spoke His Word - and this was what made the difference.

What is the message in that for us today?

Just this that no matter how much we may have failed or how much we may have made a mess of things, God can still make something glorious out of our lives.

God had a perfect plan for the heavens and the earth when he created them. But this plan had to be set aside because of Lucifer's failure. But God remade the heavens and the earth and still produced something very good out of it.

Now consider what happened next.

God made Adam and Eve and started all over again. God must have had a perfect plan for them too, which obviously did not include their eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But they did eat of the forbidden tree and frustrated God's original plan for them - whatever the plan may have been.

Logic would now tell us that they could not fulfil God's perfect plan any longer. Yet we see that when God came to meet them in the garden, He does not tell them that they would now have to live only on His second best for the rest of their lives. No. He promises them in Gen. 3:15 that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. That was a promise of Christ's dying for the sins of the world and overcoming Satan on Calvary.

Now consider this fact and see if you can reason it out.

We know that Christ's death was part of God's perfect plan from all eternity. "The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). Yet we also know that Christ died only because Adam and Eve sinned and failed God. So logically, we could say that God's perfect plan to send Christ to die for the sins of the world was fulfilled, not despite Adam's failure, but because of Adam's failure! We would not have known God's love shown on Calvary's cross, were it not for Adam's sin.

That baffles logic and that is why the Scriptures say that we should "not lean on our own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

If God worked according to mathematical logic, then we would have to say that Christ coming to the earth was God's second best plan. But it would be blasphemous to say so. It was part of God's perfect plan for man. God makes no mistakes. But since God is almighty as well as sovereign, and since He also knows the end from the beginning, and since He is always silently planning for us in love, human reasoning fails when we try to explain His dealings with us.

God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts not our thoughts. The difference between them is as great as the distance between heaven and earth (Isa. 55:8,9). So it is good for us to set our clever reasonings and logic aside when trying to understand God's ways.

What then is the message that God is trying to get through to us right from the opening pages of the Bible? Just this that He can take a man who has failed and make something glorious out of him and still make him fulfil God's perfect plan for his life.

That is God's message to man, in the Bible and we must never forget it.

God can take a man who has failed repeatedly, and still make him fulfil His perfect plan - not God's second best, but God's best plan.

This is because even the failure may have been part of God's perfect plan to teach him a few unforgettable lessons. This is impossible for human logic to grasp, because we know God so very little.

It is only broken men and women whom God can use. And one way He breaks us is through repeated failures.

Part of the apostle Peter's training for leadership was failure. The Lord used Peter's failure to break him.

One of the biggest problems that God has with us is to bless us *in such a way that the blessing does not puff us up with pride*. To get victory over anger and then to be proud of it, is to fall into a far deeper pit than the one we were in! God has to keep us humble in victory.

Genuine victory over sin is always accompanied by the deepest humility. This is where repeated failures have a part to play in destroying our self-confidence so that we are convinced that victory over sin is not possible apart from God's enabling grace. Then, when we do get victory, we can never boast about it.

Further, when we have failed repeatedly ourselves, we can never despise another who fails. We can sympathise with those who fall, because we have come to know the weakness of our own flesh, through our own innumerable falls. We can "deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since we ourselves are beset with weakness" (Heb. 5:3).

Hearing such a message, the logically minded man, can then say, "Then let us sin all the more so that good may come!"

Rom. 3:7,8 (LB) answers such a man with these words: "You say, 'My dishonesty brought God glory by pointing up His honesty'. If you follow through with that idea you come to this: The worse we are, the better God likes it! But the damnation of those who say such things is just".

No, we do not preach that we should sin so that good may come. Neither do we say that we can take advantage of God's grace and disobey God deliberately, and still avoid reaping what we have sown. No.

But we do say that human logic cannot grasp the grace of God to fallen men. Nothing is impossible for God - not even to bring us into His perfect will, after we have failed miserably and repeatedly. Only our unbelief can hinder Him.

If you say, "But I have messed up things so many times. It is impossible for God now to bring me into His perfect plan", then it *will* be impossible for God, *because YOU cannot believe in what He can do for you*. But Jesus said that nothing is impossible for God to do for us - if only we believe.

"Be it done to you according to your faith", is God's law in all matters (Matt. 9:29). We will get what we have faith for. If we believe that something is impossible for God to do for us, then it will never be fulfilled in our lives.

On the other hand you will discover at the judgment seat of Christ that another believer who had made a *greater* mess of his life than you, nevertheless fulfilled God's perfect plan for his life - *just because he believed* that God could pick up the broken pieces of his life and make something very good out of it.

What regret there will be in your life in that day, when you discover that it was *not your failures* (however many they may have been) that frustrated God's plan in your life, *but your unbelief!*

The story of the prodigal son, who wasted so many years, shows that God gives His best even to failures. The father said, "Quickly bring out the best robe", for one who had let him down so badly. This is the message of the gospel - redemption and a new beginning, not just once, but again and again - for God never gives up on anyone.

The parable of the estate-owner who went out hiring labourers (Matt. 20:1-16) also teaches the same thing. People who were hired at the eleventh hour were the ones to be rewarded first. In other words, those who had wasted 90% (11/12th) of their lives, doing nothing of eternal value, could still do something glorious for God with the remaining 10% of their lives. This is a tremendous encouragement to all who have failed.

"The reason the Son of God was manifested was to undo (dissolve) the works the devil has done (1 Jn. 3:8 Amplified Bible).

That means that Jesus came to untie all the knots that there are in our lives. Picture it like this: All of us started at babyhood with a nice ball of string. But by now that string has been knotted up with ten thousand knots, and we do not have any hope that we can ever untie those knots. We are discouraged and depressed as we look at our lives. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has come to untie every one of those knots.

You say, "That is impossible!". Well then, it will be done to you according to *your* faith. It will be impossible *in your case*.

But I hear someone else whose life is worse than yours, saying, "Yes, I believe that God will do that in me". To him too it will be according to *his* faith. In *his* life, God's perfect plan will be fulfilled.

In Jer. 18:1-6, God spoke His word to Jeremiah through a practical illustration. Jeremiah was asked to go to a potter's house, and there he saw the potter trying to make a vessel. But the vessel "was spoiled in the hand of the potter". So what did the potter do? "He remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make".

Then came the application: "Can I not, O deal with you as this potter does?", was the Lord's question (v. 6). (Fill in your name in those dotted lines, and that would be God's question to you).

If there is a godly sorrow in your life for all your failures, then even if your sins are like scarlet or red like crimson, not only will they be as white as snow - as promised under the old covenant (Isa. 1:18), but God promises under the new covenant, "not to remember your sins any more" (Heb. 8:12).

Whatever your blunders or failures, you can make a new beginning with God. And even if you have made a thousand new beginnings in the past and have come to failure, you can still make the 1001st new beginning today. God can still make something glorious out of your life.

While there is life, there is hope.

So, never fail to trust God. He cannot do many mighty works for many of His children, *not* because they have failed Him in the past, but because they will not *trust* Him now.

Let us then "give glory to God by being strong in faith" (Rom. 4:20), trusting Him in the days to come for the things that we considered impossible up until now.

All people - young and old - can have hope, no matter how much they may have failed in the past, if only they will acknowledge their failures, be humble and trust God.

Thus we can all learn from our failures and go on to fulfil God's perfect plan for our lives.

And in the ages to come, He can show us forth to others as examples of what He could do with those whose lives were total failures.

In that day He will show what He could do in us, through the "surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7).

He who has ears to hear the message of this book, let him hear. Amen.
