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CONTENTS

- 1. Knowing God's Ways**
 - 2. Some Important Truths That I Have Learnt**
 - 3. Principles Of Serving God**
 - 4. How A Spiritual Movement Declines**
 - 5. Three Marks Of A Spiritual Man**
 - 6. Five Sins That Jesus Hated The Most**
 - 7. Every Church Must Have A Doorkeeper**
 - 8. An Axe To The Root**
 - 9. New-Covenant Servants And New-Covenant Churches**
 - 10. Lessons From Cain and Abel**
 - 11. Owe No Man Anything**
 - 12. Do You Accuse Or Do You Intercede?**
 - 13. A Consuming Fire In The Midst of The Church**
 - 14. Valuing The Church**
 - 15. Seeing The Glory Of Christ And Partaking Of It**
 - 16. A Clean Heart And A Pure Life**
 - 17. The Seven Pillars of Wisdom**
 - 18. The True Grace Of God**
 - 19. The Truth About Speaking In Tongues**
 - 20. Shibboleths Among Believers**
 - 21. Understanding The Truth Accurately**
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CHAPTER I

KNOWING GOD'S WAYS

"God made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel" (Psa.103:7).

"This is eternal life that they may know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent" (Jn.17:3).

There is a lot of difference between observing God's actions (even His miracles) and understanding His ways.

Most Christians observe only God's actions. They are impressed by external miracles. They eagerly seek for healing and for material blessings. Most of their prayers too are related to such earthly matters, in which they want to see God act on their behalf and bless them in the physical realm. This is because they are in a state of spiritual babyhood.

The Bible says that eternal life is "to know God and Jesus Christ" (Jn.17:3).

Eternal life does not refer to eternal existence. Eternal life is but another phrase for God's life and nature.

Eternal existence will be experienced by all human beings - even by those who go to hell. But very few enjoy eternal life. The more we know God and the Lord Jesus the more we will have of eternal life.

In the days of Moses, only Moses could understand God's ways. Today, under the new covenant, that privilege is offered to all of us.

Yet very, very few know God and His ways, because most believers are taken up only with God's external actions. And when they experience an external miracle like getting a job, or earning more money, or getting a new house, or finding a wife or a husband, or experiencing healing, they are excited and are quick to testify about these matters, because these are the greatest things in life for them.

If these are the things that still excite us, then we have not seen the glory of the new covenant.

One mark of those who are mature is that they are NOT taken up with God's external acts as much as with knowing God and understanding His ways.

It is only when we understand God and His ways that we will be able, for example, to understand what "worldliness" really is.

Many believers think of worldliness as something external, such as wearing lipstick and ornaments and fancy clothes or having expensive electronic gadgets in the home etc.,

But Romans 12:2 makes it clear that conformity to the world is found in a person's mind. It is in a person's mind that he has to resist conformity to the world and to be renewed so as to understand the perfect will of God.

A person may get rid of all the external marks of worldliness and have a good testimony before men, and yet be thoroughly worldly in his way of thinking.

Most believers' definition of "worldliness" depends on their own standard of living!! They feel that whatever they themselves possess of this world's goods does not make them worldly. But if anyone possesses more than them then such a person IS worldly! And when their own standard of living goes up, their gauge of what is worldly is adjusted upwards accordingly!

But no believer is the perfect standard. Jesus alone is our Standard. To recognise worldliness, we must know Jesus Christ. Only in the light of His life can we see what is worldly and what is not.

The Pharisees became self-righteous in their pursuit of righteousness because they did not know God. They pursued righteousness without hungering and thirsting after God Himself.

We cannot get rid of Phariseeism merely by avoiding the acts of the Pharisees. We can, for example, hear of some of the marks of a Pharisee and perhaps get rid of those marks from our lives. But that would be only snipping off the fruit from a bad tree. The bad fruit will again appear on another branch.

A believer can spend his entire life merely snipping off various fruits of Phariseeism from his life and end up as a greater Pharisee at the end than he was at the beginning of his Christian life!

When we know God however, we will realise that the only way to be saved from self-righteousness is by chopping the tree down from the roots itself.

Consider the matter of the "healing crusades" that are conducted everywhere these days. Millions of rupees are collected for such crusades from gullible believers. It is rare to find a believer who can discern that there is nothing of the spirit of Christ in such commercialised "Christianity". When you know Jesus Christ however, you will compare everyone who claims to be a servant of God with Jesus Himself.

In the light of Jesus' life it will become evident that there is no similarity at all between the Lord Jesus and these so-called "healers". But if you don't know Jesus Christ, many things that are done in such crusades can look very impressive to you, and you can be deceived.

The Holy Spirit has emphatically stated that in the last days there will be a flood of deceitful spirits invading the world, who will lead many astray (1 Tim.4:1). Jesus often warned His disciples to be careful that they were not deceived. He mentioned deception as the first sign of the end of the age (Matt.24:3,4). The only way to escape such deception is by knowing the Lord. Then we will be able to discern between what glorifies God and what does not.

Christian parents are often confused these days concerning what they should permit their children to do and what they shouldn't, what school programs are proper for their children to participate in and what are not, what type of clothes they should permit their daughters to wear, etc., etc.

Are we to just imitate the standards adopted by other godly brothers? The Bible seems to imply that imitating the actions of others can lead to our being drowned (See Heb.11:29). We are to imitate the faith of others not their actions (See Heb.13:7). We are to understand the principles by which a brother arrived at a decision, and not just imitate his actions.

Let me illustrate this with an example. I was told of a brother who, knowing that frugality was an essential part of godliness, used to put tooth-paste across only half of his tooth-brush, so that his tooth-paste tube would last twice as long. But you can imitate that practice every day and yet never become godly!! It is the principle of frugality that that brother lived by that we can imitate and not the measure of tooth-paste he used on his tooth-brush!! If your teeth are bad, you may need to use a full length of tooth-paste on your brush, even if you are a godly man!!

Our passion should be to know God better and better, because this is eternal life. We are going to spend all eternity getting to know God more and more. This is why eternity will not be boring for anyone whose passion is to know God. Our earthly life too will then not be boring any more.

Let us learn something of God's life and of His ways from Genesis 2, in the way He dealt with Adam. There we see that it was God Who saw Adam's need for a wife and Who met that need and made a wife for him. There we see what God's nature is like. God is always alert to the needs of people and does all that He can to meet those needs.

When we partake of this Divine nature, we too will become like that - always alert to the needs and problems of those around us and doing everything we can in order to meet those needs!

This will involve a great deal of sacrifice on our part often. We need therefore to ask ourselves whether we are willing to pay this price for partaking of the Divine nature.

Our Adamic nature is the exact opposite of this Divine nature. The life of Adam is thoroughly selfish and makes us alert only to our own needs and to the needs of our own family members. In fact it is so full of selfishness and jealousy that it does not want the needs of others to be met even by another. On the contrary, it enjoys seeing people suffer.

When man sinned, God placed cherubs in front of the tree of life with a sword that turned in every direction to guard the way to that tree. The tree of life symbolises eternal life - knowing God.

Through this sword placed in front of the tree of life, God was symbolically showing Adam that if anyone now wanted to partake of the tree of life, he had to first experience the sword falling on his own selfish life.

We read in Genesis 3:21 that as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, God killed an animal in Eden and clothed them with coats of the skin of that animal. There too God was teaching them the same lesson - that the only way for them to be clothed now was through the way of sacrifice and death. Adam and Eve had tried to clothe themselves at first without any "death" - with just fig leaves. But God threw those leaves away and showed them the right way to be clothed.

So we see right from the beginning God emphasising sacrifice as the way for man to fellowship with Him and to be clothed with His nature.

God told Cain that his fundamental problem was that he "did not intend well" towards his brother Abel (Gen.4:7 margin).

Jude speaks of those who walk in "the way of Cain" (Jude 11). Who are they? They are those who do not intend well towards their brothers.

It is good for all of us to have a spiritual check-up in this matter.

Can you honestly say that you desire the very best for all the brothers and sisters in your local church and for their families? Can you also say that you desire the very best for other believers whom you know in other denominations? Then widen the circle still further and ask yourself if you desire the very best for all the people whom you know, including your relatives, your enemies and those who have harmed you in any way.

If you find a disturbance in your heart (instead of a rejoicing) when something good happens to another person or to his children, or if you sense a rejoicing in your heart (instead of a grief) when something evil happens to him or his family, what do such attitudes indicate? Just this that the life of Adam is alive and active in you.

If you are honest with yourself, you will soon discover whether you are walking the way of Cain or not. You must be quick when you see that evil Adamic life within you to put it to death, if you want the fire and the anointing of God to rest upon you constantly.

It is when the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies TOTALLY, that there will be much fruit. One who dies totally to himself will never get offended, no matter what others do or don't do. He will always intend well towards all. He will never get angry in any matter that concerns himself and he will never quarrel with anyone. He will never shed a single tear for himself in self-pity - for, surely, dead people don't weep in their graves!!

Cain's face was sullen and dark when he did not intend well towards his brother (Gen.4:6). We may not realise it, but the attitude we have in our hearts is often reflected on our faces. If you intend well towards all, your face will always beam with the joy of the Lord.

Many believers are walking in the way of Cain. Beneath their weak smiles and the "Praise the Lord"s that come from their lips, are found wrong attitudes towards their fellow-believers.

When people turn against you and do evil to you, God uses them to give you a scan of your real heart condition. If you cannot love them, your heart- scan will show that you have NOT partaken of God's nature, for God's nature is one that loves even His enemies. Jesus intended well even towards Judas Iscariot.

God desires the very best for all people. The gospel message is that we too can partake of this nature. Those who haven't understood the gospel thus haven't understood the gospel at all.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God did not curse them. He cursed the serpent. But to Adam and Eve, He gave that wonderful promise of the coming of Christ as "the seed of the woman" (Gen.3:15) to crush the serpent's head. In the process, Christ's heel itself would be bruised. That would be the price He paid in order to save Adam's race from their sins.

This is Divine love - a love that is willing to lay down its life in order to save the one it loves.

When we see the depth of the love of God, we see how far short of it we come ourselves. We can never produce this life of God ourselves, even if we strive after it for a million years. It has to be given to us by God. The Holy Spirit has come down to flood our hearts with this love (Rom.5:5).

Only one who is willing to live by this principle of sacrificial love can be used by God to build His church on earth.

In 2 Chronicles 3:1, we read that "Solomon began to build the house of the Lord on Mount Moriah". Mount Moriah was the place where Abraham had offered his son Isaac to God (Gen22). There on that mountain Abraham understood God's way as the way of sacrifice and submitted to it. God sanctified that spot and determined that His house would be built on that very spot 1000 years later. And this is where God builds His house (the church) even today - wherever he finds those who have the spirit and the faith of Abraham.

On Mount Moriah, Abraham was symbolically saying exactly the opposite of what Adam and Eve had told God in Eden.

In Eden, Adam and Eve as it were, told God by their action of eating the forbidden fruit that created things that brought them pleasure were more precious to them than the Creator Himself. And that is exactly what billions of human beings are saying to God even today. "They worship and serve created things more than the Creator" (Rom.1:25).

But on Mount Moriah, Abraham said the opposite: that his God and his Creator was more precious to him than his dearest possession on earth (Isaac). And he was willing to sacrifice Isaac in order to prove it. God will honour all who live by this principle of sacrifice. It is by those who have been gripped by this way that the true house of God is going to be built even today.

On Calvary's hill, it was not only true that Jesus died for the sins of the world. There, Jesus demonstrated the principle of sacrifice by which God does all His work. No-one can serve the Lord in any other way.

Those who seek for a comfortable life in this world and at the same time want to build the church also, will only deceive themselves. Those who seek the best of both worlds have been deceived by Satan thoroughly. Many have attempted to serve God without sacrifice. Their labours however have been crowned with failure after failure!!

"Christ loved the church and gave HIMSELF for her" (Eph.5:25).

To build the church, we have to love the church in the same way. It is not enough to give our money or our time. We have to give OURSELVES - our Self-life.

When God wanted to describe His love to man, He could compare His love with only one earthly example - the love of a mother for her newly-born child (See Isaiah 49:15).

If you observe a mother, you will see that her love for her baby is full of the spirit of sacrifice. From early morning to late at night and right through the night, a mother sacrifices and sacrifices and sacrifices for her baby. And she gets nothing in return. She endures pain and inconvenience, year after year for her child, joyfully, expecting nothing in return. That is how God loves us too. And that is the nature He wants to impart to us.

But it is impossible to find a fellowship anywhere in the world about which it can be honestly said that they all love one another like that.

Most believers know only how to love those who agree with them and who join their group. Their love is human and is far removed from the sacrificial love of mothers!!

Yet Divine love is the goal towards which we should be striving. So each time we sing the above lines, we should not only honestly admit that our love is not yet like that, but also confess our hope and longing that our love will become like that one day.

A mother does not care whether others around her are sacrificing anything for her child or not. She joyfully sacrifices everything herself. In the same way, one who has seen the church as his own baby will not be bothered whether others around him are sacrificing anything for the church or not. He will sacrifice himself joyfully, and he will have NO complaint or demand against anyone else.

Those who complain that others are not sacrificing for the sake of the church are not mothers but hired nurses. Such nurses have fixed working hours and will complain when the nurse for the next 8-hour shift does not come on time.

But a mother does not work 8-hour shifts each day. She works a 24-hour shift daily - year after year - and she does not even get paid for it. Even when her child is 20 years old, the mother's work is not over!!

Only mothers can have milk for their babies every day. Nurses cannot produce milk for the babies they care for. In the same way, those who are like mothers in the church will always have

a word for their spiritual children - in every meeting. Many elders have no word for the church because they are nurses, not mothers.

A mother does not expect any payment from her children. No child ever pays its mother for her service. In fact, if you were to calculate the wages a mother should be paid, at the rate of Rs.20 per hour (as paid to nurses), you will find that every child owes its mother more than 3 million rupees, by the time it is 20 years old!! Which child can ever repay such an amount to its mother?

Now the question that comes to us is: Who is willing to work like that for the Lord and for His church - without receiving any payment, but giving oneself, day after day, year after year, until Jesus comes?

If God can find just one person with that spirit anywhere, He will use him to build the church, much more than He can use 10,000 half-hearted believers who try to serve Him without the spirit of sacrifice.

When Jesus returns to earth and you stand before Him, will you have any regrets over the way you lived, or will you be able to look back over a life spent usefully for the kingdom of God?

Many are drifting along and wasting their lives on earth.

Wake up before it is too late, and ask God to show you that His way is the way of sacrifice.

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

CHAPTER 2

SOME IMPORTANT TRUTHS THAT I HAVE LEARNT

During the 40 years that I have been a born-again Christian, I have learnt some important truths that have encouraged me and given direction and purpose to my life. I share them here with you with the hope that they will be an encouragement to you as well.

1. God loves us as He loved Jesus

"Thou didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me" (John 17:23).

This is the greatest truth that I have discovered in the Bible. It changed me from an insecure, depressed believer to one who has become totally secure in God and full of the joy of the Lord - always.

There are many verses in the Bible that tell us that God loves us, but only this one that tells us the extent of that love - AS MUCH AS HE LOVED JESUS.

Since there is no partiality with our heavenly Father in the way He loves any of His sons, He will certainly be willing to do everything for us, His sons, that He did for His firstborn Son, Jesus. He will help us as He helped Jesus. He will care for us as much as He cared for Jesus. He will be as interested in planning the details of our daily life as He was in planning Jesus' life. Nothing can ever happen to us that will take God by surprise. He has already planned for every eventuality. So we need no longer be insecure. We have been sent to earth with as definite a purpose as Jesus was.

All this is true for you too - but only if you believe it.

Nothing works for the one who does not believe in the Word of God.

2. God delights in honest people

"If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another" (1 Jn.1:9).

To walk in the light means first of all that we hide nothing from God. We tell Him everything, exactly as it is. I am convinced that the first step towards God is honesty. God detests those who are insincere. Jesus spoke against hypocrites more than He spoke against anyone else.

God does not ask us to be holy or perfect first of all but to be honest. This is the starting point of true holiness. And from this spring flows everything else. And if there is one thing that is really easy for anyone of us to do, it is to be honest. So, confess sin immediately to God. Don't call sinful thoughts by "decent" names. Don't say "I was only admiring the beauty of God's creation" when actually you lusted adulterously with your eyes. Don't call "anger" as "righteous indignation". You will never get victory over sin if you are dishonest.

And don't ever call "sin", "a mistake", because Jesus' blood can cleanse you from all your sins, but not from your mistakes!! He does not cleanse dishonest people.

There is hope only for honest people. "He who covers his sin will never prosper" (Prov.28:13).

Why did Jesus say that there was more hope for prostitutes and for thieves to enter God's kingdom than for religious leaders (Matt.21:31). Because prostitutes and thieves make no pretence of being holy.

Many young people are turned away from churches because church-members give them the impression that they themselves have no struggles. And so those young people think, "That holy bunch of people will never understand our problems!!" If this true of us, then we are unlike Christ Who drew sinners to Himself.

3. God delights in a cheerful giver

"God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor.9:7).

This is why God gives man total freedom - both before and after conversion, and after being filled with the Spirit.

If we are like God, we also will not seek to control others or pressurise them. We will give them freedom to be different from us, to have different views from ours and to grow spiritually at their own pace.

All compulsion of any sort is from the devil.

The Holy Spirit fills people, whereas demons possess people. The difference is this: When the Holy Spirit fills anyone, He still gives that person freedom to do whatever he wants. But when demons possess people they rob them of their freedom and control them. The fruit of being filled with the Spirit is self-control (Gal.5:22,23). Demon-possession however, results in the loss of self-control.

We must remember that any work that we do for God that is NOT done cheerfully, joyfully, freely and voluntarily is a dead work. Any work done for God for a reward or for a salary is also a dead work. Any money given to God under pressure from others has no value at all, as far as God is concerned!!

God values a little done cheerfully for Him far more than a great deal done under compulsion, or done merely to ease one's conscience.

4. Holiness comes by looking unto Jesus

"Let us run the race....looking unto Jesus" (Heb.12:1,2).

The secret of godliness is found in the Person of Christ Who came in our flesh (as 1 Tim.3:16 makes very clear) - and not in the doctrine that Christ came in our flesh. It is through His Person and not through a doctrinal analysis of His flesh, that we become holy.

Any amount of self-effort will never make a sinful heart holy. God has to do a work within us, for that to happen.

Holiness (eternal life) is God's gift - and it can never be attained by works (Rom.6:23). The Bible states that God alone can sanctify us (make us holy) entirely (1 Thess.5:23 says that so plainly that no-one can mistake it). Yet multitudes of believers are struggling to deny themselves in order to be holy. They become Pharisees instead.

"The holiness which is no illusion" (Eph.4:24-Philips) is attained by faith in Jesus - in other words by "looking unto Jesus".

If we keep looking only at a doctrine we will become Pharisees. The purer our doctrine, the greater the Pharisees we will become.

The greatest Pharisees I have met on earth were among those who preached the highest standards of holiness through self-effort!! We have to be careful that we don't end up as one of them!

What it means to look unto Jesus is very clearly explained in Hebrews 12:2. First of all we are to look at Him as One Who lived on earth "enduring His cross" daily - "tempted in all points as we are and yet without sin" (Heb.4:15). He is our Forerunner (Heb.6:20), in Whose footsteps we are to run. Secondly, we are to see Him as the One Who is now "at the right hand of the Father", interceding for us and ready to help us in every trial and temptation.

5. We must be continually filled with the Holy Spirit

"Be (being) filled with the Spirit" (Eph.5:18 - Literal).

It is impossible to live the Christian life, as God wants us to, if we are not continually filled with the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to serve God as we should without being anointed with the Spirit and receiving His supernatural gifts. Jesus Himself needed to be anointed.

The Holy Spirit has come to make us like Jesus in our personal lives as well as in our ministry (See 2 Cor.3:18). God fills us with the Spirit in order to conform us to the likeness of Christ in our character, and to equip us to serve as Jesus served. We do not have the same ministry that Jesus had, and so we won't be able to do what Jesus did in His ministry. But we can be as fully equipped to serve God as Jesus Himself was - to fulfil OUR OWN ministry.

All that is required is an adequate thirst and faith, on our part, for rivers of living water to flow out through us (Jn.7:37-39).

We must earnestly long for the gifts of the Spirit if we are to have them(1 Cor.14:1). Otherwise we will never have them.

A church without the gifts of the Holy Spirit is like a man who may be living but who is deaf, blind, mute and lame - and therefore useless.

6. The way of the cross is the way of life

"If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him" (2 Tim.2:11)

There is no way for us to have the life of Jesus manifested in our body other than by accepting death to our Self-life in all the situations that God plans and arranges for us (2 Cor.4:10,11).

We must "consider ourselves dead to sin" (Rom.6:11) in all situations, if we are to overcome sin. We must "mortify the deeds of the body through the Spirit" if we are to live (Rom.8:13). The Holy Spirit will always lead us to the cross in our daily life.

We are sent by God into situations where we are "slaughtered the whole day long" (Rom.8:36) and "delivered to death for Jesus sake" (2 Cor.4:11). In such situations, we must accept "the dying of Jesus" (2 Cor.4:10), so that the life of Jesus may be manifest in us.

7. Man's opinions are fit only for the garbage bin

"Stop regarding man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for why should he be esteemed? (Isa.2:22)

When a man's breath leaves his nostrils, he is no better than the dust that we walk on. So why should we value man's opinion.

If we are not rooted and grounded in the fact that the opinions of ALL human beings put together are only fit for the garbage-bin, we will never be able to serve the Lord effectively. If we seek to please even one man, we cannot be servants of Christ (Gal.1:10).

Every man's opinion is worthless compared to God's opinion. One who is convinced of this will thereafter seek only God's approval over His life and ministry. He will never seek to impress people or to justify himself before them.

8. God detests all that this world considers great

"That which men esteem highly is detestable in God's sight" (Luke 16:15).

The things that are considered great in the world, not only have no value in God's eyes, but are actually an abomination to Him. Since all worldly honour is an abomination to God, it must be an abomination to us too.

Money is something that everyone on earth considers valuable. But God says that those who love money and long to get rich will suffer the following eight consequences sooner or later (1 Tim. 6:9,10). (a) they will fall into temptation, (b) they will fall into a trap, (c) they will fall into foolish desires, (d) they will fall into harmful desires, (e) they will plunge into ruin, (f) they will plunge into destruction, (g) they will wander away from the faith and (h) they will pierce themselves with many a pang.

I have seen this happen again and again to believers everywhere.

One of the main reasons why a prophetic word from the Lord is hardly ever heard these days in our land, is because most preachers are lovers of money. Jesus said that the true riches (the prophetic word being one of them) would not be given by God to those who were unfaithful with money (Lk.16:11). This is why we hear so many boring sermons and so many boring testimonies in church-meetings and conferences.

9. Nobody can harm us except we ourselves

"Who can harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?"(1 Pet.3:13)

God is so powerful that He makes ALL THINGS work together for the good of those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose - that is, for those who have no ambition on earth outside of His will for their lives (Romans 8:28). One who has selfish ambitions cannot

claim this promise. But if we accept the will of God totally, we can claim this promise every minute of our life on earth. Nothing can harm us.

Everything that others do to us - good or evil, accidental or deliberate - will go through the filter of Romans 8:28 and will come through working for our very best - conforming us each time a little more to the likeness of Christ (Rom.8:29) - which is the good that God has planned for us. This filter works perfectly every single time for those who fulfil the conditions listed in this verse.

Further, 1 Peter 3:13 tells us that no-one can harm us if we are "zealous for what is good". Unfortunately this is not as well known a verse as Romans 8:28 is. But we must popularise it now. However, this promise too is applicable only to those who are zealous to keep their hearts good towards all people. It will be impossible for any demon or human being to harm such a believer.

So whenever any Christian complains that others have harmed him, he is indirectly admitting that he does not love God, is not called according to God's purpose and has not been zealous for what is good. Otherwise, whatever those others did to him would have only worked for his good, and then he would not have had any complaints at all.

Actually, the only one who can harm you is you yourself - by your unfaithfulness and your wrong attitudes to others.

I am nearly 60 years old now and I can honestly say that no-one has ever succeeded in harming me in my entire life. Many have tried to do so, but EVERYTHING they did only worked for my very best and for the good of my ministry. So I can praise God for those people too. Those who have opposed me have been mostly so-called "believers" who have not understood God's ways. I am giving you my testimony only to encourage you to believe that this can be your testimony too - always.

10. God has a perfect plan for each of our lives

"We are created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph.2:10).

Long ago, when God chose us in Christ, He also planned what we should do with our earthly lives. Our duty now is to find out that plan - day by day - and to follow it. We can never make a better plan than God's.

We must not imitate what others do, for God's plan for each of His children is different. God's plan for Joseph, for example, was for him to stay in the palace in Egypt and to live in great comfort for the last 80 years of his life. On the other hand, God's plan for Moses was for him to leave the palace in Egypt and to live in great discomfort for the last 80 years of his life - in the wilderness. If Moses had followed Joseph's example, through the love of comfort and ease, he would have missed God's will for his own life.

In exactly the same way today, God may want one brother to live all his life in comfort in the U.S.A., and another brother to toil all his life in the heat and dust of North India. Each must be convinced about God's plan for his own life instead of comparing his lot with that of the other brother and being jealous of him and criticising him.

I know that God called me to serve Him in India. But I have never demanded that anyone else should have my calling.

We will, however, never be able to find God's will, if we are seeking our own honour or if we love money or comfort or the approval of men.

11. Knowing God intimately is the secret of being strong

"The people who know their God will be strong" (Dan.11:32)

Today, God does not want us to know Him second-hand through others. He invites even the youngest believer to know Him personally (Heb.8:11). Jesus defined eternal life as knowing God and Jesus Christ personally (John 17:3). This was the greatest passion of Paul's life and must be our greatest passion too (Phil.3:10).

One who desires to know God intimately, will have to listen to Him always. Jesus said that the only way man could keep himself spiritually alive was by listening to EVERY word that proceeded from God's mouth (Matt.4:4). He also said that to sit at His feet and listen to Him was the most important thing in the Christian life (Lk.10:42).

We must develop the habit that Jesus had of listening to the Father from early morning every day (Isa.50:4), right through the day; and then to be in a listening attitude in the hours of night when we are asleep too - so that if we ever wake up from our sleep at night, we can say, "Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening" (1 Sam.3:10).

Knowing God will make us overcomers in all situations - because God has a solution for every problem that we face - and if we listen to Him, He will tell us what that solution is.

12.The new covenant is far superior to the old covenant

"Jesus is the Mediator of a better covenant" (Heb.8:6).

Many Christians do not know that there is a fundamental difference between the old and the new covenants(Heb.8:8-12). The new covenant is as much superior to the old, as Jesus is to Moses. (2 Cor.3 and Heb.3).

Whereas the old covenant could purify only a person's external life through the fear of judgment and the promise of reward, the new covenant changes us from within, not through threats and promises, but through the Holy Spirit giving us the nature of Christ - a nature that is totally pure and loving.

There is a vast difference between a pig being kept clean through being restrained by chains (fear of punishment under the Law), and a cat that keeps itself clean because that is its inner nature. That example illustrates the difference between the two covenants.

13. We are called to be rejected and persecuted by men

"All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Tim.3:12)

Jesus told His disciples that in the world they would face tribulation, (Jn.16:33); and He prayed to the Father NOT to take His disciples out of the world (Jn.17:15). The apostles taught believers that only through much tribulation they could enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:23).

Jesus said that if people had called the Head of the house Beelzebul, the members of His household would be called by worse names (Matt.10:25). It is thus that we know we are faithful members of His household. Some of the names that I have been called, by other "believers", have been: "Devil", "Son of the Devil", "Evil spirit", "Antichrist", "Deceiver", "Terrorist", "Murderer", and "Diotrephes". It has been a great honour to be identified thereby as a part of Jesus' household. All who serve the Lord faithfully will experience this.

Jesus also said that a true prophet would not be honoured by "his own relatives" (Mk.6:4). Jesus Himself was not accepted by His family members. Every true prophet of God will be rejected and dishonoured by his own relatives, even today. In the same way, a true apostle will also be "slandered and treated as the scum of the world and the dregs of all things" (1 Cor.4:13). Suffering and rejection have always been the appointed lot of God's greatest servants.

The teaching that the church will be raptured before the "great tribulation" is a popular one with most believers because it comforts their flesh to hear it. But Jesus made it very clear in Matthew 24:29-31 that He will return to take His elect only AFTER the great tribulation. THERE IS NOT A SINGLE VERSE IN THE ENTIRE NEW TESTAMENT THAT TEACHES THAT THE CHURCH WILL ESCAPE THE GREAT TRIBULATION BY BEING RAPTURED OUT OF IT. This doctrine was invented by man in England in the mid-1800s.

We must now prepare the church in our country for persecution.

14. We must receive all whom God has received

"God has placed the members in the Body just as He desired...that there should be no division in the Body" (1 Cor.12:18,25).

God has raised up men at different times in different lands to restore a pure testimony for Him. But after those men of God died, their followers have made their groups exclusive and cultistic.

But the body of Christ is larger than any group. And we must never forget that. The bride of Christ is found in many, many groups today.

So we must seek for fellowship with all whom the Lord has accepted, even though we may not be able to work together with many of them, because of differences in interpretation of the Word of God.

15. We must treat every human being with dignity

"With our tongue, we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way" (James 3:9,10).

Any word or action that degrades a human being is never from God. It is always from Satan who forever seeks to demean and degrade people.

We are commanded to speak "with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet.3:15) to all people - whether they be our wives, our children, younger people, beggars or enemies. All men must be treated with dignity. For example, when giving a gift to a poorer brother, we must do so, without robbing him of his dignity as a human being. We must be his brother and not his benefactor.

16. We must reveal our financial needs only to God

"God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil.4:19).

Full-time Christian workers must trust God for all their financial needs and must reveal those needs only to Him. God will then prompt His children to supply their needs . They must not live "by faith in God and hints to other believers", as many live today.

"The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel" (1 Cor.9:14). So those who serve the Lord fulltime are permitted to receive gifts from other believers. But they must never receive a salary . There is a vast difference between gifts and a salary. Gifts cannot be demanded, whereas a salary can be demanded. Here lies the cause for the backslidden condition of most Christian churches and institutions today.

We must however, never receive any gifts for our personal or family use from people who are poorer than us. If such people give us gifts, we must either give the money away to someone poorer than them or put the money into the offering-box for the Lord's work.

Here are "Ten Commandments" on money that all fulltime workers will do well to take heed to:

1. Never make your financial needs known to anyone but God (Phil.4:19).
2. Never accept money from unbelievers (3 John 7).
3. Never expect any gifts from anyone (Psa.62:5).
4. Never allow anyone to control you or influence your ministry by giving you money.
5. Never accept money from those who don't receive your ministry.
6. Never accept money for your personal or family needs, from anyone poorer than you.
7. Never be dependent on any man for your financial needs.
8. Never handle God's money in a way that would cause others to suspect mishandling (2 Cor.8:20,21).
9. Never be excited when you receive money.
10. Never be depressed when you lose money.

Conclusion

I hope these truths will not only encourage you, but liberate you as well. If you are serious about your walk with the Lord and your ministry, you should take all these truths seriously in your daily life.

CHAPTER 3

PRINCIPLES OF SERVING GOD

(A message given to evangelical Christian leaders at the All-India conference on the church's mission and leadership training - December 17, 1997).

I'd like to turn to the Word of God in Revelation Chapter 4. After the Lord had given John a revelation of Himself in Chapter 1, He gave John an insight into the actual state of many of the churches in that part of the world - in Chapters 2 and 3. As you know, many of those churches were in a very backslidden state. Then the Lord said to John in Chapter 4:1: "Come up here!". What a lovely word that is!

When we see the state of things around us, and encounter problems for which we do not have a solution, it is good to hear the Lord saying to us, "Come up higher! Come and see things from My standpoint - and not from the low earthly level from which you have been looking at these things". I believe this is a word that we need to hear constantly - "COME UP HIGHER!" .

Paul said, "One thing I do - forgetting what lies behind, and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus". He had heard the call to come up higher and he was never satisfied, no matter how high he had reached.

The danger in Christian leadership is that we stand so much in front of people. We are acclaimed. We even have media coverage now. We have titles before our names and degrees after our names!! What more do we need! I'll tell you what we need - WE NEED TO GET CLOSER TO THE HEART OF GOD! WE NEED TO COME UP HIGHER! .

God did not create Adam because He needed a servant. He did not create Adam because He wanted a scholar. And He did not create you and me because He needs servants or scholars. He already has enough servants in the millions of angels. He created Adam first of all that Adam might have fellowship with Him. That's why, for Adam, the law was NOT: "Six days you shall work and the seventh day you shall rest". No. That came through the Law of Moses later.

Adam was created on the sixth day. And so his very FIRST day - the seventh day for God but the first for Adam - was a day of rest and fellowship with his Creator. It was from that day of fellowship with God that Adam was to go out into the garden and serve God for the next six days.

And when we forget that order - when we forget that fellowship with God must always take precedence over our going out into His vineyard to serve Him - then we've missed the primary purpose of our creation and of our redemption.

We can be so taken up with the need around us - and especially in a country like India - that we have no time for fellowship with God. We may feel that's a waste of time, when there is so much need around us. But what is the result of need-based work? Perhaps plenty of work - but the quality will be poor. Statistics are deceptive. You've probably heard the statement that there are three types of lies - black lies, white lies and statistics!! Statistics are deceptive. Everybody has statistics these days. But Jesus never bothered about statistics.

There are times in my life when I have been through certain crises. One was very early in my life when I sought to serve the Lord and I found that although I knew the Word, I lacked power! And so I sought God for the baptism in the Holy Spirit - to be endued with power from on high. Now, I know there are different views on this - and I am not trying to convert anybody. I am just saying that I was born again and baptized in water, but "rivers of living water" were not flowing out of my life. Yet I knew that Jesus had promised that everyone who believed in Him would have rivers of living water flowing out of their life - they'd never be dry. But I found myself dry, many times. Even though I knew the Word, and even though I was preaching, I was dry. Very often my service for the Lord was like pumping a hand-pump. You know what that means - you pump and pump and a few trickles of water come out. It is certainly not like a river. Yet I saw the word of Jesus clearly: "Everyone who believes in Me, out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water".

All I can say is that I sought God and He met with me. And that changed the direction of my life. I didn't join the Pentecostal church. I do not consider myself to be a Pentecostal or a charismatic. But God met with me and filled me with His Holy Spirit.

And then years later, I came to another crisis in my life. That was a crisis that dealt with the issue of reality - whether what I was preaching was actually true in my inner life, and whether the burden that I appeared to have when I spoke to people was something I really carried in my heart as well.

It was nearly 28 years ago that we had the first All-India Congress on Evangelism at Deolali. I presented a paper there. I was young then - just 30 years old. And you know how it is when we are young. I wanted to impress everyone. And my paper was impressive, because I had worked hard on it. My ministry continued with travelling to speak at deeper life conferences in Australia and Singapore etc., And everywhere, my aim was to impress people.

Then the Lord spoke to me and asked me, "Do you want to impress people or do you want to help them?" I said, "Lord, I want to help them". Then the Lord said, "Stop trying to impress them then". I came to a place then in my life, where I had to say, "Lord, my inner life does not correspond with what I am preaching". Externally, I had a good testimony. But my thought-life and my attitudes - my attitude to money - were not Christlike. I was proclaiming Christ with my mouth but the Spirit of Christ was not ruling my thoughts. And I was honest about it with God.

I believe that the first step to God is to be honest.

By then I was fairly well-known. I was writing books that had a wide circulation. I had a weekly radio programme. I was invited here and there. One day the Lord spoke to my heart and said, "Are you willing to stand up in front of that congregation that respects you and tell them that you're not genuine, that you're not real". I said, "Yes, Lord! I don't care what people think of me. I want you to do something for me. I ask you only for one thing: That my inner life will correspond with what I preach".

That's what I asked the Lord for 23 years ago. God met with me again. He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. And the Lord said to me, "Come up higher".

Fellowship with God has now become the most precious thing for me - during the last 22 years. It has changed my life and taken away discouragement and depression from my life altogether.

I have found the secret of walking with God. And that's made my service joyful! It is no longer dry!

All your service depends on your personal walk with God. You remember when Jesus was in the house of Mary and Martha. He said to Martha, "You are worried and bothered about so many things". What was Martha worried about? There was a need there. And she was serving the Lord, unselfishly and sacrificially, sweating away in the kitchen - not cooking food for herself but for the Lord and His disciples. What greater service could she do than that? It was totally unselfish! And she didn't do it for money or for a salary, as many Christian workers serve today. No. It was totally unselfish! And yet the Lord told her, "You are bothered about so many things". She had thought that Mary was selfish, sitting there at the Lord's feet and not doing any work, but just listening. And Jesus said, "That's the important thing. That's the ONE THING needful".

There is a beautiful paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 4:2 in The Living Bible that reads like this: "The most important thing about a servant is that he does just what his master tells him to." That has brought so much rest to my heart. What am I to do when I see a needy world? Get all worked up with the need? There are plenty of manipulators in Christendom who are ready to work me up. But I say to the Lord, "I want to hear You". There are plenty of Marthas who will criticise me, saying, "Tell him not to waste his time listening, when there's a needy world perishing in sin."

We must certainly look at the world's need. Jesus said, "Lift up your eyes and look at the harvest". We must see the need and we must point out the need to others too. Yes. But the call must come from God - not from man. I have discovered that.

Jesus sat in heaven for 4000 years while the world lay dying in need of a Saviour. Nobody could pressurise Him to leave heaven before the Father's time. But "in the fulness of time", He came. And when He came to earth, He sat making stools and benches for 30 years - while the world lay dying! He would not be moved by the need alone. But when the right time came, the Father said, "Go". And He went. And He did more in 3-1/2 years than others could do in 3000 years. The most important thing about a servant is NOT running around doing this, that and the other for God, but listening to Him. It's difficult to listen.

I used to be in an assembly in my younger days where we studied the Scriptures, and fasted and prayed regularly. Every morning we were taught to have a "Quiet Time" - a good habit that I would recommend to everyone. But in spite of all the hours apparently spent in the presence of God, people were still sour, bitter, hard-to-get-along-with, judgmental, critical and suspicious..... Something was wrong somewhere. I have known times when I have spent just 10 or 15 minutes with a godly man, and I have been challenged and inspired. Can you imagine then what spending 10 or 15 minutes with God Himself can do? How is it then that all of us were not being changed? The Lord showed me that I was not spending time with HIM in my Quiet Time. I was spending time with myself. I was just studying a book - whether the book in front of me was the Bible or a chemistry book didn't make a difference. I wasn't spending time with God - listening to Him. I was just studying a book!

Jesus said concerning Mary, "One thing is needful....to listen". From that flows everything else. And that's a very efficient way of serving God because He can tell you what He wants you to do!

The Father told Jesus what to do. Once Jesus was prompted by the Spirit to walk 50 miles from Galilee to Syrophoenicia, outside the borders of Israel. I don't know how many hours it took Him to get there - probably a whole day. There He met a Gentile woman, whose daughter was demon-possessed. He cast out that demon and pointed out to His disciples the great faith that woman had when she asked for just the crumbs that fell from the children's table. Then He walked back to Galilee. That was how Jesus lived. He went all that way for just ONE soul. That wasn't impressive - statistically!! But it was in the will of God.

Jesus served like that for 3-1/2 years. And at the end of that period He said, "Father, I have finished the work which You gave Me to do" (John 17:4). Had he met all the need there was in the world - in India, in Africa? No. He hadn't. But He had finished the work the Father gave Him to do. And He did not desire to live on earth for a single day longer The apostle Paul too could say at the end of his life, "I have finished my course".

You have a different calling and I have a different calling in Christ's Body. But we must all understand what God wants us to do. One of the main reasons for our becoming deaf to the voice of God is the UNREALITY there is in our lives - the dishonesty and the pretence.

The Pharisees could not hear what Jesus was saying because they were living a life of pretence. They gave others the impression that they were godly. They stood up there in front of the people as the leaders and scholars of their time. If you had met Peter or John, before they had met Jesus, and asked them, "Peter, John, could you tell me the name of some godly man whom you know?", they would have mentioned the name of some Pharisee who was an elder in the local synagogue. Because that was their understanding - that people who studied the Scriptures, fasted, prayed, carried little boxes of Scripture-verses on their foreheads and looked so holy and pious, were truly godly people. Then you can imagine the shock they got when they heard Jesus lambasting those elders in the synagogue as a bunch of hypocrites who were candidates for hell.

When Jesus selected His disciples, he did not select even one from any Bible-school. There was a Bible-school being run by Gamaliel in those days in Jerusalem. But Jesus didn't go there to select His disciples. He picked them up from the lakeside in Galilee - uneducated men - and

made them His apostles. And they wrote books, which Bible-seminaries now give to people to study, for a doctorate in theology!! Isn't that amazing?? I think Peter himself would not have been capable of getting a degree from any of our seminaries. Perhaps only one of the disciples would have been able to get such a degree - Judas, the cleverest and smartest of the lot.

Why did Jesus pick such people? They were simple-hearted and willing to listen to Him. What a stir there was when these simple men went to any synagogue and preached. They did not preach the routine messages that the people there had always heard. They were prophets. And people have never liked prophets. In the 1500 years of Israel's history, as Stephen said, "Which of the prophets did they not persecute?"

Those apostles were not diplomatic speakers. They were prophets. And I believe that our country could do with a few prophets at this time, so that we could hear what God is saying. God doesn't care for that which is big and great in the eyes of men.

I am not against meetings like this. But I stopped going to such meetings more than 20 years back. I turn down such invitations now. I know that such meetings can make you famous. You get media exposure. But I have discovered as I have travelled in the villages of our land - where most of my ministry is now - that the people who do the real work are not at a conference like this one. They are unknown and out there in those villages. They can't speak English and they certainly don't know what it is to present a paper. But they are filled with the Spirit, they love the Lord and they go out and bring lost souls to Christ. Praise God for such people. Others organise their missions and become known as mission-leaders and get the honour. But many who are first now will be last when Jesus comes back. So it is good for us to be humble. It is good for us to have low thoughts about ourselves. Perhaps we are not so great in God's eyes as other Christians think we are, because of our degrees and our titles. These may impress men, but not God. In fact they don't impress the devil either. The devil fears a holy man, a man who is genuine, a man who is the same inside as he is on the outside, and a man who never preaches what he does not practise.

People ask me, "Brother Zac, why don't you urge people to go to North India?" I reply, "Jesus taught only what He first did" (Acts 1:1). I haven't lived in North India. So I cannot tell others to do it. I'm not saying that it should not be done. I'm only saying that I cannot preach what I haven't done.

But then I'm not the whole body of Christ. I'm only one part of it. I am an imbalanced member of the body of Christ. I will always be imbalanced. The only balanced man that ever walked on earth was Jesus Christ. You are imbalanced and so am I. Let's not think that any one of us is more than just one part. Every part is needed - the evangelist, the teacher, the shepherd, the prophet and the apostle - for people to be made members of the body of Christ and for that Body to be built.

What is our calling? It is to make someone who is not a member of the Body of Christ a member of that Body. Isn't that our calling basically? I think we'll all agree on that.

Since the Holy Spirit uses the word, "Body", let me use an illustration from the physical body. Let us say there is a plate here, with a potato (representing an unbeliever), that has to become a member of my body. How does that happen? It happens first of all through evangelism - the hand reaching out and taking that potato.

Evangelism is always the first ministry in this task. That is why I never devalue evangelism. I value it very highly - and especially those who are engaged in this ministry in the heat and dust of North India. I am interested in reading their magazines - I get a number of them in my home - to read about the ministry of these dear brothers of mine who are labouring there. I have been up there now and then to meet some of them too.

Here then is my hand taking the potato from the plate. That potato will never become a part of my body if the "evangelist" (my hand) does not go out and do "evangelism" (put the potato in my mouth).

But is that all there is to it? If I just keep that potato in my mouth, will it become a part of my body? No, it won't. After a while it will get rotten in my mouth and I will spit it out. That is how some converts get rotten in some of our churches! They are taken in and kept inside the mouth!

But something more has to happen to that potato. It has to be chewed and crushed by my teeth. The potato can then imagine that everything is over. But all is not over! The potato goes down to my stomach, and there finds that acids are mercilessly poured on it. That is a picture of prophetic ministry in the church. You know it's not comfortable when acid is thrown on us. The gentle ministry of being picked up from the plate was so nice. But when acid is thrown on us, that is far from pleasant. The potato is now broken down completely and it no longer looks like a potato. But in a few weeks, lo and behold, it has become blood and flesh and bones - a very part of my body!

Now, whose job was the most important in this task. What ministry do any of us have that we did not receive? If we are humble, we will confess that we are imbalanced. The hand is not more important than the stomach. They complement each other. Unfortunately in Christendom there is this perpetual competition between the members - the hand building its own kingdom, the stomach building its own kingdom, and the mouth building its own!! What do we have then? Not a body, but an "Anatomy Laboratory", with a mouth over here, a stomach over there, a hand here and a leg there. That's not a body!

What do we need most of all? Yes, it is true we need instruction. But we need humility more than anything else. We need to recognise that we are all equally important - every member in Christ's body. And the great mission leader is no more valuable in this ministry than the poor brother who can't speak English properly, but who goes out and brings souls to Christ. They are all part of the same body.

"Come up higher", the Lord says, "and look at things from My viewpoint." Things look very different when viewed from God's viewpoint than from an earthly viewpoint.

Why is it that so many Christian workers have such a high opinion about themselves?

Be honest. What are the thoughts you think about yourself, when you are all by yourself? Are they thoughts of humility, recognising that you yourself are nothing?

There are times when I sit outside and look at the stars. I know there are millions of stars and that the whole earth is just a tiny speck in this universe. And I say, "O God, how great You are! How great this universe is! I am such a small little speck of dust on this speck called Earth. And here I am claiming to represent You and preaching such great matters. Please help me to have a sober estimate about myself." I would recommend that all of you say that to God.

God gives grace to the humble. Anybody can have knowledge. But only the humble can receive grace. We need grace far more than we need knowledge.

I have thought of the young people who come to the Lord and who are persecuted by their families for their faith. When such a person comes to one of our churches, what does he see? Does he see the spirit of Jesus Christ there? People around us have such a wrong impression of Christianity.

I've long believed that the first principle of all effective ministry - whether evangelism or whatever - is found in Hebrews 2:17, where it says that Jesus "was made like His brothers in all things". I want to meditate on that - He was made like His brothers IN EVERYTHING.

How can I serve others? I have to be made like them in everything. I have to descend to their level.

Why is it that I cannot communicate with a little ant crawling on the floor? Because I am too big. If I go to that ant in human form, it will be terrified. The only way I can communicate with that ant is by my becoming like it first of all. The only way that God could communicate with us was by His becoming like us. We can all understand that. But let us remember that in our ministry to others too - whether in a local church or in an unreached area - the first principle is this - to be made like them in all things, "to sit where they sit", as Ezekiel said (Ezek.3:15).

That means, for example, that we don't want to exalt ourselves above others in any way. This was why Jesus told His disciples never to take any titles like "Rabbi", "Father", or any other title. Because a title will exalt you above the people whom you serve. You will overawe them with your greatness, instead of being one like them.

In spite of such a warning, we still have lots of people with titles in Christendom today.

We think we can serve God better by adopting the methods of the world. But that is just not true.

In the Old Testament, we read that the Philistines captured the ark of God once. But they had a problem with it, and so they sent it back on a bullock cart. Years later when David was about to move the ark, he thought, "Hey, that's a good idea. The way that the Law taught, of the Levites carrying the ark on their shoulders, is all right for short distances. But for long distances, the Philistine method is certainly better." And so he too put the ark on a bullock cart. And you know what happened. The oxen stumbled and Uzzah stretched forth his hand to steady the ark. God

was angry and smote Uzzah dead on the spot, because he was not a Levite. God wouldn't change His methods. Then David was greatly disturbed. But where did it all begin? It began with David imitating the Philistines. And death came in.

Death always comes in when we imitate the ways of the world, when Christian churches are run the way business enterprises are run, and when money becomes the Number One factor in Christian work.

A good question we could ask ourselves is whether the church or organisation that we are running will survive, if all money stops coming in. Or will the whole thing come crumbling down then? A true work of God may use money but will never be dependent on money. It will be dependent only on the Holy Spirit.

The Bible says that the Spirit is jealous (Jas.4:5) - jealous when something else or someone else takes His rightful place in the church. It could be music. I'm not against music. I believe we should have the best possible music in our churches, without imitating the world. But we must not depend on music.

For example, at the end of a meeting, if we think that by getting the organ to play softly, we can move people to make a decision, what is that? It is psychological manipulation, not Holy-Spirit power.

If the Word of God is preached in the power of the Spirit, like Jesus preached it and like Peter preached it, you won't need any organ playing softly at the end. You can have it if you like, but it's not going to help. But if you haven't got the power of the Holy Spirit, then you will have to manipulate people psychologically to make them take a decision. But you will discover in the long run that such decisions are only emotional and superficial.

The Holy Spirit is jealous for His rightful place in the church. You can't replace Him with theology. You can't replace Him with music. You can't replace Him with money. Thank God for all these things. Use them all. Jesus used money. So how can we be against it. It is written that Jesus sang a hymn. In Hebrews 2:12, we read that Jesus Himself is the One Who leads the church in praising the Father. So when we praise God, we are only following our Leader. So how can we be against music. We are not against any of these things. But it's a question of what we depend on.

Do we depend on great personalities or great preachers? No. The Holy Spirit is jealous.

Jesus became a servant. Every Christian leader speaks about a servant life-style and being a servant and many books are written about it too. But what does it mean in practical terms? Let me ask you: How do you treat your co-workers? How do you treat your juniormost co-worker, who joined your group just yesterday? Is he really a brother to you or does he live in awe of you? If so, then even if you preach about servanthood until doomsday, I'd say you haven't understood it. You haven't seen Jesus.

Jesus was so simple. He never overawed people. He said, "I am a son of man" - and that means, "an ordinary man". He was the pure and holy Son of God Who had lived from all eternity with the Father. But He came and lived on earth as an ordinary man. He became like His brothers in all things.

For us to become like our brothers in all things, something in us has to die. It says about Jesus that "He humbled Himself to the point of death". When we die to Self, we prove our humility.

The grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies is guaranteed much fruit. That was one of the things that I discovered when I had this crisis of reality with the Lord 22 years ago. I understood that the greatest work that I could do for the Lord in India was to fall into the ground and die - die to my will, to what people thought about me, to my ambitions, to my goals, to my love of money, to everything - and especially to my Self - so that thereafter Jesus alone would be everything to me, so that I could look up to Him every day and honestly say (like the psalmist), "Whom have I in heaven but Thee and there is nothing and no-one I desire on earth beside Thee" (Psa.73:25).

There are times when I lie down on my bed and say to the Lord, "Lord, my ministry is not my god. You alone are my God. Nobody will ever take Your place. You are everything to me. You can take away my voice, paralyse me or do whatever you like with me. I will still love You with all my heart." Nobody can take away my joy - because in God's presence there is fulness of joy. It is from that fount alone that the rivers of living water can flow through us.

One last thing: Many, many years ago, when I was a young Christian, the Lord spoke to me from 2 Samuel 24:24, where David said, "I will not offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing".

What the Lord spoke to my heart that day was that when He came to earth, He had offered that which cost Him everything. And if I was going to serve Him, I would have to serve Him in that same spirit. Every service of mine must cost me something.

How is it with your service for the Lord? Has it cost you something? We have many people in Christian work in India today, who are earning five to ten times what they would have been earning if they had been in a secular job.

Is that sacrifice?

I made a decision when I quit my job in the Indian Navy, 31 years ago, that I would never receive any money that would raise my monthly income to more than what I would have earned in my secular job. That decision has preserved me for 31 years.

We don't have to judge others. And I am not here to judge you. I don't know many of you and so it is easy for me to say this: Ask yourself what you would have been earning today if you had been in a secular job.

John Wesley used to tell his co-workers, "Let it never be said that you have become rich by preaching the gospel."

Do you know where Christian work suffers the most? Right here, in this area. You cannot serve God and money. That's the issue that we need to deal with first of all. We can spend our time here talking about every other subject under the sun. But if we don't deal with this problem of the love of money, all our service will be useless.

People relocate their residence from one place to another. There is nothing wrong with that. Jesus also relocated His residence from heaven to earth. But when He relocated, it was a step DOWN. And it was because He had a genuine concern for people here on earth.

Why have you relocated?

Again I'm not judging you. I'm only asking.

Did you relocate your residence, because you felt that from your new location you could serve the Lord more effectively in India - the land for which you SEEM to have such a great burden? Do you have a genuine burden?

Can we live in the comfort of South India and have a burden for the villages of North India? Maybe you can. But I don't see how I can do that myself.

Can you live in the United States of America and have a burden for India? Yes - but only on paper. On paper you can have a burden for anything!

The devil is a great deceiver. He deceives us thoroughly. He makes us feel that we have a great burden for something when in actual fact we have nothing but hot air!!

I want you to be honest with yourself.

I'm not presenting a paper here. I'm sharing my heart.

And I hope it is God's heart too.

I'm not judging you, my brothers and sisters. God told me years ago, "If you judge others you will destroy yourself."

I stand before God today and say that I'm not judging anyone. I judge myself. And I repent. My life is one of daily repentance - because I see unChristlikeness in many areas of my own life. I repent and say, "Lord, I didn't speak kindly to that person. I want to learn how to speak".

The man who cannot control his tongue - his Christianity is worth zero, as James says (James 1:26).

And I want to keep that verse before me always.

Paul said something about his co-workers once. When he was looking for someone to send to Philippi, he said he could find only Timothy, because all the rest who were with him then, were

seeking their own!! (Phil.2:19-21). Note that Paul did not say this about the heathen but about some of his coworkers. Getting on to Paul's team itself was an honour, for Paul was the type of person who would not permit even a John Mark to continue on his team, because he felt John Mark was not radical enough. Yet Paul felt that most of his coworkers were seeking their own.

Today, many are preaching the gospel and appear to be burdened for souls, but they are really seeking their own gain and comfort. They are promoting themselves.

They are promoting their children and their family members - to take over their work when they retire!!

Saul also wanted to promote Jonathan. But God said, "It's not Jonathan but David who has to take over as the next king." That made Saul furious and he tried to get rid of David, in order to promote his own son.

Do you think that such things are not happening in Christendom today? They are.

When we serve the Lord and speak the truth, we are not going to be popular. But if we seek to please men, we cannot be servants of Christ.

I want to thank God for every brother and sister - and especially for those who labour in difficult situations, who have made sacrifices that we will not know about until Jesus comes again, who are not known in Christian circles, whose names are not heralded and who have no media coverage, but who are God-fearing, humble people, sacrificially spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in our land. I want to salute them. I praise God with all my heart for such people. I stand nowhere, when compared to any of them. Many of them are working in our churches and our organisations. Let us follow in their footsteps. Amen.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

HOW A SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT DECLINES

"Lord! Help! Godly men are fast disappearing. Where in all the world can dependable men be found? Everyone deceives and flatters and lies. There is no sincerity left" (Psalm 12:1 - Living).

The state of affairs described in the above verse is an apt description of Christendom today. We find nowadays that even believers who were once pursuing after godliness have started indulging in deception, flattery and lies - to serve their own ends.

Sincerity is what God seeks from all of us first of all. We may have a thousand and one faults and make an equal number of mistakes. But if we are sincere, God can do miracles with our lives.

In Matthew 16:3, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees by asking them a question: "Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?"

If we do not read the signs of the times in which we are living now, Jesus will have to rebuke us exactly as He did the Pharisees.

When people know the Bible but don't know God Himself, they can easily be deceived - for every cult in the world uses the Bible as its textbook and have their proof texts to promote their peculiar doctrines. This is why so many cults have mushroomed around the world in this century and become fashionable and acceptable to many people. Even believers are being led astray and are losing their salvation.

Under the new covenant, God wants every child of His to know Him personally (Heb.8:11), unlike as in old covenant times, when only the prophet (who rarely appeared) could know God personally. In fact, the new-covenant child of God can know God better and in a more personal way than the greatest prophet under the old covenant. Jesus said so, very specifically (Matt.11:11).

There are very few believers who have a passion to know God Himself. Most of them seem to be keen only on increasing in Bible-knowledge and on having spectacular emotional experiences.

All this is an indication that we have come to the very last minutes of the last hour of the last days in which Paul said it would be "difficult to be a Christian" (2 Tim.3:1 - Living).

It will be difficult to be a Christian in the last days, not because of persecution or opposition, but because many people would "have a form of godliness without its inner power" (2 Tim.3:5). In other words they would major on correctness of New Testament pattern and doctrine but would not be interested in personal devotion to Christ or in practical godliness.

Most of us who left dead denominations in the past, left them because we were searching for spiritual reality. We may have begun our search in earnest. But Satan is very smart to sidetrack believers into something cultistic, like the cult of the Pharisees in Jesus' time.

The history of Israel has been given us at such length in the Old Testament to teach us some important lessons. A wise man will learn from that history the way men pleased God and the way many displeased Him.

In Jeremiah 3:14,15, the Lord promises saying, "I will take you one from a city and two from a family and I will bring you to Zion. Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding."

"Zion" represents the true church of the living God. God brings one from a city and two from a family into His "Zion". And when we have come to this Zion - the church that the Lord is building - He promises to give us there "shepherds after His own heart", who will feed us on a knowledge of Himself (and not just a knowledge of the Bible) and on understanding of His ways (and not just an understanding of doctrine).

One primary identifying mark of the true church of God is this: It has shepherds after God's own heart.

God is love - and the primary characteristic of love is that it does not seek its own. So, shepherds after God's own heart are those who do not seek their own. Such shepherds will not seek for anyone's money or honour. They will seek neither to please men nor to impress them. Instead they will seek to build up the believers in order "to present them perfect in Christ" (Col.1:28). Wherever God can find a man with such a longing - in any town or village of the world - He will build His church.

On the other hand, we have seen many cases of believers who leave the mainline denominations and who seek to follow "the New Testament pattern", who have their doctrines all correct, but who love money and seek their own, and who yet imagine that they are building the Body of Christ. Confusion and chaos are always the result of their labours and what is finally built through their labours is always Babylon.

Only where God can find a man who does not seek his own, can the Lord build His true church. One man like that, who shares the concern of God's heart for people, is far more valuable to God than a thousand believers who seek their own.

To be a shepherd after God's own heart will involve sacrifice, inconvenience, and suffering. It will mean being willing to suffer misunderstanding, opposition, ridicule and slander joyfully. And if such a shepherd is blessed enough to have a wife who also does not seek her own, so that their home is open for the Lord to do whatever He wants, then there will be no limit to what God can do through their lives.

I am not talking now about gathering many people. Numbers are not a mark of God's blessing. Many of the well-known cults gather more numbers of people than anyone else. That does not prove anything.

I am talking now of quality - the building of the Body of Christ, where every individual member comes into a personal knowledge of God.

Without such a development, any group will only be a place where one blind man has led a whole lot of other blind people into the ditch. All their prayer meetings will be in the ditch, their Bible-studies will be in the ditch and their conferences will be in the ditch too!!

In Jesus' time, He looked around and saw that people were like sheep without a shepherd. It is the same today.

The great need everywhere is for shepherds after God's own heart. I am not talking here about just being an elder in a church. No. A large church needs many shepherds - those who have a heart that cares for God's people. Such people may not be elders at all. But they will feed and encourage the sheep - serving them gladly.

As I said earlier, the history of Israel is given us at such length in the Bible to show us good examples in their history that we can follow and the mistakes that men made there that we should avoid.

There were two significant starting points in the history of Israel as a nation:

Firstly, when they began as a nation in Canaan under the leadership of Joshua.

Secondly, when they had a fresh beginning under King David, after centuries of backsliding.

Let us consider these two cases.

Joshua was a godly man who gave excellent leadership to Israel. He was determined to follow the Lord with his whole family, even if the rest of Israel decided to forsake the Lord (Josh.24:15).

Only such a man, who is willing to stand alone if necessary, can provide godly leadership to any church today. During Joshua's lifetime, Israel went forward from one victory to another.

But then Joshua died.

And there we can see in what followed, what happens when a man whom God has raised up at a particular time for a particular purpose in a particular country finishes his earthly course and passes on.

Joshua's fellow-elders took over the leadership of Israel (Josh.24:31). These elders belonged to the next generation after Joshua. Joshua died when he was 110 years old and the new leaders were in their 60's and their 70's - for Joshua's own generation (except for Caleb) had all perished in the forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

During this time - when the second generation was in leadership - things were not as good as in Joshua's time. We read in Judges 1 that during this period, there were a few victories (v.1-21), but many defeats as well (v.22-36). A slow decline had started.

The second generation had no steam in themselves, but were surviving on the momentum that they had received from Joshua's leadership in the previous generation.

Like a train-wagon that has been pushed by an engine, the second generation moved very fast initially, but gradually slowed down and finally came to a grinding halt!

By the time we come to Judges 2:11, things become really bad. Israel now does open evil in the sight of the Lord.

Thus we see how what started in a good way in one generation, gradually became evil by the time of the third generation.

The second watershed in Israel's history was when David became king of Israel.

Saul was the first king of Israel. He had started in great humility, but backslid so greatly that God removed the anointing from him. Saul's life is a picture of those movements that decline in the first generation itself - and there are many like that in Christendom too!

God told Saul through Samuel that He was now going to give the kingdom to "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam.13:14). That was David. This made Saul extremely jealous of David. Saul hated David so much that he even wanted to kill him.

Those in Israel however, who recognised where God's anointing lay, joined David. Thus a small group gathered around David. But they were chased and persecuted and hunted by Saul all across the land and had to run for their lives. But God was with that small group.

Saul however continued to sit on the throne of Israel for many years - just like many Christian "leaders" rule their flock today, even though they have lost the anointing of God from their lives long, long ago.

But Saul still had a following of those who fawned on him - just like many Christian "leaders" have in their own groups. Such a following means nothing. Many dead denominations and even heathen religious leaders have a large following. But God is not with any of them.

The important question we need to ask ourselves always is this: "Do the grace and anointing of God rest upon me now?"

Church history has proved again and again that God has always done His greatest work in every generation through a small minority of His people who stand wholeheartedly for Him. As in Gideon's time, the victory in the battle with Satan is always won by a small group of a few wholehearted disciples (Judges 7).

Such a group (as in the case of David's group) is hated, misunderstood and persecuted by the established systems in Christendom, who have no understanding of what God is doing in their time.

But God took care of David and his little group. And the Bible records that "David served the purpose of God in his own generation and fell asleep" (Acts 13:36). Despite his faults, David was a man after God's own heart and gave Israel godly leadership during his lifetime. He was not perfect. But he was quick to humble himself and repent when even an ordinary prophet came to him and rebuked him for his sin (2 Sam.12).

But in spite of all of David's devotion to the Lord, and his humility and the anointing of God upon his life, he could yet serve God's purpose only in his own generation.

After his death, things began to decline very quickly. Solomon, his son, started well (1 Kings 3:3,5,10-14). The book of Proverbs shows us how wise Solomon was when he began. Proverbs is perhaps the finest book in the entire Old Testament. It is like a new-covenant book right in the middle of the Old Testament! And Solomon wrote it!!

But Solomon backslid very quickly and very badly - and ended disastrously. Initially, he had moved forward on the momentum he had received from his godly father. But he did not have enough of a passion after God, to continue for long in the same direction. He was led astray by wealth and by women (1 Kings 10:23; 11:1-9) - just like many Christian preachers in our time!

After Solomon died, his son Rehoboam (the third generation) took over. Then things became really bad. The younger generation joined hands with Rehoboam and took over the leadership of Israel, and Rehoboam despised the advice of the wiser, older men (1 Kings 12:6-15). This brought chaos into Israel and the kingdom soon split into two. All that Rehoboam could boast of now was that David was his grandfather. But he did not have any of David's spirit.

We find an exact duplication of this degenerative process in many movements that were started by godly people in Christendom during the last 20 centuries.

In the history of Christendom, we see that every godly reformer sent by God to bring Christendom back to Him could serve God's purpose only in his own generation. In almost every case, after the reformer died, his followers in the next generation laid greater emphasis on the doctrines their leader taught than on the life that he had. The form of godliness became all-important and the power of godliness was ignored. Thus decline and decay set in.

By the time such movements reached their third generation, the corruption and the decay within the group became total. The group thereafter bore no resemblance whatever to the godliness and the spirituality that had been found in their leader. They proclaimed the same doctrines he did and gloried in his name - but built Babylon.

A group can start as a spiritual movement, but still end up as soulish and carnal - and even demonic.

A movement started by a man of God can easily end as a cult.

The same story of decline that we saw in the history of David, Solomon and Rehoboam has been repeated again and again in Christendom. Just examine carefully any movement that started with God and that is currently in its second or third generation - and you will see before your eyes the truth of what I have just said.

Why does this happen? The answer is simple: Because believers are more taken up with the letter of the Word than with the Person of Jesus Christ. When any doctrine becomes more important than personal devotion to Christ, then decay and self-righteousness and Pharisaism are invariably

the result. We have seen numerous examples of how even the doctrine of "taking up the cross" has been turned into mere words, without the life of Jesus being manifest in those who preach it.

All of this should be a serious warning to us.

Consider the history of the church at Ephesus.

Paul stayed there for three years, preaching night and day (Acts 20:31). That means that the Ephesian Christians listened to many hundreds of sermons from Paul's lips. They had seen extraordinary miracles wrought by the Lord in their midst (Acts 19:11). From their midst, the word of God had spread to all the surrounding parts of Asia Minor during a short period of two years. They had experienced revival (Acts 19:10, 19). They were the most privileged of all the churches in apostolic times. They were also undoubtedly the most spiritual church in Asia Minor at that time. (We can see that from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, where he had to correct no error in their midst, unlike the way he had to, in the other churches to which he wrote.)

But when Paul was leaving Ephesus, he warned the elders there that things would take a turn for the worse in the next generation, under the new leadership of the church. He told them that savage wolves would come into their midst and that from among their own midst would arise men speaking perverse things, drawing people after themselves, instead of drawing people to the Lord (Acts 20:29,30).

As long as Paul was there, no wolf had dared to enter the flock at Ephesus. Paul was a faithful doorkeeper (See Mark 13:34), who had spiritual authority from the Lord, because he was anointed, because he feared God and because he sought the Lord's interests and not his own. But he also had enough spiritual discernment to know that the spiritual condition of the elders in Ephesus was bad - and so he knew that things would deteriorate once they took over the leadership of the church.

Paul did not give the elders a prophecy of what would definitely happen at Ephesus. No. It was only a warning. It did not have to happen like he predicted - if the elders would only judge themselves and repent.

Jonah once prophesied destruction on Nineveh. But it did not happen as he predicted, because the people of Nineveh repented. The church at Ephesus also could have escaped the fate that Paul predicted.

But alas, the new generation of leaders in Ephesus never took Paul's warning seriously and drifted away from the Lord.

By the end of the first century, the third generation had come into power. And then things became really bad. Their doctrines were still correct and they were zealous in Christian activity. They probably still had their all-night prayer meetings and their other special meetings. But their spiritual state was so bad that the Lord was about to remove His recognition of them as a church. What was their crime? They had lost their devotion to the Lord (Rev.2:4,5).

What does the history of the church at Ephesus teach us? Just this - that no doctrine is as important as a fervent devotion to the Lord Himself. There is one- and only one mark of true spirituality - that the life of Jesus is manifested increasingly in our behaviour. and this in turn can come only by an increasing personal devotion to the Lord Himself.

Paul was a godly man - a fervent and faithful apostle who was devoted to the Lord Jesus until the very end of his life. And he warned believers everywhere that Satan would try every means possible to turn them away from "simple devotion to Christ" (2 Cor.11:3).

Errors in doctrinal matters such as "baptism in water" and "baptism in the Holy Spirit", are not at all as dangerous as losing one's personal devotion to Christ. Yet many believers never seem to realise this.

We see that even Paul could serve God's purpose only in his own generation. Those who lived with him like Timothy, imbibed his spirit and lived in selfless devotion to Christ (Phil.2:19-21). But otherwise, Paul could not transmit his spirituality even to the second generation of believers in the churches he had founded.

We see a similar pattern being repeated in every movement that God has raised up - in every generation, since the first century.

God has a passion to have a pure testimony for His Name in every part of the world, in every generation. For this purpose, he raises up a godly man in a country, in a particular generation, to restore to the church in that country, the truth that the apostles preached, and thus to lead people to a godly life. A movement gradually starts around that man and a few wholehearted believers who are fed up with the unreality and hypocrisy of the Christendom of their generation gather around him. Very soon a pure testimony is established for the Lord.

Such a group is always small in size at the beginning and intensely hated and persecuted by the older churches. The founder is hated most of all. And the hatred is usually most intense from the group that God had raised up in the previous generation - for the current leaders of that group, not realising that the Lord has left them, are jealous of the new group!! Satan too joins in the attack against this new group - and he does his work of accusation mostly through other "believers" - especially those from the older group.

All the persecution and the schemings of men and demons however, do not hinder God from establishing a pure testimony for His Name in the new generation through the man He raised up.

But what happens when this man dies?

Then the movement begins to decline. Personal devotion to Christ disappears and is replaced by emphasis on the doctrines that the founder preached. Those doctrines become more important to the second generation than the Person of the Lord Himself. And a cloud comes between them and God - as it did between the disciples and the Lord on the mount of transfiguration (Matt.17:5).

No doctrine, however important or good, can ever take the place of devotion to Jesus Himself. The founder knows the Lord. The second generation knows only the doctrine. Chaos results and by the time the movement reaches the third generation, there is open division and strife.

One of the commonest things that happens to every movement is that by the time it reaches the second and third generation, it becomes rich and wealthy, with the members owning plenty of money, houses, lands and properties etc., And wealth has a way of being accompanied invariably by pride, self-sufficiency and complacency - for very few believers know how to handle wealth.

The first generation of a movement usually struggles in poverty and is close to God. The second and third generations are usually closer to the world, with all their wealth - and lose out spiritually.

God then withdraws from that group, which has by then become a part of Babylon - and He raises up another man and starts a totally new work through him.

But alas, the same story is repeated all over again - for no-one ever seems to learn from the mistakes of those who went before them!!

Those who are wise will therefore look around them to see where the anointing of God is resting currently - in their own generation - and associate fully with such a church. They will not care to see where the anointing had rested in previous generations. They will look to see where God is moving NOW and not where God moved a generation or two ago.

Scripture tells us very clearly that we must AVOID those who have the mere form of godliness (2 Tim.3:5) and seek to fellowship with "those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Tim.2:22). Those who have a pure heart are those who love the Lord with ALL their heart. Such believers have no place in their heart for money, for property, for anything of this world, for themselves, for their family members, or for their jobs. They love the Lord supremely and thus love their family members in a deeper way than they would have done otherwise. They are devoted to the Lord and not to any doctrine. We are told to seek fellowship with such believers at all times.

Thus God's work proceeds from generation to generation, without ever failing - for all the machinations of men and Satan cannot hinder any of God's purposes. Hallelujah!!

CHAPTER 5

THREE MARKS OF A SPIRITUAL MAN

"I could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh" (1 Cor.3:1).

We read in 1 Cor.1:5,7 that the Corinthian Christians excelled in three areas - knowledge of the Scriptures, preaching and the gifts of the Spirit. Yet in spite of having all these, they were not spiritual.

It is rare indeed to find believers who have the discernment to recognise that a gifted, eloquent preacher whose knowledge of the Bible is extensive and who in addition, has miraculous gifts of the Spirit as well, need not be a spiritual man at all. He could be thoroughly carnal.

Unfortunately, we live in a day when most believers think that a man is spiritual if he is a good 'Master of Ceremonies' who can conduct meetings in a lively way, put people at ease with his many jokes and preach eloquently as well.

Preachers today are respected, unfortunately, for their gifts and not for the fruit of Christlikeness in their lives - in spite of the fact that Jesus clearly taught that false prophets would be identified by the lack of Divine fruit in their character (Matt.7:15-20).

Jesus also said that in the day of judgment many would come before Him and say that they had prophesied and done miracles in His Name. But He would reply that He never knew them (Matt 7:22,23). They called Jesus "Lord" and had supernatural powers. But there was sin in their lives. This shows us clearly that much "Christian" activity and even supernatural gifts do not make a man spiritual. In fact, they are not even an indication that a man is born again, for the Lord told these people that He NEVER knew them at any time!!

To understand what makes a man spiritual, we could first of all make a list of all the abilities that Satan possesses. That would show us clearly the things that are NOT the marks of true spirituality.

Consider activity, for example: Satan is a full-time worker who is active day and night (Rev.12:9,10). He never takes a holiday. He is always seeking for people whom he can accuse - and he has many helpers too!! He also has plenty of Bible-knowledge, for he quoted the Scriptures even to Jesus. He has supernatural gifts, zeal, many co-workers, a great following and authority over many people. But he is not spiritual!!

What makes a man truly spiritual could be summed up in three statements: An upward look, an inward look and an outward look.

A spiritual man looks in these three directions constantly:

1. Upward - in worship and devotion to God and Christ.
2. Inward - in acknowledging and repenting of his unChristlikeness.
3. Outward - in seeking to help and bless other people.

A Spiritual Man Looks Upward

God has called us first of all to be His worshippers - to hunger and thirst after Him. A spiritual man worships God. His one desire is God. He does not desire anything or anyone other than God in earth or in heaven (Psa.73:25). Money does not mean more to him than God. As the deer pants after the waterbrooks, so the spiritual man longs after God. He longs for God more than a thirsty man longs for water.

A spiritual man longs for fellowship with God more than he does for ease or comfort. He longs to hear God speak to him daily.

Those who worship money, ease and their own convenience, will always find something or the other to complain about. But the spiritual man never has any complaints, because he desires only God and he always has Him. He is never disappointed with the circumstances of his life, because he sees the mighty hand of God in all those circumstances and he humbles himself underneath that hand joyfully at all times.

Because a spiritual man is in touch with God he does not need any laws or rules to regulate his life. He has found the tree of life (God Himself) and so he has no interest in the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Because he is taken up with simple and pure devotion to Christ, he is not sidetracked by secondary issues. Looking at Jesus, the spiritual man becomes increasingly like his Lord year by year.

A spiritual man humbles himself constantly. And so God exalts him constantly. He is exalted higher and higher - into a closer and closer relationship with God. Such a man having seen the realities of the heavenly life will always seek to do his good deeds hidden from man's eyes.

A Spiritual Man Looks Inward

The upward look leads on to an inward look. As soon as Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord, he immediately became aware of his own sinfulness (Isa.6:1-5). It was the same with Job, Peter and John (Job 42:5,6; Lk.5:8; Rev.1:17). When we live in God's presence, we become aware of many areas of unChristlikeness in our lives. The spiritual man is thus constantly getting light over the hidden sins in his life.

We are commanded to worship the Lord "in holy array (dress)" (Psa.29:2). Without the clothing of holiness, we are naked before the Lord. So the spiritual man "does his best" at all times to keep his conscience clear before God and before men (Acts 24:16). Just as the businessman does his best to make more money, and the research scientist does his best to make new discoveries, even so the spiritual man does his best to keep his conscience clear at all times.

A spiritual man judges himself constantly, because he discovers many things in his life that need to be cleansed away - things that other believers may not be disturbed by, in their own lives.

A spiritual man realises that he has to die inwardly every day, to many things that hinder him from being effective for God. So his lifestyle becomes one of taking up the cross and "always bearing about in his body the dying of Jesus" (2 Cor.4:10).

The spiritual man has no problem in humbling himself before anyone or in asking for forgiveness from anyone - whether that person be older than him or younger than him. He realises that his prayers and his service will never be accepted by God, if he has hurt even one other person - whether wife, brother or neighbour - in any way. And so, as soon as he realises that he has hurt someone, he "leaves his gift at the altar and goes and settles matters with that person first, and then returns to offer his gifts to God" (Matt.5:23,24).

A Spiritual Man Looks Outward

The upward and inward look lead on to the outward look.

A spiritual man is one who realises that God has blessed him only in order that he might be a blessing to others. Since God has forgiven him so much, he gladly and readily forgives all who have harmed him. Since God has been so good to him, he is good to others too. He has received freely from God and he gives freely to others.

A spiritual man is genuinely concerned for the welfare of others. He is filled with compassion for lost and suffering humanity and can never ignore a brother whom he sees in any need - like the Levite and the priest did, in the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk.10:30-37).

God is concerned for fallen man - to help him, to bless him, to lift him up and deliver him from Satan's bondage. The spiritual man's concern is the same. Like his Master, the spiritual man seeks to serve others and not to be served. Jesus went around doing good and delivering people who were bound by Satan (Acts 10:38). The spiritual man does the same.

A spiritual man does not seek to gain anything from others through his service for them - neither money nor honour. Like God, he only seeks to bless others through his life and his labours. He will NEVER expect any gifts from anyone - for he trusts in God alone for his every need.

A little booklet that has come down to us from the second century titled "The Teaching of The Twelve Apostles" tells us that the early apostles taught all believers in their time to beware of any preacher who asked them for money, for such a person was always a false prophet. If only we understood this, we would be saved from many false prophets today!!

A spiritual man looks upward, inward and outward. If he looked only upward, he would be unrealistic - "so heavenly-minded as to be of no earthly use". If he looked only inward, he would be depressed and discouraged most of the time. If he looked only outward, his work would be shallow.

But a spiritual man looks in all three directions constantly.

May God help us to be balanced - and spiritual.

FIVE SINS THAT JESUS HATED THE MOST

As we grow spiritually, we will discover that the righteousness of God is not primarily external, and that sin too is not primarily external.

When we talk about righteousness, most people think of the standard mentioned in the ten commandments. But righteousness under the new covenant is measured by the life of Jesus and not by any written Law.

When we consider the sins that Jesus spoke against the most, we will discover what He hated the most. As we consider five such sins, we will see that none of them are listed in the ten commandments!!

1. Hypocrisy

To be a hypocrite is to give others the impression that we are holier than we actually are. It is the same as being false, or telling a lie. Jesus pronounced a curse on hypocrites seven times in Matt.23:13-29.

It is possible to tell a lie without even opening our mouths. Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit without saying a word - when he pretended to be a wholehearted disciple of Jesus (Acts 5:1-5).

Jesus told the Pharisees that their inner life was "full of self indulgence" (Matt.23:25) - which meant that they lived only to please themselves. Yet they gave others the impression that because they knew the Scriptures well and fasted and prayed and tithed their income, they were holy. They appeared very pious externally. They prayed lengthy prayers in public, but they did not pray at length in private - just like many today. It is hypocrisy if we praise God only on Sunday mornings, but do not have a spirit of praise in our hearts at all times.

God looks at our hearts. The wise virgins had a hidden reserve of oil in their vessels while the foolish ones had only enough to light their lamps externally and have a good testimony before men (Mt. 25:1-4).

When we hear of a Christian leader suddenly falling into adultery, we must realize that that was no sudden fall but the final result of a long period of unfaithfulness in his inner life. He was a hypocrite for long!

2. Spiritual Pride

Spiritual pride is the most common sin to be found among those who pursue after holiness. We all know the parable of the self-righteous Pharisee who despised others even in his prayer (Lk. 18:9-14)! It is more than likely that 90% of all prayers offered in public by believers are primarily meant to impress others who are listening and not prayed to God at all. The Pharisee in the parable may not have been evil like other sinners in his external life. But Jesus hated the

pride with which he thought of his spiritual activities and with which he despised others. It is spiritual pride that makes believers constantly judge other believers.

The tax collector however, who saw himself as THE sinner - worse than all others - was accepted by God. All who have come face to face with God will have seen themselves at some time, as the chief of sinners.

Jesus taught that the greatest person in heaven would be the humblest (Mt. 18:4). The greatest virtue found in heaven is humility. We see in the book of Revelation that all those who receive crowns in heaven are quick to cast them down before the Lord acknowledging that He alone deserves every crown (Rev. 4:10,11).

Jesus said that even if we managed to obey EVERY SINGLE commandment of God, we would still be unprofitable servants who have not done anything more than what was expected of us (Lk. 17:10). Then what shall we say about our condition when we fall so often!

3. Impurity

Impurity enters into our hearts mainly through our eyes and our ears. This impurity then comes OUT from our hearts and expresses itself through the various members of our bodies - primarily through our tongues and our eyes. Anyone who seeks to be pure must therefore be especially careful about what he sees and what he hears.

Jesus hated impurity so much that He told His disciples that they should be willing to pluck out their right eye and cut off their right hand rather than sin with those members (Mt. 5:27-29).

When do doctors recommend the amputation of the right hand or the surgical removal of an eye? Only when things have become so bad that without the removal of these organs, the whole body will die. This is what we need to understand in relation to sin as well. Sin is so serious that it can imperil our very life. Most believers have not realized this and that is why they are careless in the way they use their tongues and their eyes. We must be as blind men and as dumb men when tempted to sin with our eyes and our tongues. This is the implication of Jesus' words.

4. Indifference To Human Need

Jesus was angry when the leaders of the synagogue did not want Him to heal a man, just because it was the Sabbath day "He was deeply disturbed by their indifference to human need" (Mk. 3:5 - Living).

We are commanded to do good to all men, especially to the children of God (Gal. 6:10). Jesus taught that those who did nothing to help their brothers who were in need of the basic necessities of life, would be cast out of His presence in the final day (Mt. 25:41-46). We may not have the gift of healing to heal sick believers. But we can all certainly visit those who are sick and encourage them. That's all the Lord asks of us

The rich man went to hell because he did not care for his brother Lazarus, who was a fellow-Jew and a fellow-son of Abraham. The priest and the Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan, were exposed as hypocrites by Jesus because they did not show compassion on their fellow-brother-Jew who was lying on the roadside wounded.

The Bible says that those who see their brothers in need and who are not moved to help them do not really have saving faith (Jas. 2:15-17). They are only deceiving themselves when they say that they are born again. They are not. Those who do not help their brothers in need cannot possibly have the love of God dwelling in their hearts (1 Jn.3:17).

Jesus spoke out strongly on such matters because He hated the attitude that many religious people had who were concerned only with religious activities but not with helping their needy brothers.

5. Unbelief

The four sins that we have already mentioned can easily be identified as sins by all believers. But when it comes to unbelief, almost all believers think of it, not as a sin but as a weakness. And therefore they don't learn to hate unbelief as they hate other sins.

But the Bible speaks of an unbelieving heart as an EVIL heart (Heb.3:12) Jesus rebuked His disciples seven times for unbelief. (See Mt.6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:17-20; Mk.16:14; Lk.24:25). It seems that He almost never rebuked His disciples for anything else!!

Unbelief is an insult to God, because it implies that God does not care or provide for His children even as much as evil fathers on earth care and provide for their children.

There is also a counterfeit faith being preached these days, as a means of getting things from God. But that is not the faith that Jesus preached. He wanted us to have faith to live by, in our daily life.

Victory over depression, bad moods and discouragement can come only as we have faith in a loving Father in heaven and in the wonderful promises He has given us in His Word.

Twice we read of Jesus being amazed - once when he saw FAITH and once when He saw UNBELIEF!! (Mt.8:10; Mk.6:6). Jesus was excited whenever He saw faith in people. And He was disappointed when He saw people unwilling to trust in a loving Father in heaven.

Now That We Know

Now that we have understood what Jesus hated the most, it should be our aim to hate these five sins too. As we discover these sins in our lives, we must crucify them ruthlessly.

Many preachers read our books regularly, only in order to get points for their sermons. Let me warn all such: Satan will tempt you to use this article just to get five points for a sermon! But what you need to do, first of all, is to hate these sins thoroughly in your own life. Then you will

be able to proclaim God's Word with authority. Otherwise you will only be a Pharisee like many other preachers in the world.

CHAPTER 7

EVERY CHURCH MUST HAVE A DOORKEEPER

"It is like a man, away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. (Mark 12:34)."

We see here that the Lord has put His servants in charge of His house on earth (the church) and assigned a task to each servant. The Lord has also appointed a doorkeeper in the house who is specially commanded to stay on the alert. The doorkeeper is obviously one of the elders of the local church. His task is to open the door for the Lord to lead His flock, and to strictly ensure that hirelings and wolves do not enter the church and destroy the sheep or lead them astray (Jn.10:3).

He has also to keep an eye on the spiritual condition of all who are a part of the church, to warn those who are backsliding. The Bible commands all shepherds, "Know well the condition of your flocks, and pay attention to your herds" (Prov.27:23).

The doorkeeper must also be alert at all times, because worldly people may want to become a part of his local church who have been sent by Satan to corrupt the church and to destroy its witness.

Jude speaks of such people who had "crept in unnoticed" even into the churches in the first century (Jude 4).

The doorkeeper's job can at times therefore be the unpleasant task of putting such people out of the church.

Such a task is obviously not something that most elders would like to do - especially if they love their reputation for gentleness more than the honour of the Lord's Name and the testimony of the church!

So we see that the primary qualification for being a doorkeeper is a willingness to be strict for the glory of God's Name, and a freedom from seeking one's own honour and reputation.

Why did Paul say that after he left Ephesus, the church there would be overrun by "savage wolves who would not spare the flock" (Acts 20:29)? Because he knew that among the elders in that church, there was not even one who was willing to take up the unpleasant task of being a doorkeeper. All sought their own reputation for being "gentle brothers" and wanted to "get a following of disciples who would admire them".

That was why the church in Ephesus was later overrun by wolves, and Satan was able to corrupt it to such an extent that the Lord was about to remove His presence and His anointing (the lampstand) from their midst (Rev.2:5). This is also the very reason why many churches have been overrun by savage wolves today.

David said that he "would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psa.84:10).

That indicates that the doorkeeper's position was the least desirable of all positions in the house of God. That is the task for which the Lord desires brothers in responsibility to offer themselves today.

Eli was the high priest in Israel who was responsible for maintaining purity in God's tabernacle. But he permitted his own sons to defile the house of God by their adulteries, and he never drove them out. He just rebuked them mildly and they continued to live in sin (1 Sam.2:22-25).

In Eli's time, "word from the Lord was rare" (1 Sam.3:1). It is the same today too - even in many churches that proclaim the new covenant. This is because many elders, like Eli, love their children so much that they don't correct them. If an elder's children are not believers, he has no right to continue as an elder (See Tit.1:6). One who cannot be a doorkeeper in his own house, to bring up his own children properly cannot possibly be a doorkeeper in the church (See 1 Tim.3:4,5).

Such elders don't know how to listen to God, but only know how to defend their own family-members. They have lost the anointing of God, even though they may continue to sit on their thrones, like Eli!! We should pray that God will make it clear to every believer in the church that such elders have lost His anointing upon their lives.

When an elder's ministry is boring, heavy, lifeless and a dull repetition of what has often been said before, you can be certain that that elder has become like Eli. God is no longer with him, even if God was with him in the past. Perhaps he now loves money more than he loves the Lord and His church. Believers must not remain undiscerning, and imagine that such elders are men of God. They are not.

Many elders in new-covenant churches today are elders only because they have been in that church from the beginning. They sit on their thrones on the basis of their seniority and not on the basis of a continual anointing from God upon their lives.

Eli's children were "worthless men who did not know the Lord" (1 Sam.2:12). Yet they were given positions of responsibility in the Lord's house. This is the tragic situation today too. Men who "do not know the Lord" are in positions of responsibility in many churches. Thus Satan accomplishes his purposes in such churches, because there are no doorkeepers. The gates of Hell thereby prevail against such a church.

How strict Paul was when he heard that a man had sinned sexually in the church at Corinth? Even though he was not personally present in Corinth but had only heard about the matter

through Sister Chloe (1 Cor.1:11), he said, "I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the Name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor.7:3-5).

It was Paul's strong stand that saved the church in Corinth from being polluted, and that prevented the Name of the Lord from being dishonoured there. His strong action also resulted finally in the man's salvation (2 Cor.2:5-8).

Only doorkeepers like Paul can preserve a church in purity and bring backsliders to an awareness of their true condition and back to the Lord. Those, on the other hand, who seek their own name and honour will never accomplish anything for the Lord.

It is possible for some elders who read this to be stirred up with human zeal now, and to determine that they are going to drive every sinner out of their churches in future. This will only result in their churches becoming empty of everyone - for "the zeal of man cannot accomplish the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). One has to be led by the Spirit even in this.

Jesus saw the moneychangers and the sellers of doves in the temple on many occasions. But He never drove them out every time He saw them. He drove them out only when His Father told Him to - once at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:15) and once at the end (Mark 11:15). Jesus was a faithful doorkeeper in His Father's house.

If we act in human zeal however, we will be like Uzzah who tried to steady the ark with his hands and was struck down by God "for his irreverence" (2 Sam.6:7).

As doorkeepers of the Lord's house, we have to be on the alert, not only against worldly believers who will corrupt the testimony of the church, but also against zealous young brothers who act in human zeal and lead other young people off in strange directions.

We have to be on the alert against emotionalism, and against new "fads" and "gimmicks" that immature disciples are always seeking for.

We have to be on the alert to ensure that the church does not begin to major in music or in social work or in anything other than "making disciples and teaching them to obey ALL that the Lord commanded" (Matt.28:19,20).

When Adam and Eve were turned out of the garden of Eden, God kept cherubs near the tree of life with a flaming sword that turned every way to prevent anyone from coming to the tree of life.

This is a picture of the type of ministry that doorkeepers must have in every church today. But such a doorkeeper must be one who has first allowed that sword to fall on his own flesh, slaying all known sin in his own life, all his human zeal, all his partiality towards his family members and friends, etc.,

Who then is willing to stand with the sword at the doors of the churches in India today?

May the Lord raise up many doorkeepers in our land.

CHAPTER 8

AN AXE TO THE ROOT

- The Real Meaning of Repentance -

Most believers don't believe that Satan can lead them astray through God's Word. But Satan comes as "an angel of light" (2 Cor.11:14). So he won't come to you quoting from some heathen religious book, but from the Bible. If Satan could try to tempt even Jesus by quoting the Scriptures, we can be certain that he will try that with us too.

Someone has said that truth is like a bird and has two wings - "It is written" and "It is also written". If you have only one wing, you will go around in circles perpetually and probably astray. But when you have both wings you move forward.

Consider the answer to this question: Why did Christ die on the cross? The common answer to that question is: It is written, "Christ died for our sins." (1 Cor.15:3). But that is only half the truth. To get the whole truth, we must look at another Scripture. It is also written, "Christ died so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." (2 Cor.5:15). Only when we put both these Scriptures together, do we get both wings of truth.

When we read that Christ died for our sins - we need to understand what sin is. This can be understood aright only when we look at the second Scripture. There we see that to sin is to live for ourselves. But that is not the common understanding of sin that most believers have. When you say that you don't want to sin anymore, do you really mean that you don't want to live for yourself anymore?

Sin according to our conscience may mean different things to different believers. For example, a head-hunter's conscience may not bother him even after he has chopped off somebody's head. To others, telling lies is not sinful, but even necessary at times, if we are to live on this earth. So conscience is not a very good guide concerning sin.

As we get a better understanding of God and Scripture, we will realise that sin is not just murder, adultery and theft etc., It is living for oneself. If we live for ourselves, whatever bad habits we may have put away, we are still living in sin.

"If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away" (2 Cor.5:17). This means that the old attitudes, the old way of living has gone away. He is no longer living for

himself. He has not reached the goal of Christlikeness. But he has turned around and is seeking to live for the glory of God. This and this alone is true repentance.

You may have given up your gambling, smoking and drinking, and yet not have repented of the root cause of all sin - living for yourself. But there are many preachers today who will tickle your ears and tell you that you are still saved!! Such preachers are happy so long as you go along to their meetings and put your contribution into the offering-bag!!

One of the greatest deceptions that Satan has ever deceived believers with is this - making them believe that a man can continue to live for himself and still be saved and go to heaven at the end of his life.

A man may have turned from a few bad habits that are ruining his life. But that may only indicate that he is trying to preserve his life on earth. There is a statutory warning placed on all cigarette-packets that smoking is harmful for the health. So people don't smoke. For the same reason, people may not drink or gamble. They may not commit adultery, because they are afraid of catching AIDS. But such people have not repented (turned from sin) in the Biblical sense.

We have been created by God to live for His glory. If we don't do that but live for our own comfort, ease and glory, we are not saved. We have not repented. Jesus died to deliver us from that sinful way of life.

A person who seeks to be somebody big in the church and who wants others to respect him is clearly living for himself. He may have painted himself with a bit of religious whitewash. But he hasn't changed basically. He may now use a little Christian language - words like "being born again" etc., But the inner man is still the same.

It is evident why most preachers won't want to preach a message like this, because it will reduce the size of their congregations. They won't be popular and they won't be invited back to the prestigious Christian conventions at which they speak every year. We know of preachers who have read our books, only for the purpose of getting points for their sermons, and for the articles and books that they write. But they are careful to leave out the hard-hitting parts of our message, lest they lose their popularity.

I can guarantee that if any preacher preaches the whole counsel of God for six months to his congregation, and keeps on telling them that to live for themselves is to live in sin, and that those who love money cannot love God, he will either lose his job or 75% of his congregation!!

God looks at our hearts. If the basic motivation of our lives has not changed, we are not saved. The only difference we find in many believers, after their conversion is this: At first, they lived for themselves without any "religious whitewash". Now they are living for themselves with a whole lot of "religious whitewash". In actual fact their former condition was better - for then at least they knew that they were sinners. Now they imagine themselves to be saints, and are deceived.

Notice that when a woman caught in adultery was brought before Jesus, He never condemned her. Jesus was an unusual type of prophet. He allowed a woman caught in adultery to go scot-free without even a word of rebuke!! Why? Because He could see that she had repented. And so He forgave her.

And then there was this murderer who was such a wretched criminal that the Romans decided to crucify him. But when he acknowledged his sin, Jesus not only forgave him but also took him to paradise. That man hadn't probably done a single good thing in his entire life. He had only done evil, murdering others and robbing them. Yet when he died, he was welcomed into paradise by Jesus Himself. That's amazing, isn't it?

But when it came to the religious people who carried their Bibles and went to the synagogues every Saturday, Jesus called them "a generation of vipers who would not escape the damnation of hell."

Jesus' preaching was so out of the ordinary!! Whereas most preachers in his day told the murderers and the adulteresses that they were destined for hell, Jesus said that to the most religious, and outwardly upright people of His generation!!

Why? Because He knew that hypocrisy and spiritual snobbishness (that makes one look down on other human beings) were a million times worse in God's eyes than murder or adultery. Jesus saw the hearts of people and He didn't care one bit for outward religious whitewash. The Lord is not impressed by our religious language, even when we talk about "victory over sin" and "pressing on to perfection". If a man seeks his own and yet claims to be born again, the Lord will call him "a whitewashed grave and a viper" even today. He is not looking for people who make tall claims about their spirituality, but for people who are broken with sorrow for their sins, who consider themselves as the chief of all the sinners on earth - as Paul did towards the end of his earthly life, even after living in purity for so many years and accomplishing so much for the Lord.

The Lord will always be rich in mercy and forgiveness towards anyone who sincerely desires to turn from his selfish way of living, who is honest about his failures, and who blames no-one but himself for his sins. Think again of that woman caught in adultery. What qualifications did she have? Did she have a good testimony in the city? No. But she was honest. She did not pretend that she was innocent and that others were accusing her falsely. By the fact that she did not open her mouth, she acknowledged her guilt. Therefore there was hope for her.

It is extremely difficult for those who are righteous in their own eyes to find salvation. Those Pharisees were ready to stone the woman caught in adultery but they saw nothing of the sin there was in their own hearts at that very moment. When they put large amounts of money into the offering box and wanted everyone to see it, they were committing a sin that was worse than adultery in God's eyes, because they were getting people to worship (admire) them, instead of worshipping God.

Repentance means an "About Turn", so that we turn our backs henceforth to living for ourselves and decide to live for God alone. This does not mean becoming full time Christian workers. No.

God calls only 1 in a 1000 of believers to be full time workers. He wants all His other children to work in secular jobs - earning their own living, but not living for themselves but for the glory of God.

Repentance is described in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, as "turning to God from idols". Many so-called believers have not turned to God from their idols. In India, many of the heathen people are happy to accept Christ as their god - but only as one more god in addition to the many idols that they already worship. We know that this is impossible. One who accepts Christ must give up all other gods and idols.

Remember that it is to believers that the Holy Spirit says, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (1 Jn.5:21). There is no difference between a heathen man who wants to accept Christ in addition to his existing gods, and the so-called believer who wants to accept Christ, but still wants to pursue after money (his present god).

That would be like a woman who is already married who now wants to marry a second husband. It is amazing how believers can fool themselves into thinking that Jesus Christ will agree to that type of a marriage with them. How many of us would be willing to marry a girl who is already married to another man. Yet you expect Christ to marry you, without your having forsaken your love for the world and its honour, its pleasures and its wealth.

Idols made of wood and stone are not as deceptive as the invisible ones (like money and honour), because one can see one's idolatry clearly when bowing down to physical idols. If you saw a man bowing down before a statue of some heathen idol in one room and then going into the next room and praying to Jesus Christ, you would not consider him to be a Christian. But what is the difference between him and the man who spends his whole week worshipping the idols of money, the honour of men and worldly ambitions and then comes to the meetings on Sundays and tries to worship Christ. I think there is more hope for the man who worships Buddha than for such a "believer".

When such a "believer" comes to the meeting on a Sunday and sings:

"Take my silver and my gold - Not a mite would I withhold",

- he is telling God a lie.

Christians tell more lies to God on Sundays than on any other day of the week, because they sing songs of great consecration to the Lord, claiming to surrender all to Him and to follow Him etc., God hears all this, but He is not deceived. He says, "With their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness. (Eze.33:31)

Listening to the words of the songs that many believers sing, one would think they are the greatest saints on earth. But in fact most of them are the greatest of hypocrites. And God is not fooled.

To live for oneself is to live like an animal - for all animals live only for themselves and their little ones. They all seek their own, always thinking of what will benefit them the most. This is how a lion thinks in the forest, "If that deer can be killed for my food then I will kill it." And so among animals, only the strongest can survive. But we are not animals. God did not create us to live like the dogs and the pigs, who just eat and sleep and produce little ones and die. Man was created to live his entire life for the glory of God.

I sometimes get letters from people who have retired from some job asking whether we can employ them because they want to spend their retirement years in "the service of God". Imagine a scene where a honoured guest comes to your house and you drink a cup of tea in front of him and then offer him the dregs in your cup!! That is what people do to God. Having lived their entire life for making money in the world, they now want to give the dregs of their lives to God. What an insult!

We must give our lives to God when we are young. All of our lives must be for Him to order as He pleases. Have you turned like that from a life of seeking your own? Many believers are going to have a lot of regret when Jesus returns and they discover that all the money that they earned on earth was no better than the play-money that children play with in a MONOPOLY game - worth nothing!! And all the property that they acquired on earth too was just like the hotels and the houses on that MONOPOLY board - worth nothing. The game of life is over then and they never accomplished anything other than accumulating worthless things that have no eternal value. They have lived a useless life. There will be tremendous regret too if all they sought for was honour and they discover that their honour has evaporated in the light of eternity.

But those who have lived to do the will of God and for the glory of God will find that they have tremendous joy in that day. Material things are only for our use on this earth. That is all. As long as we use them, that is all right. But they should never master us. It is one thing to use money. It is another thing to be mastered by it. Money is an excellent servant but a terrible master. Consider a woman who is married to an excellent man, but who loves the car-driver (chauffeur) more than her husband and spends most of her time with the chauffeur. What would you think of such a woman? That is an exact description of the believer who is always thinking of making more and more money (beyond his legitimate needs) than on how he can be more effective for the Lord.

When God created Adam, He told him to have dominion over the whole earth. But Adam became a slave. Christ has now come to make us kings once again. God has given us many things to enjoy in this world. But when any of those things master us, then we become slaves. Then we are no longer the kings that God intended us to be.

God told the serpent in Eden that dust would be its food. Do you know what gold is? It too is part of the dust that God created on this earth - a little harder and a little rarer perhaps than ordinary dust, but dust nevertheless. And here we see the sad spectacle of man pursuing after the devil's food. Man is enslaved to gold-dust everywhere.

When the devil sees that he can't enslave a man through a bad habit, he will enslave him through something neutral - just so that the man has no time for God, or for reading the Bible, or for

fellowship. It could be a good, clean television program that enslaves a man. The devil is looking for believers who will seek their own - their own entertainment, their own profit, etc., The devil has 101 means to keep a man away from God. That is why we need to see sin not just as drinking and gambling and adultery and murder. We must see sin as "living for ourselves". To sin is to do what pleases ourselves, to do our own will. From that root, many fruits of sin come forth. Jesus died to save us from all that.

John the Baptist said that when Jesus came, He would lay the axe to the root of the tree. This is the root that Jesus has come to lay the axe to - living for ourselves and wanting to do our own will.

We can cut off little bad fruits from the tree every now and then. But that does not solve the problem. Our life may look so nice when the bad fruit that others could see have all been snipped off. But the tree hasn't changed. Jesus said that a good tree will never bear good fruit unless you change the tree itself. To change the tree, you have to first put the axe to the roots of the old tree.

Why are most homes war zones today? Because both husbands and wives want to live for themselves. And so we see this amazing thing happening in the world today: So called "born again Christians" are divorcing their partners and marrying again!! This is unique to the 20th century. Even pastors and preachers are divorcing their wives and marrying other women. Some preachers don't divorce their wives, but just live in secret adultery. Worldly couples have divorced each other in all centuries. But when Christians start doing that, we can be certain that the great apostasy ("falling away from the faith") is upon us and that we are in the last days.

The reason for all this is that believers have not seen that sin is living for oneself. They have not seen it because they have not been taught it. The fault is with their leaders and their blood is on the hands of their leaders who are accountable to God.

Jesus said that "very few will find the way of life". Why?

Because the gate is so narrow.

From a worldly standpoint, the rich young ruler who came to Jesus had four excellent qualifications for church-membership - he was young, rich, influential (a ruler) and morally upright. All churches would love to have such a man as a member. He would have qualified even to be a board-member in most evangelical churches today. But Jesus did not consider him fit to be even His disciple - leave alone a leader. Isn't that amazing?

Jesus was not impressed by his wealth or his worldly influence. If the man still loved money, he was unfit to be Jesus' disciple. He had to give up his love for money before he could enter through the narrow gate. The man went away sad, and Jesus let him go. Jesus did not go after him and suggest that he give up his money in stages - 10% now and another 10% a month later etc., No. There is no bargaining when it comes to discipleship. It is either all or nothing. He could not love money and God at the same time. He had to make a choice. He had to turn from his idol (money) and be united to Christ alone.

If you want to live for yourself, you can go ahead and do so. And as in the case of this rich man, the Lord will leave you alone. And if you find a convenient church where you are told that you are still on your way to heaven, God won't disturb you there either. He will allow you to deceive yourself all your life. You will wake up finally to discover yourself in hell. The reason why God allows people to be deceived is because they don't love to know the truth about themselves. And when some prophet tells them the truth about themselves, they get angry with the prophet.

Jeremiah prophesied during the reign of King Jehoiakim. When the people of Judah read the words that Jeremiah had written on a scroll, they were afraid, for Jeremiah was one of the hardest prophets in the Old Testament, never preaching a soft message. It was judgment, judgment and more judgement (Jer.20:8 - Living). When the king read Jeremiah's scroll however, he got so angry that he cut it up and threw it into the fire (Jer.36). But God told Jeremiah to write the scroll again. That is how we got the book of Jeremiah. But the first time it was written, it was torn up by an angry king who did not want to hear the truth about himself. There have always been people like that.

But there have also been A FEW in every age who have loved the truth. It is a great grace that God has given us an ear to hear the truth. God loved us before we were born and wanted the best for us. He did not want us to waste our lives and to wake up in eternity to find ourselves paupers. He wants us to be wise and to live for the things that are eternal.

All that is created (including money, houses and lands) will be shaken and removed one day. Only that which is not created will remain. So we must be wise to spend our time and energies for that which will remain eternally. And let me say again that that does not mean that you should all become full time Christian workers. But it does mean that in whatever work you do, you no longer live for yourself, but only for the glory of God. You can certainly work and earn the best salary possible - to support yourself and the Lord's work. But your goal in life must be the glory of God. Your ambition in life must be to please Him.

I am not saying that we can't go for a picnic or have any form of recreation. Of course we can. As human beings, we need that - whether playing games or listening to music or whatever. All that is perfectly all right, if it is clean and healthy entertainment. It is when any of these things master us and begin to be a dominant interest in our lives, that we cross over the red line into dangerous ground. It is very easy for a job or a sport or some harmless entertainment to become so much a part of a person's life that it becomes the main thing in his life. And then even his wife and children get neglected. And God of course gets neglected first of all. When that happens, then you know that that thing (whatever it is) has become the man's master.

We have to turn from living for ourselves, if the Lord is to build His church through us - the type of church that He has planned from eternal ages. He can build it only through people who are not seeking their own, but who are willing to lay everything on the altar for Him.

The Old Testament temple was built on Mount Moriah - where Abraham offered up his son Isaac to God (2 Chron.3:1). Abraham had only one son left, at that time - Isaac, the darling of his heart.

God tested Abraham's devotion that day to check whether Isaac had become an idol in his life. God told him, as it were, that he had to turn from all idolatry if he was to serve the Lord. And so he had to place his son on the altar and give him up. God did not take Isaac away, because God was only detaching Abraham from his unnatural attachment to Isaac that would have hindered his walk with God. God has to do the same with us. We have to give him that which is most precious to us.

In the rich young ruler's case it was his money. Just like God asked Abraham to give up Isaac, God asked the rich young ruler to give up his money. For all you know, if that rich man had only said "Yes, Lord, here it is all", God may have told him that he could keep his money, just like he told Abraham to keep Isaac. But he had to give it up first.

May we then all have the grace to say, "Lord whatever Isaacs there are in my life, I lay them all on the altar and give them all up to You. I don't want any more idols in my life that come between You and me. I don't want to live for myself. I really want to live for You alone. I want to live for the glory of God. I don't want to waste my life."

This is the best news in the world: We don't have to be slaves to our own ambitions and desires any more and thus waste our earthly lives, but can be free to live for the glory of God and thus live useful lives. To live for ourselves is to live in bondage and in chains. To live for the glory of God is to be like the eagles who fly in the sky. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus can break every chain and set you free - TODAY!!

If you have wasted much time in profitless pursuits in the past, you can't do anything about that now. But you can press on to do the best TODAY.

Since there is still time ahead of us, what we should all say to the Lord is: "Lord I can't do anything about the years of my life that are past. But I want to live the rest of life for You alone. Search my life and see if there is any idol anywhere that I am worshipping. I want to turn from every idol in my life to worship and serve You alone. Lord Jesus I repent especially of this unconscious idolatry of living for myself."

May the Lord help us all.

CHAPTER 9

NEW-COVENANT SERVANTS AND NEW COVENANT-CHURCHES

New-Covenant Servants

There are three passages of Scripture that tell us who a true servant of God is under the NEW covenant. When we read those three passages without any preconceived opinions, we will discover that all of us can be servants of God, in this day and age, if we want to be.

Under the old covenant, only the Levites could be servants of God. They were not supposed to do any earthly work and were to be supported by the tithes of the other tribes of Israel. Babylonian Christianity today teaches that under the new covenant too, only those who give up their secular jobs can be servants of God - and that they must be supported by the tithes of other Christians. But this is the teaching of man's tradition and not that of Scripture!

(1) Free From Sin

"Being made free from sin and become servants to God" (Rom.6:22).

This is the first requirement - to be free from sin. It is obviously easier to be free of one's earthly job than to be free from sin. Jesus worked in a secular job. Yet He was a servant of God even then.

A man who gets angry and loses his temper cannot be a servant of God. He may be a preacher or even a chief-pastor, but he cannot be a servant of God. Many pastors shout praises to God in "other tongues" on Sunday morning and then shout angrily at their wives in their "mother-tongue" the same afternoon. Is the Holy Spirit able to control us only when we speak in other tongues, but not when we speak in our mother-tongue? That is a deception. I thank God that I have spoken in tongues for 22 years. It has edified me and delivered me totally from depression, gloom and discouragement all these years. But I thank God that the Holy Spirit also controls my language when I speak in my mother-tongue - to my wife, to my brothers, to strangers and to beggars.

A man who lusts after women with his eyes cannot be a preacher of the gospel or a servant of God. Only one who is radical enough to be willing even to pull out his eye to avoid sin can be a servant of God. When was the last time you wept on your pillow at night, because you slipped up with your eyes? If you are casual about this matter, you will backslide inwardly little by little until one day you fall publicly.

A man who tells a lie in order to make a little more money or in order to gain some honour for himself is actually a servant of the devil - for the devil is the father of all lies. He cannot be a servant of God.

One who cannot love ALL his enemies, or do good to ALL who harm him, is totally unfit to preach the gospel. If you have the slightest bit of bitterness or unforgiveness in your heart against anyone, then the best thing for you to do is to keep your mouth shut, go home and repent and cleanse your heart of those evils. You cannot be a servant of God.

(2) Free from Mammon

"You cannot be a servant of God and a servant of Mammon. You must hate one and love the other. You must hold on to one and despise the other" (Luke 16:13).

This is the second requirement - to be free from mammon (money and all material things). Again, it is easier to be free from one's secular job than it is to be free from mammon.

You have to make a choice as to which you are going to serve - either God or Mammon. Many "full time workers" are seeking to serve God AND Mammon. They earn more as so-called "servants of God" today, than they would ever have earned if they had been in a secular profession. Anyone who has not had to sacrifice earthly comforts, money and material things in serving God is NOT really serving God at all.

Any believer can be a servant of God - but he must be free from loving mammon. In fact, if you read the above verse carefully, you will find that Jesus said that we had to hate mammon and despise mammon in order to be servants of God.

If you can say before God that that is your attitude towards mammon or at least that that is the attitude that you want to have towards mammon, then you qualify to be a servant of God - not otherwise. How many full-time workers qualify by the standard that Jesus has set here? Very, very few!

The test as to who we serve is discovered by whose orders we obey - God's or Mammon's. Whose claims have priority in our lives - God's or Mammon's? No-one can serve two masters. When money calls you, if you respond immediately, you are a servant of mammon.

Why is it that most preachers travel only to preach in comfortable places where there are rich believers. How many are interested in regularly visiting the poor believers in the villages of India and establishing them in the faith. Those are the true servants of God in India.

Many Indian full-time workers now live in America and claim to have a burden for India. This is sheer hypocrisy. Yet multitudes of believers are fooled by them. If they really had a burden for India they would have lived in India itself. There is nothing wrong in a believer re-locating his residence to another country. But the motive in his re-location is what matters. Jesus also relocated His residence from heaven to earth. But what was His motive? Was it comfort and ease and money? Or was it that God might be glorified and needy people helped. You too must decide why you decided to relocate from one place to another. That will indicate to you whether you are a servant of God or of Mammon.

The devil knows that a man who serves Mammon is useless to God. And so he leaves such preachers alone. The greatest insult that the devil can give you is to leave you alone and to allow you to get honour from worldly people and from the worldly leaders of apostate Christendom.

A servant of God thinks constantly about how to win souls and build the church. That is what he dreams about at night too. A servant of Mammon however thinks and dreams day and night about how to make more money. We cannot fool our "subconscious" - because it knows, more than anyone else, exactly what we desire. If we love Mammon, let us be honest and tell God that - and ask Him to deliver us from it. There is great hope for honest believers - but NO hope for dishonest hypocrites.

We hear these days of many "miracle crusades". But I am still waiting to see one crusade where the miracle of "not asking people to give money" is seen!! Jesus and His apostles never took an offering from people in any of their meetings. Yet blind, foolish believers today admire

preachers who unashamedly ask for money and even imagine that these are great servants of God. The clearer light of the judgment-seat of Christ will reveal that such preachers were only serving themselves and not God.

Believers draw a dividing line to separate those who are evangelical in doctrine from those who are liberal. But in such a case, the devil and all his demons will also be on the "evangelical" side, because they are all evangelical in doctrine (Jas.2:19)!! But God draws a line to separate those who love Mammon from those who love God. Then we find that the devil and his demons are found among the lovers of Mammon.

If we seek God's kingdom first, God will give us all that we need for our life on earth, without our pursuing after them. I have found this to be true in all the 40 years of my Christian experience. Heaven and earth will pass away, but God's Word will not pass away. We must all be living demonstrations of the fact that God supplies ALL the needs of those who seek His kingdom first. Although none of us may be able to say that we have consistently sought God's kingdom first at all times throughout our Christian life, we should certainly be able to testify that we have not run after money. If we are preachers, we should also have this testimony that we do not go anywhere to preach just because we know we can get money there, that we do not seek to please the rich, that we do not ignore the poor, that we are not interested in taking up offerings, that we do not make our financial needs known to people and that we do not expect people to give us money. Paul could testify to having lived such a life. He said that he lived like that in order to expose all the money-loving preachers in his time who claimed that they too were serving God like he did (2 Cor.11:10-13 -Living Bible).

In our day also, there is a great need in India for living witnesses like Paul, who will expose the money-loving preachers that are found in abundance in Christendom in India. We know very well why the devil hates us and our ministry so much, that he makes believers (who have never come to our meetings or heard us speak) call us heretics, antichrists, terrorists, false prophets etc.. It is because we are troubling Satan's kingdom so much by exposing the fact that full-time workers who love money and preach the gospel of Christ are actually servants of Satan (See 2Cor.11:15 in the context of verses 10-13).

Jesus said that if we were not faithful in the use of Mammon, God would not commit the true riches of His kingdom to us (Lk.16:11). When we see the blind imitation of Western Christians by Indian Christians, the terrible lack of revelation on God's Word, and the boring preaching of today's preachers, we can understand clearly that the reason for all this is that these preachers have NOT been faithful with money.

(3) Free From Seeking To Please Men

"If I seek to please men, I cannot be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

This is the third requirement - to be free from seeking to please men.

Once again, it is easier to be free of a secular job than to be free from seeking to please men.

If we preach God's Word to please men, we are servants of men and not of God. When a preacher wants to be invited back once again to a prestigious convention where he can get more money and honour next year, he can be tempted to modify his message so that nobody is offended by what he says. Thus he becomes a servant of men.

When you pray in such a way in public as to impress men, you are worshipping men's opinions and not the living God. God does not hear such prayers, because they are offered to men and not to Him.

In the same way, we could examine ourselves concerning the way we dress, the way we talk to people, and even the way we walk. If any of these things are done to impress men with our "holiness" or perhaps our "humility", we are servants of men and not servants of God.

Even if you seek to please your wife/husband, you cannot please God.

The more you please God the more you will be called evil names by men who do not know God - even by religious leaders in Christendom. Jesus was called "the prince of devils". How much more His disciples will be called by such names - because they do not seek to please any pope or archbishop or chief-pastor or any human being on the earth.

New-Covenant Churches

Nowadays many believers are fed up with their own denominations, and are leaving them in search of a new-covenant church. There are also many groups that claim to be "New-covenant churches".

But how are we to identify a new-covenant church? Certainly not by the pattern of its meetings. It is possible to imitate many things in the pattern that we see in a powerful church, and yet never become a powerful church ourselves.

It would have been possible for the Philistines to build a tabernacle exactly like the one that Moses built, because the details were all clearly given in the book of Exodus. But there was one thing about that tabernacle that no-one would have been able to imitate - and that was the fire of the glory of God that rested upon the tabernacle. That was the one distinctive mark by which the true dwelling place of God was identified in the wilderness. Without that, the tabernacle was an empty shell. When the tabernacle was later replaced by the temple in Solomon's time, the glory of God filled it. But later, when Israel backslid, that glory slowly moved out (Ezek.10:4,18,19). That temple then became an empty shell. It is the same with many churches today.

The one identifying mark of a new-covenant church is the presence of God in its midst. When the spirit of prophecy is powerfully present in a church-meeting, those coming to that meeting will fall on their faces and "acknowledge that God is there" (1 Cor.14:24,25). When Jesus speaks prophetically in the church, our hearts will burn, just like the hearts of the two disciples burned on the way to Emmaus, when Jesus spoke to them (Lk.24:32).

God is a consuming fire. When God came down into the bush through which He spoke to Moses, and the bush burned, no worm could survive in that bush. In exactly the same way, no sin can remain hidden or unexposed where the powerful, burning presence of God is found today. Such a church alone is a new-covenant church. The eyes of Jesus are like a flame of fire (Rev.1:14) and He is constantly searching and exposing sin and human traditions and Phariseeism in all the churches which he is building.

The master key to the kingdom of heaven is poverty of spirit (Mt. 5:3). Without this, we will not be able to build a new-covenant church. To be poor in spirit is to be broken before God constantly with a sense of our own need, because we have a great and intense longing to be perfect even as our heavenly Father is perfect. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted" (Psa.34:18). And when He is near, His presence brings the fire of heaven into our hearts and through us to others wherever we go.

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) made a serious mistake when they joined the powerful new-covenant church at Jerusalem where the presence of God burned like a fire. If they had been in the church at Corinth (in later years) they would have lived long lives. Ananias might even have become an elder there - because the church at Corinth was a carnal, dead church. But in the fiery new-covenant church at Jerusalem, this couple just could not survive. God will expose and remove those who live in hypocrisy in any new-covenant church.

If there is anything that dishonours God in our life at home or work place, we are in great danger if we remain as members of a truly new-covenant church. If your basic aim in life is not to seek the glory of God, but something for yourself or your family, it is far better that you leave a new-covenant church where God is powerfully present and His Word powerfully proclaimed. It would be better for you to join a dead church. At least you may then live long - unlike Ananias and Sapphira!

There are many churches today that call themselves "new-covenant churches". But they are as dead as the dodo bird!! The name means nothing. The question is whether Pharisees and hypocrites can live comfortably there or whether they are exposed and get offended and leave. In a new-covenant church, many will get offended with the preaching of the Word and leave the church. It is written of the church at Jerusalem, that "many people didn't dare join them" (Acts 5:13)

If our desire as elders is to increase our numbers rather than to make disciples for Jesus, we will gather Pharisees and hypocrites in our churches. We will never build a new-covenant church. When the presence of Jesus is powerfully present in a church, the disciples therein will be taken up with seeing His glory. The proof that we have indeed seen the glory of the risen Lord will be that the things of earth (like comfort and honour and wealth) will have become dim in our eyes, and will no longer have the attraction that they once had for us.

In a new-covenant church, there won't be just powerful preaching of the Word but powerful living examples of the Word too. It is not new doctrines that make an impact on others for God, but holy lives. New-covenant servants don't just preach to others, they invite others to follow their example too (1 Cor. 11:1).

We should weep when our example is not a worthy one. We should hang our heads in shame when we bore people with dry, un-anointed messages. It is impossible to become cold or Pharisaical if we follow Jesus. We are far away from Jesus if we have only dreams and visions to talk about, but no word from the Lord to feed the people with. It is impossible to bore people, when we ourselves are on fire for the Lord.

Jesus was raised from the dead so that He might have the first place in everything (Col. 1:18). God fully backs all those who have this as their ambition. What this means is that we give up our own plans and rights and let Jesus tell us what we are to do, how we are to spend our money and time etc., If this is your only ambition in life, you can be certain that God will use you to build a new-covenant church in your locality.

Many claim that Jesus is in their midst just because they quote His Name (Mt. 18:20). But they are deceiving themselves. If He is really present in their midst, then why are the meetings so boring? Why is it that lives are not being transformed? Even a short time spent in the company of a truly godly man makes a deep impact upon us such that, it even changes the course of our lives. How much more of an impact there should be upon our lives if we have spent even a short time with Jesus Himself. So if lives are not being transformed through the church-meetings, then we have to admit that the Lord's presence is not there in our meetings. Then we are NOT a new-covenant church.

We will never be able to build a perfect church here on this earth. Even in the first church that Jesus built - His twelve disciples - there was one traitor. So we cannot expect anything better. But where Jesus builds His church today, there will be a core at the centre of that church of people who have seen His glory and who have been gripped by it. Their hearts will be aflame with a fire that the Devil cannot quench. Through them the Lord will build a new covenant church for the glory of God.

CHAPTER 10

LESSONS FROM CAIN AND ABEL

Reading: Genesis 4:1-12.

This is the first incident recorded in the Bible after Adam and Eve were turned out of the garden of Eden.

Here were two children brought up in the same home, under absolutely identical circumstances, with the same background the same teaching concerning the true God etc., And yet their lives turned out so differently. Jesus said that when He comes for His Bride, two can be in one bed, and yet one may be taken and the other left behind. Two can be fellowshipping in the same church, one will be taken and the other left behind.

That was how it was with Abel and Cain, one was accepted and the other rejected. Both were religious. Both brought offerings to God, but their heart attitudes were different and that made all the difference. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.

The difference between Abel and Cain was NOT, as we have commonly heard, that one brought a lamb (and shed its blood) and the other brought an offering of the produce of the ground. They were not presenting a sacrifice for their sins but an offering to the Lord. And it was quite permissible (even under the law of Moses) to present to the Lord an offering of "the produce of the ground" (Deut.26:2,10). The exhortation in Proverbs 3:9 is to honour the Lord with the first of all your produce. In Abel's case this happened to be the firstlings of his flock, because he was a keeper of flocks. in Cain's case this was the fruit of the ground because he was a tiller of the ground (Gen. 4:2). Each of them brought the firstfruits of their respective occupations. in this matter, there was nothing to find fault with in Cain.

Acceptable Sacrifices

But the sacrifices of God are a broken and a contrite heart, that is aware of its own nothingness and helplessness (Psa.51:17). That is what Abel had, and what Cain did not have. And that is why it is written, "The Lord had regard for Abel, and (therefore) for his offering But the Lord had no regard for Cain and (therefore) not for his offering either (Gen.4:4,6).

Faith is the helpless dependence of the soul upon God and it was "by faith that Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain" (Heb.11:4). Therefore Abel's gifts were acceptable to God.

There is a great deception in the teaching that what made the difference between Abel and Cain was that Abel offered blood and Cain did not. The application of such teaching is that what makes a man acceptable to God is his presenting the blood of Jesus before God. is is almost as though the way the man lives and the condition of his heart (whether broken or not, whether with faith or not) makes no difference. All he does is plead the blood of Jesus as though it were some type of magic charm, and he gains acceptance with God. This is a lie and many are being deceived by it.

The blood of Jesus cannot be claimed by anyone and everyone. is does NOT say in the Scriptures that the blood of Jesus can cleanse anyone and everyone from their sins. No. That is a subtle perversion of Scripture. What the Scripture does say is that the blood of Jesus will cleanse all those "WHO WALK IN THE LIGHT AS GOD IS IN THE LIGHT" (1 Jn.1:7). To walk in the light of God, one must have a broken and a contrite heart, as Abel had. Only then can one's offering be acceptable to God.

If a man says that he trusts in the blood of Jesus, but has a proud and arrogant spirit, God will resist him and oppose him (1 Pet.5:6), just like He did Cain. It is only the humble who receive grace from God (Jas.4:6).

Our offerings of worship, prayer and service are acceptable to God ONLY if they come from a broken and contrite heart of faith (humble dependence an God). It is not the fluency of our

speech or the efficiency of our service that God looks at, but rather the attitude of our hearts. This is the first lesson that we can learn from this incident in Genesis 4.

From the days of Cain and Abel and on until the end of time, the sacrifices of God have always been a broken and contrite spirit. He does not change. His laws remain the same.

God would not have accepted Cain even if Cain had brought a lamb and shed its blood, for his heart was proud and lifted up.

Humility of heart is the first step to salvation Then we can come into the light and ask for the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from all sin.

It is only the humble of heart who can shout Paul's shout of triumph, "If God be for us, who can be against us " (Rom.8:31), because God is only on the side of the humble. The proud cannot say that, for God is against them. Anyone who has high thoughts concerning himself, as Cain had, will end up like Cain too, even if he keeps claiming the blood of Jesus. "Do not be deceived. God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Gal.6:7). And that law applies universally without respect of persons.

Jealousy and Anger

There is a further lesson that we can learn from this incident. Cain was jealous and angry with Abel, because he had gone so well with Abel (for God had accepted him).

How do you feel when you find it going very well with someone whom you are closely associated with? When you find a fellow-brother who is preaching victory over sin and you find that his life is consistent with his preaching - that there is no evidence of anxiety or anger or impatience in him, but on the contrary, a perpetual spirit of triumph and joy and peace; and in contrast your own life is miserable and gloomy and defeated (because you do not believe that a life of victory is possible) - Do you then find a root of envy creeping in and a desire to see him fall somewhere so that you can gloat over his failure and drag him down in the eyes of others? That was the same spirit that drove Cain.

Do you feel happy when some trouble befalls that brother? Does his perpetual victory irritate you and make you angry? That attitude of yours, is the spirit of Cain, not the Spirit of Christ; and the sooner you recognise it for the foul, slimy thing that it is, the better.

Sin was crouching at the door of Cain's heart when God sought to warn him. Sin wasn't a hundred miles away but at the door of his heart pressing for entrance.

Cain was NOT thinking about doing something good. He had not yet thought to do something evil, for in that case, sin would have been inside the door already. He had just kept his heart empty, swept and unoccupied with anything good. That opened the way, as Jesus said for eight wicked spirits to occupy it (Matt.12:43-45).

There was no joy in Cain's life, for such a man cannot truly rejoice. His face was fallen, and gloom and depression and anger were written across it. He could not bear to see it going so well with someone else.

Cain was angry with God and with Abel. An extra reason for his anger was that it was going well with someone younger than him. It would perhaps have been tolerable to see it going well with someone older, but it was unbearable to see it happening to someone younger.

Before you throw a stone at Cain, consider: Can you truly rejoice when you see brothers who are much younger than you, going ahead of you spiritually? Do you seek their good so zealously that you are eager to see them go ahead of you. If so, then you have the mind of Christ Who could rejoice that His disciples would do greater works than He Himself did (Jn.14:12).

But "where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing" (Jas 3:16). Yes, where the spirit of Cain is found, every imaginable evil will also be found, sooner or later.

God's Warning

And yet the amazing thing is that God does not leave even such a man without giving him a warning. Look at the father of the prodigal son who was willing to go outside and invite his elder son to come in. So God came to Cain. As Jesus would later love even Judas Iscariot right up to the very end, so God loved Cain and did not desire his destruction.

"Why are you angry?" God asked him, "if you do well, surely you too will be accepted" (Gen.4:7 marg.) If Cain came with a broken and a contrite heart, he too would be accepted. There is no partiality with God.

God has no favourites. His laws are unchanging and those who humble themselves will be exalted and those who exalt themselves will be humbled. Even Jesus, His own Son, was not treated in any special way by the Father. It is clearly written that Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God, because He HUMBLED HIMSELF (Phil.2:8,9). Not because He was God's Son, but because He humbled Himself as a man. He lived as a man under the same laws of God that we live under, as human beings. God treated His own Son just as He would treat any other man. Therefore we dare to believe that what God did for Jesus He will do for us too. If we humble ourselves, we too will be exalted - but not otherwise. If we do well, our face too will be lifted up and become radiant with joy.

"But," God warned Cain, "if you do not do well, then sin is crouching at the door." Like a lion waiting to devour him, sin was close to Cain's heart. He himself did not probably realise it, but God warned him. Cain was already jealous and angry, but something worse was waiting outside the door. The spirit of murder was waiting to possess Cain. But God told Cain that he must master sin. This has always been God's desire for man and it is mentioned right at beginning of human history - THAT MAN MUST MASTER SIN.

But that warning of God went unheeded - just many do not heed God's warnings in Scripture today. Cain did not respond to God's call. Instead of humbling himself under the mighty hand of God, he exalted himself and gave in to the desires in his flesh. Thus God became His enemy.

God orders our circumstances so that we begin to see the corruption in our flesh. If Cain had been an only son of his parents, he would never have seen the jealousy that there was in his flesh. But the presence of Abel and the fact of God's acceptance of Abel brought out the evil in Cain's flesh - for Cain to see clearly, if he wanted to. Cain should have judged himself instead of being angry with his brother. Then he would have been saved.

We ought to be thankful that God brings us into situations with other people, that bring out what resides in our flesh, for us to see clearly. If we heed those warnings from God and humble ourselves and judge ourselves, acknowledging the truth about ourselves that God has brought forth into the light, then it can go well with us. Otherwise sin waits outside our door too to devour us.

We should be thankful too that we can be part of an assembly where the light of God shines brightly, so that all that is fleshly and soulish is brought to the surface for us to see. It would be terrible to belong to an assembly where we can sit for years and never discover the evil that dwells hidden in our flesh. Those who do not seek for fellowship never have any light on their self-life, and thus remain in blissful ignorance of their condition and never make any progress. When God shows us something concerning ourselves we should be thankful for the light.

When God gives us a warning through the exhortations of the brothers and sisters in the church, we should take it seriously, or we too can end up like Cain who ignored God's warning.

Freedom from suspicion

In Abel, we see a contrast to the wicked attitude of Cain.

When Cain invited Abel for a walk in the fields (Gen.4:8), he went along with him unsuspectingly. Abel did not suspect that Cain was jealous of him - or else he would not have gone out with him. How simple in heart Abel was. He had a broken and contrite heart and did not judge his brother Cain. What an example for us to follow!

How often even those with whom it is going well in other ways, are suspicious that others are jealous of them or that they are thinking bad thoughts about them or trying to push them down etc., We may have nothing against others, but may yet suspect that others are having things against us. Thus we also are defiled.

Abel did not even suspect one who was out to murder him. What a good heart he had! That is the type of heart we need. There are two cliffs on either side of the narrow way. One is the cliff of jealousy and the other is the cliff of suspicion - and we can fall over either cliff and reach the bottom. Abel was neither jealous of Cain nor suspicious of him. This is the path we are to walk in relation to our fellow-believers. It is better to die like Abel with an unsuspecting heart than to live with a heart contaminated with suspicion.

The one who suspects and judges others of being jealous or angry, is a busybody in the matters of others, and thereby proves that he himself does not have a broken and contrite heart any more than the one who is jealous and angry.

If we have lowly thoughts about ourselves, like Abel had, then we will not even think that others could be jealous of us. We would then be so insignificant in our own estimation that we would not imagine that anyone could possibly be jealous of us.

Abel rejoiced in God's acceptance of him. But that did not lift his heart up in pride against Cain. No. He would not compare himself with Cain neither would he be a busybody in Cain's life.

The end of Cain

Cain was too proud to accept God's warning and so the sin that lay crouching at his door came inside his heart, mastered him and destroyed him. Finally, it was Cain who was destroyed, not Abel - for Abel went straight into God's presence, whereas Cain went out from the presence of the Lord for eternity (Gen.4:16).

When God warns us through an exhortation in a meeting or through a word that comes to us through an article, if we think, "Oh, I don't need that exhortation," then we have begun to walk "the way of Cain" (Jude 11). "The pride of our heart has then deceived us" (Obadiah 3).

And when the exhortation has come from a brother who is much younger to us in the Lord, then the temptation is even greater to treat it lightly. It is then that God shows us, if we have ears to hear, that we love ourselves more than we love the truth. And if we continue along that path, God will one day send a delusion into our lives so that we are deceived concerning the truth (2 Thess.2:10,11). It is dangerous to ignore exhortation. That is the surest way to end up being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and to depart from the living God, like Cain did (Heb.3:12,13).

We may not kill someone with a stone, as Cain did, but we may do so with our tongues. The Bible warns us that the tongue has the power to kill people (Prov.18:21). We can murder a man's reputation, his character and many other things besides - without even touching his body. And, alas many who call themselves believers do just that, week after week. And at the end of the week, they go so innocently to the Sunday meeting, to worship God, as though they had done nothing wrong at all during the past week. But God says to them, "The voice of your brother's character (which you have slain) is crying to me". But they don't hear that voice, because their conscience has become hardened. Like Cain, they end up as tramps and wanderers spiritually, never making any progress into the likeness of Christ, and never being built into the Body of Christ (Gen.4:10,12).

Truly, sin crouches so very closely at the door of our hearts. The only way of escape is by keeping our minds occupied with good things and praiseworthy things concerning our fellow-believers, and not with their faults and weaknesses (Phil. 4:8).

Abel and Cain are the forerunners of the two systems described in the closing pages of the Bible - Jerusalem and Babylon, the Bride and the Harlot. One system is spiritual and the other religious (like Cain). One follows Jesus and the other follows the Pharisees.

He who has the hope of Christ's coming and of being taken up when He comes will certainly purify himself day by day, and seek to go down and humble himself more and more (1 Jn.3:3). The remainder will go on "deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim.3:13).

He who has ears to hear let him hear what the Spirit is saying.

CHAPTER 11

OWE NO MAN ANYTHING

God is never in debt to any person. Under the new covenant, we are called to partake of God's nature. So we too are commanded to "owe no man anything" (Romans 13:8). Having to borrow from others was part of the curse of the law - a curse that God said would come on Israel when they disobeyed the law. (Read Deut 28:43-48). Israel would suffer from "the lack of all things"(v.48), when they did not keep God's commandments.

One of the blessings that God promised the Israelites when they obeyed God's commandments, was "You shall lend to many, but you shall not borrow" (Deut.28:12; also see Deut 15:6). To have enough with which to bless others was one way in which God would bless his people.

So if you are in constant financial need, you must have a spiritual check-up to see what is wrong. Occasional financial need may be permitted by God to test our faith. But constant financial need such that a person has to get into debt is not the will of God for any of His children.

The Bible says that "the borrower is the slave of the lender" (Prov.22:7). The Hebrew word for "borrowing" has the implication of being bound to the person who has lent you the money. You are tied with a chain to your creditor and he has power over you.

It is never the will of God for any of His children, that others should have such power over them. Since we have been bought with Christ's blood, we are commanded not to become the slaves of men(1 Cor.7:23).

Jesus has come to deliver us from every curse of the law, having become a curse for us (Gal.3:13). He has also come to set every bound captive free (Luke 4:18). So if you are bound by the curse of debt, here are a few areas in which you could examine yourself and have a spiritual check-up:

1. Wrong Priorities

Jesus said that those who sought the kingdom of God and His righteousness first, would find all the material things necessary for their life added to them (Matt.6:33). This is a promise that is valid in all countries and at all times. God never fails to keep His part of the promise. So, if there is a financial lack, the failure must be on man's part.

David said that he had never seen a righteous man forsaken or his children begging for bread (and borrowing is a form of begging). On the other hand, the righteous person lends to others and is a blessing to all (Psalm 37:25,26).

Have we sought God's kingdom and His righteousness first in every area of our lives? Are God's work and His interests, our interests too?

If not, then we have got our priorities wrong and this may be one of the causes of our financial problems.

Righteousness in money matters entails returning what has been taken wrongfully from others. Many believers have not settled such matters and therefore they miss God's blessing on their lives.

Zaccheus decided, as soon as Jesus came into his house, that he would set all his past financial irregularities right(Lk.19:1-10). Therefore, even though he was a rich man, he went through the needle's eye. He returned what he had taken wrongfully (with interest). To ensure that the interest would not be less, he gave back four times what he had taken. There were also many whom he had cheated, who had either died or gone away elsewhere, so that Zaccheus did not know their whereabouts. What was Zaccheus to do with such money? Could he conveniently forget about it? No. He had no right to keep such money with him. So he decided to give away that money to the poor. That itself amounted to half his savings. He was a radical man in this area and so Jesus said that salvation (from the love of money) came to his house that day (Lk 19:9). Can Jesus make a similar statement about us?

We also need to ask ourselves whether we are earning our money in totally honest ways. Wealth earned dishonestly can never be blessed by God. On the contrary, "dishonest money brings grief to all the family" (Prov.15:27 - Living). The Lord can feed more than five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes, provided they are honestly-earned loaves and fishes (Prov.13:11).

We must not have a single paisa with us or in our bank account that does not belong to us or that has not been honestly obtained. Money that we have acquired through cheating the government of taxes or through deceit is dishonest, dirty money, and will only bring a curse on us and our children.

2. Receiving Without Giving

When we receive from God and hold on to what we have received selfishly, we die spiritually. The clenched fist is an appropriate symbol of the race of Adam - grabbing whatever it can get and holding on tightly to what it has. Jesus had an open palm on Calvary's cross and so must we.

The Israelites were told "The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives" (Deut.14:23 LB).

Under the new covenant, there is no command to tithe, for Jesus said that one had to forsake 100% (and not just 10%) to be His disciple (Lk. 14:33). No part of our money is now our own. It is all God's. This does not mean that we have to give all our money for God's work. But we must recognise that everything belongs to God. Whatever we spend on ourselves also must be done for the glory of God.(1 Cor. 10:31). But we must still give to God and His work. How much should we give? As much as we can give cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7). The quality of our giving is what is emphasised under the new covenant unlike the quantity as under the old covenant.

But we are also told in the same passage that we will reap according to what we sow (2 Cor.9:6). What we give to the Lord is like seed sown. If we sow little, we will reap little. This could be one reason why many believers are in perpetual financial difficulties: They have not been 'rich' towards God (Lk. 12:21). It is impossible for a man to be rich toward God, and for God to be in debt to him in his time of need.

Jesus said "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Do we love to receive gifts from others? Then we are like all the children of Adam. One characteristic of the truly godly is that they prefer to give rather than to receive. "The godly love to give" (Prov.21:26 - LB).

The Bible says "He who hates gifts will live" (Prov.15:27). Our mind must be renewed to hate receiving gifts and to love giving gifts.

Another reason for financial difficulties could be our unwillingness to give to our fellow-believers in their need. "He who shuts his ears to the cries of the poor will be ignored in his own time of need"(Prov 21:13). On the other hand, "when you help the poor, you are actually lending to the Lord - and He pays wonderful interest on your loan" (Prov.19:17 LB). Of course, one must do this wisely. If you do not have the wisdom for this, then it is best to give the money to the elders (in whom you have confidence) and to ask them to distribute it wisely. This was the practice followed in the early church(Acts 4:34,35).

"Give and it will be given to you... for whatever measure you deal out to others, it will be dealt to you in return" (Lk.6:38) is a law of God that will determine whether we will have an abundance or a shortage. If we are generous towards others, God will be generous towards us. If we are stingy towards others, God will be stingy towards us.

The love of money is a factor that causes many Christians to be in need. All people love money. When we are born-again, that love of money does not disappear. But if we are faithful to judge ourselves and cleanse ourselves from it, then it can gradually disappear from our lives totally.

3. Wastefulness

To be righteous in money matters is but the first step towards the goal. We must then learn to be faithful. Many are in debt because they spend their money in wasteful ways. They have not learnt to discipline their expenditure to fit within their monthly income. They have not learnt from the

ant to save a little bit each month (Prov.6:6-11) so that in a time of emergency they won't have to beg or borrow (Prov 21:20 LB).

How much should a person save each month? That depends entirely on the measure of faith that God has allotted to him(Rom.12:3). Some (like George Mueller of Bristol in the last century) may have such faith in God that they can give away everything extra for the Lord's work and for His people and have NIL savings for themselves. In their hour of need, God will not let them down but will provide for them in miraculous ways. But if we do not have such a measure of faith (and the vast majority of us do not), then we should humbly acknowledge that. Then it is best to have some savings so that in a time of need, we don't have to live expecting other brothers and sisters to help us out.

Even when Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes in such abundance, he commanded the disciples to pick up the extra fragments - so that nothing was wasted (Jn 6:12). The Lord hates wastage. Many are extravagant in their homes. Those who have a problem here should maintain an account of their income and expenditure each month in order to identify where the wastage occurs every month. If we don't take this matter seriously, we will remain in debt forever.

A lot of unnecessary expenditure indulged in by believers is often done to obtain the honour of men. This is especially so at weddings. Many get into debt in order to have a grand wedding. This is foolishness. In the same way, many get grand things for their home and invite others for grand meals, just for the sake of honour. All this is folly. We must die to the honour of men, if we are to live freely before God's face alone. Thus we can be free from debt too.

If we are not faithful with money, Jesus said that God would never commit the true riches of His kingdom to us (Lk 16:11). When one listens to the dry sermons that are being preached these days by most preachers, it is clear that they do not have the true riches of the revelation of God's Word. This is because they have not been faithful with money. If God is not giving us revelation from His Word we need to check up whether we have been faithful with money. We may not have been unrighteous with money, but we may have been wasteful.

4. Judging Others

We reap what we sow. If we have been critical and judgmental of others, then it should not surprise us if we are in financial difficulties.

Have we criticised or judged any of God's anointed servants? This is the most dangerous thing that anyone can do. God has said in His Word, "Do not touch my anointed ones and do my prophets no harm"(Psa. 105:15). God deals severely with those who criticise or judge His servants. If we have spoken against them in times past (perhaps it may have been a long time ago) or judged them for their actions (setting ourselves up as assessors of their actions) then our present financial difficulties may be due to the fact that we have not repented of those actions and confessed our sins. Let every man examine himself here.

Many sicknesses among God's people are due to this cause. God uses sickness and financial difficulties to speak to us about our careless words. The words we carelessly spoke at home

against God's anointed men were like arrows that have now come back to injure us. There can be no solution to this problem, without a severe judging of ourselves, a real humbling of ourselves and an apologizing to the people concerned.

Perhaps our criticism has been directed against other believers who we feel are being wasteful in their expenditure. Thus we have become busybodies in the affairs of others. Now God may have judged us with financial difficulties to teach us to stop being overseers in the affairs of others. It is possible to be so carnal that one can even speak in the meetings words that are meant to hit others concerning some matter in which we have judged them. God takes note of such words and we may find that many years later, we reap corruption as a result of sowing to the flesh in this way.

5. Unbelief

A final reason for debt could be unbelief.

When an atheist has a financial difficulty, he runs to other men for help, because he does not believe in the existence of God. How is it with us? When we are in need, what do we do? God can test us through financial need. The apostles were often in need financially (See 1 Cor 4:11). But they never had to beg or borrow. They trusted God to provide their need and God did so.

God will never forsake his faithful children, feeding them through ravens if necessary, as he did Elijah. Have we taken our financial needs to God in prayer - in faith? Or have we acted like the atheists? (Read Isaiah 30:7-21 and Psalm 121) in this context.

We must be content with what God has been pleased to give us, and not foolishly compare ourselves with other believers who have more than us. God has promised never to leave us or to forsake us(Heb 13:5).

It is important that everyone who is at present in debt, judge himself in all these areas and set his affairs right. If you are a Christian leader or elder and are in debt, then you need to judge yourself ten times more. No one who is in debt has the right to be an elder of God's people.

We must be radical. We must see clearly that to be in debt is to disobey God's Word in Romans 13:8. To live in debt is to live in sin. To be radical is to cut off the right hand and to pluck out the right eye if necessary in order to avoid sin. This means that we must take steps immediately to clear our debt.

First of all, we must empty our bank account (keeping just what is enough for our bare monthly needs) and begin to pay back our debt. Then we should sell whatever gold or silver we have in our home and pay back our debt. We must also cut down our monthly expenditure so that we can clear our debts quickly. We must never wait till we have the whole amount, before clearing our debt. We must pay back our debts every month, with as much as we can. God will help us if He sees that we are radical in this matter. Many are so casual about clearing their debts, that God Himself does not help them. God helps only those who are wholehearted about obeying him (Jer 29:11-13).

If we are unwilling to take these steps to clear our debts then it becomes clear that we are not radical Christians and that we are not disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. God will then leave us to remain as carnal Christians all our lives, and to suffer the consequences.

God honours all those who honour Him.

This has not been written to condemn anyone for failure in the past. God does not speak to us about the past except in relation to the future. There is forgiveness with God for the past. But God forgives us so that we might fear him in the future - as Psalm 130:4 makes plain.

CHAPTER 12

DO YOU ACCUSE OR DO YOU INTERCEDE?

Are you a co-worker with Satan or with the Lord Jesus?

We read in Revelation 12:10 that Satan is the 'Accuser of the brothers', and that he accuses them before God day and night. This is a full time ministry that Satan is engaged in. And in this ministry he has many co-workers - both among his evil spirits as well as among men. The sad fact is that there are many believers too who are co-workers with Satan in this ministry of accusation.

Satan transmitted his nature to Adam as soon as Adam sinned in the garden of Eden. We see proof of this in the fact that when God came to Adam and asked him whether he had eaten the forbidden fruit, the very first thing that Adam did was point his finger at Eve and say, "She was the one who gave me the fruit to eat" (Gen. 3:12).

That pose of Adam's - with his forefinger pointed at a fellow human-being - is a familiar one, found among all his children as well. From early childhood, we have all developed the habit of blaming and accusing others. As we have grown older, this blaming, accusing spirit has become cleverer, more subtle and more evil in its manifestations. The sad thing is that it has not been eliminated from most believers, even many years after they are born again!

The Bible says, "If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation; old things are passed away. Behold all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Our attitude towards other people must now be new - the same attitude that Jesus has towards them. But such a change of attitude can never take place in us, without our cooperating with God. Without doubt, it is God Who works these new attitudes in our hearts. But He does not treat us as machines or robots. WE need to cooperate with him in "working out our own salvation" from our wrong attitudes (Phil. 2:12,13). Only then will we change.

It is because believers have not taken this command seriously, "to work out their own salvation", that they continue to behave like the children of Adam until the end of their lives. And the Lord

gets a bad name through the behaviour of His children. A false teaching has led most believers to imagine that they have to do nothing in order to be sanctified, but "simply believe" the facts of the gospel intellectually. If that were true the devil himself would have been sanctified, because he believes all the facts of the gospel too! But he still remains the accuser of the brothers - and so do many so-called "believers".

Consider the Pharisees of Jesus' time. They were fundamental in their doctrine and deeply religious. They fought against the "liberal" Sadducees in their generation for the truths of God's Word - just like evangelical Christians do today. Yet Jesus condemned them more than He did the Sadducees.

We see the attitude of those Pharisees clearly in the incident where they accused a poor woman who was caught in adultery. They had no interest in saving her from a life of sin. All they desired was to show off their own "righteousness". There they stood, pointing their forefingers (like their forefather Adam) at that hapless woman. By that action, they revealed whose children they really were. Jesus however, had come to save such women from their sins. And He told those Pharisees that their father was not just Adam, but the Accuser, Satan himself (See John 8:1-11 and 44).

Jesus' entire public ministry was one of confrontation with the Pharisees, because He had come to earth to fight against the Accuser and his agents - even if those agents wore religious robes. When we follow the Lord, we will find that our conflict too is with "Christian fundamentalists" who major on doctrine more than on sanctification, and who would rather accuse others than lift a finger to save them! Many who seem to be burdened to save the lost heathen, at the same time accuse their fellow-believers, with no interest in saving them!

God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world (Jn. 3:17). And the reason our Lord is able to save us completely is because He always lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25).

The ministry of accusation and condemnation is the ministry of Satan and we should have no part in this. Our Lord, on the other hand has a full-time ministry of intercession and salvation. This is the ministry that we should have.

God has given us to Jesus as His Bride and His 'helpmeet' for this ministry. So we are to be co-workers with our Lord in this ministry of intercession. As the Father sent Jesus into the world - not to condemn (judge, accuse) the world, but to save it - even so, He has sent us too, into the world, not to condemn, judge, or accuse others, but to save them. (Jn.20:21). Therefore, we can be effective instruments in God's hands in His work in the world today, only if we get rid of "the spirit of accusation" (the spirit of Satan) totally from our lives and replace it with "the spirit of intercession" (the Spirit of Christ).

In Zechariah 3:1-5, we have a beautiful illustration of these two ministries. There we see Joshua (symbolising a believer) standing before the Lord's throne. He was clothed with filthy garments - which indicates that there will always be sin (conscious or unconscious or both) even in the best of us until the end of our earthly lives - for remember that Joshua was the high-priest, the leader of the Jews (1 Jn.1:8). We then see Satan standing next to Joshua to accuse him. On the other

side, we see the Lord taking the side of Joshua and rebuking the Accuser. The Lord took away Joshua's filthy clothes and replaced them with glorious clothes. Zechariah, who was watching all this, was so thrilled to see the Lord "justifying" Joshua, that he too joined the Lord in "making his brother glorious" and said, "Let them also put a clean turban on his head." The Lord answered Zechariah's prayer and gave Joshua a clean turban too. This is what it means to be a co-worker with God.

The Bible says that "if anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will give life to those who commit sin" (1 Jn. 5:16). This is an amazing promise of God. Have we ever considered using it, when we see a brother sin or fall? Or have we joined Satan's hosts instead and accused the poor brother?

Before the throne of the Lord, these two ministries - accusation and intercession - are constantly going on. It is up to us to decide now which of these two ministries we will participate in.

We need to see clearly first of all, that it is Satan and his evil spirits who constantly urge us to accuse our fellow-believers - and Satan will always give us a "good and righteous" reason for doing so!! But the more we do this, the more we will expose ourselves to the influence of evil spirits in our lives. This one evil habit of accusing others alone is the main reason why many believers today are afflicted in their bodies and their minds with incurable sicknesses.

We must be radical in getting rid of the spirit of accusation entirely from our lives - just like the "radical surgery" a surgeon does on a person having incurable cancer. The question however is whether we have seen that "the spirit of accusation" is far worse than any cancer.

All of us have had this evil habit of blaming others from birth. We have spent our lives pointing our fingers at others and accusing them of one thing or the other and backbiting against them. Like the Pharisees, we have forgotten about our own sins and not realised that our own sins disqualify us from being fit to throw stones at others!!

We need to mourn that this evil spirit of accusation has found so much place in our lives in past years. Unknowingly, we have been co-workers with Satan in his ministry of accusation, instead of being co-workers with our Lord in His redemptive ministry of intercession. We need to repent of this at least now.

Casting out the evil spirit of accusation from our lives is only the first step to a full salvation. If we don't fill that empty space in our hearts with the spirit of intercession, the spirit of accusation will come back into our hearts with seven worse spirits and torment and corrupt us all over again - as Jesus warned (Lk. 11:24-26). It is essential therefore that we are filled with the Holy Spirit - who is called "the Spirit of intercession" (See Zech.12:10 and Rom.8:26,27). The only way to drive out the spirit of accusation permanently from our lives is by being filled with the spirit of intercession.

It is impossible to speak evil of, or to accuse a person whom you are regularly praying for. Check it out and see if it is not true: You never pray for those whom you accuse. Right?? That is why

this "cancerous spirit of accusation" never seems to leave you, but on the other hand gets worse and worse every year - just like any other cancer!

Satan has a field-day in Christendom today, with the easy access that his spirits of accusation have into the lives and hearts of so many believers.

But the Lord has given us authority over all evil spirits, including the spirits of accusation (Lk.10:19). We must exercise this power over these spirits by interceding for those whom we are tempted to accuse. If we don't do that, we will remain the third-rate, useless Christians that we have always been, until the end of our lives. We cannot be co-workers with our Lord.

The ministry of intercession is one that every one of us must take seriously. There is no other way to overcome Satan in the church. Our Lord has told us not only to forgive those who persecute us, but also to pray for them (Mt.5:44). If we only forgive them but do not pray for them, then the spirit of accusation can re-enter our lives. Let us begin to thank God then for one another, for this is where all true intercession begins. "You were called in one body - be thankful (for one another)" (Col.3:15).

In Paul's letters, we see how he had this habit: He invariably began his letters by thanking God for the Christians - at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Phillipi, Colossae and Thessalonica and also for Timothy and Philemon (Rom.1:8; 1 Cor.1:4; . Eph.1:15, 16: Phil. 1:3; Col.1:3: 1 Thess 1:2; 2Thess.1:3; 2 Tim. 1 :3; Philemon 4). No doubt, there were many faults in all those Christians, that a godly man like Paul could easily see. But he refused to join hands with the Accuser in accusing them. God had sent him to help them and save them, not accuse them and condemn them.

Even when writing to the Corinthians, who had such serious problems in their midst, Paul began by thanking God for the good that he could see even in them. It was only after saying that, that he corrected them. Perhaps this was why the Corinthian Christians accepted Paul's correction readily (2 Cor.7.8,9). Perhaps this is also why others do not accept our corrections and exhortations - because we have never appreciated the good that we have seen in them!

You who are parents, consider this: Haven't you been quicker at pointing out the failures and mistakes you see in your children than in appreciating the good that you have seen in them? Have you ever spoken words of encouragement and appreciation to your children? Have you ever knelt down with them and thanked God for them? If you have criticised but not appreciated, then it is not surprising that your children haven't got any better!! Why not try another - more Divine - approach? When you change your attitude, you will find that your children change too. Try it out and see if it doesn't work.

We who are believers could also ask ourselves this question: Is it really true what Satan keeps telling us that there is nothing good at all in those other believers whom we have been accusing for so many years??

God grant that, as much as the spirit of accusation and complaining and backbiting against others has found its place in our thoughts and in our hearts in the past, we will now be equally filled -

and even more - with the spirit of thanksgiving and intercession for one another. Thus the enemy will no longer find a place in our lives. The Accuser and his spirits will be overcome and driven out by the the spirit of intercession. Will you be radical now and forsake this habit of accusing others - once and for all - and replace it with the spirit of intercession? May the Lord help us all to do so.

"Let the one who wants to be holy keep himself holy. But let the one who wants to be filthy remain filthy" (Rev.22:11).

CHAPTER 13

A CONSUMING FIRE IN THE MIDST OF THE CHURCH

"Our God is a consuming fire...." (Heb.12:29).

We have often seen the words "God is love" hanging on the wall in many homes. But have you ever seen the words "God is a consuming fire" hanging anywhere? Both these verses are in the New Testament. But we don't like to think of God as a consuming fire. And therefore our concept of God is imbalanced. And when our concept of God is imbalanced, our Christian life will be imbalanced too - and carnal!

In Isaiah's prophecy we read the following words:

"Sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling has seized the godless (hypocrites - KJV). Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning? He who walks righteously, and speaks with sincerity, he who rejects unjust gain, and shakes his hands so that they hold no bribe; he who stops his ears from hearing about bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil" (Isa.33:14,15).

Here we read that there are both sinners and hypocrites in Zion (the church)!!! And then it goes on to ask who can live with the consuming fire? If the Lord is really present in a church, there will be a a consuming fire and a continual burning there at all times.

Many churches today claim to be "New Testament churches", because of certain distinctive features like "believer's baptism", "speaking in tongues", "praise and worship", "weekly breaking of bread" etc., But none of these are the identification mark of a truly New Testament church. The mark of a true New Testament Church is this that God is in its midst as a consuming fire - a fire that terrifies sinners and makes hypocrites tremble.

I am not surprised when carnal people leave our church, or fall away - because this is proof that the consuming fire is still burning in our midst. When hypocrites and carnal people leave a church, that is a good sign. It is a sign that God is working in power in such a church. It is when spiritually-minded, God-fearing people leave a church, that the church should sit up and take

stock of its position. That would be akin to the best students leaving a school and joining another in the same locality. Then the first school should ask itself, "Why did they leave?".

If the fire is not burning in our midst, then many people will continue to remain with us. It is still possible that there are haughty, insincere hypocrites in our churches even today. I don't know, because I am not God! But I am absolutely certain of one thing: As long as God is present in our midst as a consuming fire, one day or the other, all such hypocrites will be exposed, if they do not repent and set matters right. There is no partiality with God - He will even expose hypocritical elders, as we see in Revelation 2 and 3.

God is longsuffering, but His patience will come to an end one day. The one who defiles the church of God will himself be destroyed by God - that is certain (1 Cor.3:17). God does not remove those who are imperfect, or those defeated by sin. But He removes the insincere.

The first qualification to dwell with this consuming fire mentioned here is: "He who walks righteously and speaks with SINCERITY" (Isa.33:15)". That refers to those who walk according to the light they have, in sincerity in their private lives. They may not be perfect, but they are SINCERE. They are not hypocrites.

If there is one thing that we must fear more than anything else in the church , it is giving people an impression about our spirituality that is not true. Do you give others the impression that you pray a lot, when you don't pray at all? Do you give them the impression that you fast much when you don't actually fast that much? Do you want others to consider you as wholehearted when you are not? Then you are in danger of falling away - not because you are imperfect, but because you are insincere. God desires truth in our inward part. The hypocrites in Zion tremble, because they are afraid of being exposed.

The second qualification to live with the consuming fire is "rejecting unjust gain" (Isa.33:15) - in other words, being righteous and faithful in money matters. We may have thought that the alternative master to God is Satan. But Jesus Himself stated in Luke 16:13 that that alternative master to God was Mammon (money and material riches)! No believer imagines that he can love God and Satan at the same time. But there are multitudes of believers who imagine that they can love money and God simultaneously. No believer will ever fall down and worship Satan. But there are millions of believers today who worship Mammon and who imagine that they can worship God too. But they cannot worship God, if they are not faithful with money. They don't realise that Mammon draws a person away from the true and living God.

The third qualification to live with the consuming fire is shutting our ears from hearing about bloodshed (Isa.33:15). This is more than avoiding gossiping. This refers to not wanting to HEAR even someone else gossiping. A Godfearing man will shut his ears not only to the main Accuser of the brethren (Rev.12:10), but to the Accuser's agents as well!!

If we could look at this earth from heaven's standpoint, we would see millions of people all over the world, tearing others to pieces with their tongue from early morning to late at night, every day. But if you want to live with God, the consuming fire, you must discipline yourself not to listen to such accusations. Even if you have to listen to them in situations where it is impossible

for you to get up and walk out of the room, you should switch off your mind inwardly from listening. Let people around you be corrupt but why should you lose God's grace in your life? If you are serious about living with the consuming fire, then stop listening to all accusations. God has given us the ability to switch off our mind from inside. Do that. Stop your ears from bloodshed.

A fourth qualification that is mentioned here, to live with the consuming fire, is shutting our eyes from looking upon evil. These two bodily senses - hearing and seeing - are the main channels through which good and evil enter our minds. We must decide what we allow to enter in. One who lives with the consuming fire does not look upon what will defile his spirit.

Only when you allow God to consume all that is worldly and that can be consumed in your life, will you be able to live with Him Who is a consuming fire. Whatever is left in you then will be incombustible!! God is going to populate heaven with such people - who have nothing combustible left in them.

God is preparing us for heaven. When we sing the song, "Heaven came down and glory filled my soul", what are we talking about? We are talking about that consuming fire coming into our soul, that burns up everything that can be burnt up. Can we willingly say to the Lord, "Lord, I only want those things left in my life, that cannot be burned, so that You and I can live in fellowship with each other forever."

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 tells us that in the final day the Lord will test everything by His fire. Everything that is combustible - wood, hay and straw will be burnt up. Only those things that cannot burn - gold, silver and precious stones - will remain.

Since this going to be so, what a wonderful privilege it is to receive the fire of the Holy Spirit now itself, so that all that is combustible in us can be burnt up before that day.

Jesus has come to baptize us with the fire of the Holy Spirit (John 1:29), so that the Spirit can enter every part of our lives with His burning fire and burn up everything in us that is worldly - all the wood, hay and straw.

God's Word is a fire that can burn up and eliminate many things in our lives (Jer.23:29). But there are many things that God's Word doesn't speak about, that still need to be burnt up in us. These are the things that the Holy Spirit will point out to us and ask our permission to burn up. God's Word tells us nothing about many matters that we face in the modern world, because they did not exist in the first century. But the Spirit will tell us whether we can practise them in fellowship with Christ or not.

Therefore we must be careful to be sensitive every day to all that the Holy Spirit tells us. The only one who can live with God the consuming fire is the one who is always listens to the Holy Spirit and acts in the fear of God.

When such a man sees other believers slipping up and falling, he fears for himself. He does not judge those others but says "Lord, I have the same flesh as them. The same thing can happen to

me. I want to live in fear. Help me to be sincere. I want to be faithful with money according to my light. I don't want to listen to 'accusations' against others. Lord, preserve me from all 'bloodshed'. I don't want to look at anything evil either, Lord. I don't want to imagine that just because I have accepted You, I am safe forever, irrespective of how I live. I want to live in fear." That is how a God-fearing man who is serious about living with the consuming fire will pray.

It says in 2 Thess.2:11 that God will send a deceiving influence on those who don't love the truth (about themselves) so as to be saved. That verse teaches us that God will also allow evil spirits to deceive all those who DO NOT LOVE THE TRUTH and permit them to believe the Lie -(NASB margin).

What is 'The Lie'? There are many types of lies, but there is one lie, that is called 'The Lie' in Scripture. 'THE LIE' is the first LIE that a human being ever heard! It was Satan's word to Eve saying, "YOU WILL NOT DIE" (Gen.3:4). Eve believed the lie that because she was made in God's image, she would not die spiritually, even if she disobeyed God and sinned. And the Devil is still telling people today that they will not die, because they accepted the Lord, or because they were baptized in water or because they speak in tongues, or because they attend meetings regularly, etc., etc.,

God will allow all those who don't love the truth about themselves to believe this 'Lie'. And there are millions of so-called "believers" believing this lie today. They believe that they will never die spiritually, even if they live in sin. And so, they are careless with sin. They don't fear God. They don't hate sin. They don't throw into the consuming fire, all that needs to be burned up in their lives. They are not sincere or upright, but hypocritical. They play the fool with sin. They accuse others and listen to accusations. They look at evil things with their eyes. And yet they imagine that they will live forever in heaven with "the consuming fire". How did they come to believe such a lie? Through the master-plan of Satan who has made them believe that if their doctrines are right, it does not matter how they live!!

God says in His Word, "I gave them time to repent". How good God is! He does not judge at once. He gives us time to repent. But if we don't love the truth about ourselves so as to be saved from sin, then God Himself will not be able to help us. So, brothers and sisters, let me plead with you to love the truth about yourself and seek to be saved from everything un-Christlike in your life.

Today there are so many groups, denominations and cults, all proclaiming that they have the truth. How can we know which is the truth? How can we prevent ourselves from being deceived?

Here is the answer: If you love the truth about yourself at all times and eagerly desire to be saved from all sin, the Lord will never allow you to be deceived till the end of your life. Otherwise, you may preach to others and not only go to hell yourself but lead others there as well.

If we love the truth so as to be saved ourselves, we can never be deceived, by any preacher, or so-called godly man, or cultist or Pharisee or legalist. No-one will be able to deceive us or lead us astray.

When God speaks to us - directly by His Word, or by the Holy Spirit, or through another brother, or perhaps even through an enemy - and we hear the truth about ourselves, what do we do? Do we justify ourselves or do we judge ourselves?

I have received many letters of accusation in my life. (That is the appointed lot of all who serve the Lord). I usually throw them all into the garbage bin. But before doing so, I read them and ask the Lord, "Lord, is there some truth in what my enemy is saying? Perhaps there is. Please show me." Our enemies often tell us more truths about ourselves than our friends do.

But I never allow any letter to make me feel condemned, because I know there is NO condemnation for me, because I am in Christ. But I do allow the Lord to speak to me at such times. It is like getting a free "scan" of our bodies. A Magnetic Resonance Imaging scan of our body can cost thousands of rupees in medical diagnostic laboratories these days. Isn't it wonderful then that someone scans our heart freely for us!! And if it is our enemy who is offering us such a scan, let us praise the Lord and subject ourselves to such a scan. If there is no sickness in our hearts, we can lose nothing by "scanning" ourselves even with a letter written by an enemy.

Remember that it was an ungodly, heathen man (Abimelech) who once rebuked Abraham for lying (Gen.20:9). Abraham was a prophet chosen by God. But he had to be rebuked for his sin by a godless man! Today, Abraham is in heaven and Abimelech may be in hell. But it was Abimelech who helped Abraham that day, to see his sin.

Humble yourself then. Maybe some heathen man can help you too to see something in your life that may help you to cleanse out some evil habit from your life.

In the final analysis, we will discover that there are only TWO categories of people before God - not those who do right and those who do wrong, but those who are HUMBLE and those who are PROUD, or in other words, those who followed Jesus in His humility and those who followed Satan in his pride.

It is the pride in our hearts that God is constantly seeking to burn up with His consuming fire, first of all. It is the proud, haughty ones whom He seeks to remove from Zion. The Lord says, "I will remove from your midst your proud, exulting ones, and you will never again be haughty on my holy mountain" (Zeph.3:11). And then the church will be left with "a humble and lowly people" (Zeph.3:12). This is the church that will triumph over Satan.

In the final day, we will find many people who did right being rejected by God because they were proud. And amazingly, we will also discover then that some people who made serious mistakes in their lives are still accepted by God, because they were humble and sincere.

Consider how God rejected some who committed what we would call "a small sin" and how He accepted and blessed some who committed what we would call "a great sin".

Take first the case of King Saul. He committed what we would call "a small sin": Instead of killing ALL the sheep of Amalek, as God had told him to, he killed only the bad sheep and kept

the good sheep to offer to God as a sacrifice. Would you have condemned Saul for such a mistake? Perhaps not. But God did punish him - and that severely! He took away the kingdom from Saul.

On the other hand, consider what King David did. He committed adultery with a man's wife when the man was out of town (fighting in David's own army). And then to cover up his sin, David had the man killed on the battlefield and then married the woman. What would you do with such a man as David? You would perhaps send David to hell immediately. But God didn't do that. His ways are not our ways. God's ways cannot be understood by our human reason. We divide people according to whether they do right or wrong. But God divides them according to whether they are proud (and insincere) or humble (and sincere). And so God accepted David, after punishing him for his sin.

God even refers to David as a man after His own heart, who served his generation in the will of God (Acts 13:22,36). David's end was not like Saul's, just because he was humble.

In observing Christians and Christian leaders who have fallen, I have noticed a difference. God allows some to get exposed but not others. Some whose crimes are very small (in man's eyes) are exposed and humiliated before everyone. While others (who I happen to know confidentially have committed far greater sins), do NOT get exposed at all! And not only does God cover up their failures, He even blesses them and uses them greatly!

All this appears unfair to us. But it is not. Why does God do things like that? Because He is NOT Pharisaical, like most religious people are! He divides people into "Humble" and "Proud" categories and not into "Those who did right" and "Those who did wrong" categories.

This gives great hope and encouragement to all of us. If God had divided people up as men divide them, then we would have to live in constant fear lest we accidentally end up in the wrong group - for all of us make mistakes and do wrong things - at least accidentally, if not deliberately.

Men usually come down hard on us, when we do even one wrong thing. But thank God, we don't have to deal with unmerciful men. We have to deal only with God our merciful Creator (Heb.4:13).

If we live in humility and brokenness before God always, never esteeming ourselves as better than anyone else, but always recognising ourselves as the chief of sinners; if we never seek to lord it over others and never seek to grab anything on earth (not even a ministry); if we are willing to walk "the second mile"; and if we are ready to forgive those who have done us the greatest wrong, then God will cover up our failures and continue to bless us, no matter what men think about us or do to us.

1 Peter 2:18,19 tells servants to be submissive even to unreasonable masters. As long as we live in this world, we will all encounter people who are unreasonable. If we can live only with reasonable people, then we are unfit to be the disciples of Jesus. It is through unreasonable people that God consumes away our pride. And when we deal with unreasonable people, and we

suffer at their hands, God will be happy with us, if we humble ourselves and endure our suffering patiently, because that is how Jesus suffered too.

You get no credit for being patient, when you suffer for having done something wrong. You get ZERO for that! Why should you get any marks from God in any case for that? But if you do what is right and suffer for it - whether in the office or in the church or anywhere - and bear that patiently, God is well-pleased with you (1 Pet.2:20). "Well-pleased" is such a wonderful word! That was the word that God used when He spoke about Jesus, saying, "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well-pleased".

Humility has tremendous value before God. It says in 1 Peter 3:4 that a meek and gentle spirit is extremely precious to God - whether found in a woman or in a man. Jesus Himself had a humble and gentle heart and told us to learn these virtues from Him (Matt.11:28).

A gentle and a quiet spirit is one that is not agitated or in unrest. Some washing machines have what is called an "agitator". It turns one way and then the other way - perpetually. It is never at rest, it is always "agitating"! In the hearts of all who are born of Adam too, there is an "agitator". If anyone rubs them the wrong way, the agitator starts "agitating". But those who are humble and gentle in spirit have got rid of this agitator. They are not offended or hurt, when anyone says or does something to them , or when they don't say or do something that was expected of them. They have put their "agitator" on the cross.

Peter says that the beauty of a gentle and a quiet spirit is "imperishable"! This is the secret of eternal beauty. The world is full of women nowadays who are wanting to look younger. But what is the beauty that is really imperishable? It is a gentle and a quiet spirit.

And this is for men too! This is what will make you really precious to God - if you have a gentle, quiet spirit that is not agitated or offended, that doesn't get into bad moods, that is not grumpy or angry. You need never lose control of yourself at any time either, for the fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

Let the world be full of people who have "agitators" but that's not for us any longer. Praise the Lord, we can get rid of our agitators permanently.

When Jesus told His disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees, what did He mean? He meant what I have just been talking about. The righteousness of the Pharisees was a matter of "right" and "wrong". But Jesus wanted the righteousness of His disciples to comprise of more than that. It was to include humility, brokenness, gentleness and quietness of spirit as well. He told them that otherwise they would NEVER enter the kingdom of God. I don't know how many of us really believe what Jesus said.

In Hebrews 4:1, we are asked to fear lest we do not enter into this "rest" that Jesus offers - this freedom from "agitating". And in verse 11, we are told to be diligent to ensure that we enter into that rest. Have you entered into that rest yourself?

Have you forgiven all those who have cheated you, and those who have wronged you? Have you cleansed your heart of all bitterness, hatred, anxiety and greed? This is what will enable us to enter into that rest of God.

There is no person or situation in the world, that can ever prevent Romans 8:28 ("All things work together for good for those who love God....") and 1 Corinthians 10:13 ("God will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability....") from being fulfilled in your life, if you are a disciple of Jesus. We can never be tempted beyond our ability. That is impossible - because God is faithful to His promises. And everything - yes, everything - will work for our good.

A humble person can never fall, because he is already at ground-level! How then can he fall down!! When God's Word says, "He is able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24), it is thus that the Lord keeps us - by keeping our faces in the dust before Him. Then it becomes impossible to fall.

The way of escape promised in 1 Corinthians 10:13 is the way of humbling ourselves. We humble ourselves, because we believe that God will give us grace and lift us up. Just as in water-baptism, we submit readily to someone who immerses us in the water, because we believe that he will lift us up again. In the same way, we also believe that the God who allows some situation to crush us will lift us up and bring a resurrection in our lives too.

God is a consuming fire who is determined to consume every bit of pride from every corner of our hearts - if we will let Him. He will arrange people and circumstances in such a way that every particle of pride is totally consumed. Let us cooperate then with Him and allow the Spirit to do a perfect work within us.

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

CHAPTER 14

VALUING THE CHURCH

"Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph.5:25).

We will not give up our lives for anyone and everyone. But for certain people we will give up even our very lives.

For example, if your child is dying and needs your kidney, you would certainly donate your kidney, even if that involves a risk to your own life. You would gladly give up your life to save your child's. You would not however do that for a stranger - not even for your next-door neighbour. What we do for someone depends on the measure in which we value him.

In the above verse, we read that Christ loved the church - that is you and me - and gave up His life for us. He felt that we were so valuable that He was willing to give up not just His kidneys, but His whole life for us.

We all say that we want to follow Jesus. But how shall we follow Him? Shall we think only of going to heaven, to dwell with Him for eternal ages. Or shall we begin by following Him on earth in this area first of all - loving everyone in His church so much that we are willing to give up our very lives for them?

It is easy to love the brothers and sisters far away - in South America, and in Russia - because we never see them, and none of them ever try our patience!! But we cannot give up our lives for them, because we cannot see them.

Jesus did not sit in heaven and send us a message that He loved us all immensely. He came down to earth and showed us His love, by laying down His life for us. We too can show our love for the church not by words but by giving up our lives for those whom He has placed us with.

Are we willing to give up our honour, prestige, rights and expectations - everything - for the sake of the brothers and sisters with whom God has placed us in our local church? The Lord Jesus will be able to find fellowship and oneness of spirit with us, only if we are like that.

I read of a young man who was converted, but who was not wholehearted for the Lord. One day he had a dream in which he saw himself dying and entering heaven. There he saw the word "FORGIVEN" written across the record of his life. He rejoiced that he was forgiven and in heaven.

But in heaven he saw some believers with a special aura of glory about them. They were the martyrs, who had laid down their lives for the Lord on earth. They had given up everything for the Lord and for His church. They had sacrificed money, position, honour, and everything that the world valued.

This man saw their great glory in heaven and envied them. Then Jesus came to this man in his dream and told him that he would find himself totally out of tune with these glorious people he had just seen, because unlike them, he had lived only for himself on earth. He was broken hearted when he heard that and realized that he would have to live with the memory of his selfish way of life throughout eternity. He pleaded with the Lord to give him a second chance. But the Lord told him that there was no second chance after death.

Then he woke up - and he was thankful that he was alive and that all that he had seen had only been a dream. He determined thereafter to live the rest of his life wholly for the Lord and became a great man of God.

We cannot be transformed suddenly into wholehearted disciples of Jesus when we die, because God does not change anyone against his will. He will change us only if we are willing to cooperate with the workings of His Spirit in our hearts now. The Holy Spirit has come to make us partake of the divine nature more and more.

We must remember that what is valued greatly on earth has no value in heaven. If you lose something that the earth values, it won't really matter much in eternity. Equally, if you gain something that the earth values very highly, that won't give you any benefit in heaven either.

Let me say to all of you young people especially that your popularity with your friends will have no value at all in heaven.

It is good for you to study hard for your examinations. But your good marks will not add to your glory in eternity. If you are wholehearted and want to live for God, He will open the right door of employment for you, whatever your marks may have been and whatever your other disqualifications may be.

It is impossible to miss God's will, just because you were not good in Maths! But if you can forgive others, be good to those who are evil to you, and bless those who curse you, you can follow Jesus and build His church. And you will find that all the material things necessary for your earthly life are added to you.

If you have valued the spiritual food that that you have received in the church through the years, then you will appreciate the church very highly. Consider how grateful you are to those who invite you for a single meal. How much more grateful you should be for the spiritual food that you have received constantly, year after year, in the church.

Or consider this matter in another way. Supposing there was someone who looked after you children, protected them from danger, cared for them when they were sick, encouraged them when they were discouraged, and helped them with their studies so that they got good marks. And suppose this person did all this not just for a day or two but for a number of years. Wouldn't you be grateful to him?

Are you at least equally grateful to the church for protecting your children. One reason why many believers have not grown spiritually is because they have not been grateful for what they have received in the church. The ones who have fallen away from the church are those who have been thoroughly ungrateful for all that they have received so freely for so many years in the church.

In Luke 17:15, we read of ten lepers who were healed. But only one of them returned to the Lord to thank Him and to glorify God. When they were in need, they had all raised their voices asking for mercy. But after they were healed, nine were thoroughly ungrateful for the benefit they received. Only one raised his voice in thanksgiving.

There must have been thousands of others too who were healed in Palestine who never bothered to thank the Lord.

But this Samaritan man returned and thanked the Lord. He might have told the Lord something like this, "Lord what a different life my life is going to be in future, now that You have touched me. I can go inside the city. I can go back to my family. You have brought joy into my life. I

don't want to take any of these blessings for granted. I owe everything to You and I am deeply thankful for all of Your blessings on my life".

Jesus appreciated the man for this spirit of gratitude that he manifested.

Then Jesus gave him something more. He told him that his faith had saved him. That cleansed leper got something more than just healing from the Lord. He had already received healing. But because he was grateful, he got salvation as well. I am certain that I will meet this Samaritan in heaven. But I am not sure whether I will meet any of the other nine there. When you come back to thank the Lord you get something more than what the others get.

The Lord is in the midst of His church, which is His body on earth. We show our appreciation for the Lord now by valuing His body.

If you don't appreciate and value the church, it is you who will be the loser, not the church. God has mightily blessed those who have valued the church and who have been thankful for what they have received from the church.

Think of how much we need to be thankful for the church having preserved our children from the world. I can testify to this personally. From the time my oldest son was 6 years old, all my four sons have grown up in the midst of the young brothers in the church. I don't have words to express my thankfulness to God for that privilege. Those young brothers were not perfect. They had many weaknesses. But in spite of all that, my sons were all helped by them, because those brothers were sincere. Parents alone cannot do the job. We need the brothers and sisters in the church to help us in bringing up our children.

Unfortunately, many people value their home church only when they leave it. David once longed for a drink of water from the well in his hometown of Bethlehem. That had a special taste unlike the water in any other place (2 Sam.23:15). In the same way, many long for the meetings of the church only when they have been transferred away or have to go far away to some distant land. But you don't have to wait until you go away from home before you learn to value and appreciate your brothers and sisters. You can do that right now.

Why is it that you find it difficult to value the brothers and sisters in your local church? Maybe you say that you see many faults in them.

When people have a problem with their eyes, sometimes they see spots in front of their eyes all the time. It can be the same spiritually too. In the eyes of some people, every brother's and sister's face is spotted. If that is so with you, the problem may not be with those other brothers and sisters. The problem may be with your own eyes. You see spots in others, because those spots are in your own eyes. Your vision will never become clear until Jesus heals your eyes.

Jesus valued the loyalty of His disciples very highly. Once He told His disciples that even though all of them were going to forsake Him, yet He would not be alone, because His Father was going to be with Him (Jn.16:32). He did not need those disciples. Yet He told them in Luke 22:28 that He was thankful that they had stood by Him. He was the Lord of glory. He did not need anybody

to stand by Him. But even though He did not need their support, He appreciated their loyalty. He was saying to them, as it were, "You have come out of this old Jewish system and given up the old wineskin. You have seen the difference between the spirit of the Bride and the spirit of the harlot and you have come out and stood by Me, willing to pay any price."

I hope the Lord will be able to say to us too in the final day that we stood by Him and were not ashamed of Him, that we loved the church He placed us in, and gave ourselves for it, and were not critical of the church like many others.

Brothers and sisters, let us appreciate the tremendous protection that we and our children have had in the church.

You young people will never realise how much the church has protected you from accident, danger and sin. Only when you stand before the Lord will you realise how the strict standards in the church kept you from going astray into the world and destroying yourself.

In that day, you will see how something you heard in the church many years earlier protected you from danger much later. The Lord will also show you in that day how many dangers your children were saved and protected from, because of what they heard in the church.

Yet, in spite of these and many other blessings, how little all of us have appreciated and valued the church.

Do you want to progress to the point where you become a blessing to others? Then first of all, learn to be thankful to the Lord for what He has done for you and for the church He has given you. Don't take the church for granted.

Many of us are like children who realise the real worth of their parents only after their parents are dead. May the Lord teach us to be thankful for one another in the church now, before it is too late.

CHAPTER 15

SEEING THE GLORY OF CHRIST AND PARTAKING OF IT

"Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are transformed into the same image from glory to glory by the Lord, the Spirit. Therefore, since we have received this ministry we do not lose heart. (2 Cor.3:18; 4:1)

When most believers think of a ministry they think only of some external service for the Lord. But here Paul speaks of the ministry of being changed into the likeness of Christ from one degree of glory to another. Because he had such a ministry, he was never discouraged.

The one who serves the Lord will have "the fruit of sanctification" (Rom.6:22) in his life. The more he serves the Lord, the more he will be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

In other words, the more he serves the Lord, the more he will do everything for the glory of God, the more he will seek to hide himself, the more humble he will become in his attitude to others, the more he will hate money, the more he will become pure in his thought-life, the more he will love even his enemies, etc., etc., One who does not have such fruits of sanctification in his inner life and attitudes is not really serving the Lord at all, even if he is engaged in a multitude of religious Christian activities, and even if he is a world-famous preacher or healer or whatever.

There are many upright, righteous people among Christians who are not spiritual, but only religious. Do you know that there is a world of difference between being upright and being Christlike?

Because we preach righteousness, many religious, upright Christians are drawn to us. But they may not be interested in being Christlike!! People who are taken up with the letter of the Scriptures are only interested in being upright. But those who are taken up with the spirit of the new covenant will seek to be Christlike. They alone become truly spiritual.

We read in 2 Cor.11:3 that we face a constant danger of being led astray from simple devotion to Christ into mere religious works - just as the serpent deceived Eve. The devil did not frighten Eve into committing sin. No. He deceived her with his cleverness. Therefore it is not surprising that Satan's servants today too come preaching "righteousness" (2 Cor.11:15).

The servants of Satan may preach "righteousness", but they will not preach Christlikeness. They will emphasise matters like long hair for women and short hair for men, covering of the head for women, removal of ornaments, obedience to the pastor/elder, payment of tithes, breaking bread every week, following the new-testament pattern in the church-meeting etc., etc., With such preaching on external matters they will deceive many believers into thinking that they are servants of God.

But these servants of Satan can easily be recognised by what they do NOT emphasise. They will leave out the most important matters in the Christian life, like humility, purity of heart, fervent love for one another, taking up the cross daily, being filled with the Spirit, following Jesus in daily life etc.,

An elder who commits adultery or one who steals church funds can never lead other believers astray, because even unbelievers will be able to see that such a man is not a godly man. But a religious brother can easily lead many believers astray, because most believers (not being able to differentiate between religiosity and spirituality) will be impressed by his external righteousness of life, his religious fervour and his religious activities. If you think that "serving the Lord" (as Martha did), is more important than "listening to His voice" (as Mary did), you can be certain that you are religious and not spiritual (Lk.10:38-42)

There are many preachers visiting India nowadays from Western lands. No-one knows how such preachers live with their wives at home, how they have brought up their children or what sort of

brotherhood they have built up in their home-towns. People are taken up merely with their eloquence, and (very often) their money!! But to evaluate a man's ministry aright, you need to know how he lives at home! Don't consider any man to be a spiritual man until you have seen how he has brought up his children. If his children are worldly, that would usually indicate that the man himself is a hypocrite - because a man cannot fool his own children about his spirituality. If his local church is only a congregation of his admirers and not a brotherhood of equal brothers and sisters, then it is obvious that he knows nothing about building the body of Christ.

The Christian world is full of many righteous people who very often cannot get along with each other!! The more "righteous" they are, the more difficult it is often for people to have any fellowship with them!! Those who pursue Christlikeness however are easy to get along with and will always have glorious fellowship with each other.

Satan came to Eve and told her that she could be like God. Jesus also came to earth with the message that we could be like God. Both messages appear to be the same. But there is a world of difference between what is meant in the two statements - a difference as vast as the difference between heaven and hell. Satan tempted Eve to be like God in knowledge, power and authority. Jesus however came to make us like God in character - in humility, purity, love and goodness.

Because of lack of discernment, most Christian churches today are crowded with Pharisees who are proud of their numbers, their "righteousness", their "new-testament pattern" and their activities. They sit in their churches with a testimony of being very righteous. But in their private lives, they behave worse than the heathen. They were probably not like that when they started their Christian lives. They may have become Pharisees gradually. They may have started in genuine righteousness. Today they are first-class hypocrites. God allowed such a development to take place in their lives, because He saw that they were basically insincere.

But God has His remnant in many places - humble brothers and sisters who are seeking for inward purity and who are broken and contrite in spirit, people who are not seek anything for themselves, but who are concerned about the glory of God's Name and who are taken up with Jesus Himself, and not with doctrine or teaching or any external thing primarily.

How can we prevent ourselves from being deceived? The answer is given us in 2 Cor.11:3 - By a simple and pure devotion to Christ.

Anything that leads us away from devotion to the person of Jesus Himself - whether it be a doctrine or an emphasis or a ministry or whatever - is part of Satan's scheme to lead us astray and destroy us.

A.B.Simpson was a great man of God who lived in the 19th century - one who founded the largest missionary movement of his time. At first, he was a sickly preacher. But then he was baptized in the Holy Spirit. One day, he heard someone singing these words: "My Jesus - no man can work like Him". Those words gripped his heart and he realized that his problem was that he was working in his own strength and getting exhausted. He then saw Jesus, not just as a Healer,

but as the very Source of his physical health and life. Then he wrote a hymn that described his experience:

"Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord, Once it was the feeling, now it is His Word. Once His gifts I wanted, now the Giver own Once I sought for healing, now Himself alone.

Once it was my working, His it hence shall be Once I tried to use Him, now He uses me Once the power I wanted, now the Mighty One! Once for self I laboured, now for Him alone."

This has been the secret of every great man of God in the history of the church - THEY WERE TAKEN UP WITH THE PERSON OF CHRIST HIMSELF, AND NOT WITH HIS BLESSINGS OR HIS GIFTS. Thus they entered into a life of rest in the midst of a world full of turmoil and strife.

"There is a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God - A place where sin cannot molest - near to the heart of God."

This is the place into which the Holy Spirit desires to lead us every day. We will not thereby become hermits living in solitude by ourselves. No. We will be active in serving and helping others. But our personal life, our married life and our ministry will all be transformed.

In the next verse (2 Cor.4:2), we read Paul saying, "We have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God."

We can never come into this rest of God, if there is anything of dishonesty or craftiness in our lives. In the past, there were one or two brothers who joined us (they have fallen away now), who were very gifted and very intelligent. But they were very crafty too. God can use gifted and intelligent people if they are straightforward and honest and humble. But God will trap crafty people in their own craftiness (1Cor.3:19). And that is what He did to those brothers. Like Haman, they finally hung on the very gallows that they had prepared for others.

Crafty brothers and sisters may survive for a long time in the church, because God being longsuffering and merciful, gives them plenty of time to change. But if they don't cleanse themselves, they will not survive in a spiritual church. "Sinners cannot stand forever in the assembly of the righteous" (Psa.1:5).

If you want to be a useful member in the body of Christ, then begin here: Renounce all craftiness and dishonesty, renounce the hidden things of shame, and stop adulterating the word of God to suit your convenience.

There are two ways in which people can adulterate the Word of God.

One way is by compromising the standards of God's Word, when it comes to their own life or when dealing with someone who is a close friend or a loyal supporter. Jesus would rebuke even someone as close to Him as Peter saying, "Get behind Me,Satan", if Peter suggested a course of action that was contrary to God's will. We must not adulterate the standards of God's Word to

cover-up the failures of our wives or to please some rich person or close friend. We must never have any friends who are closer to us than the Word of God itself - for such a friendship can never be a spiritual fellowship.

A second way in which people can adulterate the Word of God is by twisting the interpretation of a verse to suit their pre-conceived theology or ideas. Consider just one example: The doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This truth is emphasised very plainly and clearly at the very beginning of each of the first 5 books of the New Testament (See Mt.3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk.3:16; Jn.1:33; and Acts 1:5) Yet it is almost impossible to get believers from Brethren and Baptist groups to believe that Jesus can baptize them in the Holy Spirit today - because they have been brainwashed from childhood into believing that "they got everything as soon as they were converted". If they are honest, they will have to admit that rivers of living water are not flowing out of their lives, as Jesus said it would out of the lives of those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. But they will not face up to reality. When they read the Scriptures relating to being baptized in the Holy Spirit, they will make it fit the shape of their denomination's theology. This is intellectual dishonesty and adulterating the Word of God.

A honest believer however would say, when he comes to a difficult verse, that it doesn't seem to fit with the doctrine that he has always believed, and that perhaps he needs to get more light from God on it. There is great hope for such honest believers.

Honesty and humility are like twins. They always go together in a person. They are like the two sides of a coin. You can't have one side without having the other. If you are really humble, you will be honest too. To acknowledge your craftiness is to humble yourself. When you renounce dishonesty you are actually renouncing a part of your pride.

Paul goes on to say in this passage that the gospel that he preached was hidden from the eyes of many. Which gospel was he speaking of there? Not just the gospel of the forgiveness of our sins, but "the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God" (2 Cor.4:4). The glory of Christ is certainly not found in the forgiveness of sins - for Christ had no sins to be forgiven!!

What is "the gospel of the glory of Christ"? The answer is found in the same verse. It refers to Christ as being the image of God. The gospel message is that after our sins are forgiven, we can be transformed into the image of God.

In the beginning of creation, God said, Let there be light (2 Cor.4:6). That was the first word spoken by God. That is the first word that God speaks into our hearts too. There is darkness within us, because we have the nature of Adam in our flesh - not only Adam's lust and anger, but Adam's shrewdness and craftiness as well. All of that darkness has to be driven out. It is not only the bad sheep of Amalek that God commanded to be killed, but the good sheep too (1 Sam.15).

What is the light? John 1:4 states very clearly that it is the life of Christ which is the light. That is the light with which God wants to light up our dark hearts. The glory of God "full of grace and truth" was seen in the earthly life of Jesus. One who is taken up with this light will be more interested in being Christlike than in just being righteous.

External righteousness brings us the honour of men. But God wants to make us like His Son inwardly.

About 350 years ago there lived in France a woman named Madam Guyon. She had so much light on the ways of God, even at a time when there were no Christian books available. The reason was that she sought God Himself in the midst of her suffering. Many believers suffer but they don't get to know God through their sufferings, because they don't seek Him for what He is Himself. They only seek for relief from their sufferings. Madam Guyon however sought after God Himself, and as a result, came to know God in a way that few very people have. It is when we joyfully accept all the suffering that God sends our way that we get to know God - not only when we submit to it, but when we joyfully accept it as well.

Madam Guyon, in one of her writings, says that there is a way of lights, gifts and graces - a holy life - which brings us the admiration of those who do not have the purest light. But if we go beyond such a life, to a life of total obedience to the Lord in all areas, we will find ourselves despised and rejected by those very same people who formerly admired us. Then we shall find fellowship with Jesus in His sufferings - because this was exactly what Jesus experienced too.

You can rejoice in the opinion that others have of you that you are a godly man. Many are satisfied with just that. But if you really follow Jesus you will go further. Why did the people who saw Jesus' life in Nazareth - even his own relatives who saw it more closely than anyone else - reject Him instead of admiring Him? Don't people in your office and your neighbourhood generally admire an upright man? But people did not admire Jesus. Why? Because the spirit of this world is so opposed to the Spirit of God that anyone who is a faithful witness to the true God will be rejected. Jesus was such a faithful witness to the true God.

How is it then that people admire you so much?

Perhaps, even people in dead denominations admire you!! And perhaps you even glory in their testimony about you!!

We read nowadays of "Christians" even getting the Nobel peace prize. But the world would never have given that prize to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. The world gave Him a cross, not a prize or a medal. And remember that the spirit of this world has not changed. It has in fact become worse. Jesus said that those who were admired by all men were false prophets. He said, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you" (Lk.6:26).

When you really see the glory of Christ, the honour of men will mean nothing to you any more.

When we walk in the pure light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, we will be misunderstood and rejected and called all sorts of evil names by others - especially by religious Christians. Jesus was called by such names as "a mad man", "a friend of sinners", "the prince of demons" etc., You too will be called by such names if you follow Jesus all the way. If however you seek to please man and to be diplomatic in your speech, then you will avoid that reproach of Christ. But that would also indicate that Satan has blinded your eyes from seeing the glory of Christ.

In 2 Cor.3:15, it says that if you read the Word of God according to the letter, you will find a veil over your eyes - a veil that hinders you from seeing the real meaning of Scripture and the glory of Christ. And then even if you seek to obey the new-covenant commandments such as, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who harm you" etc., you will obey them only according to the letter. It is possible to obey all these commandments with a self-righteous, Pharisaical spirit - because of a veil over your eyes. But when you turn to the Lord, that veil will be removed, and you will see the glory of Christ (v.16).

It is possible for you to go to a meeting just to hear a message, and not to meet with the Lord. But no message can solve your problems. Only Jesus can do that. Many believers, for example, who have heard so much about what a truly Christian marriage is, still do not have Christlike attitudes towards their marriage-partners. Why? Because they are occupied with the letter of Scripture. What you need then is not to hear more messages, but to see the glory of Christ.

When you are taken up with Jesus Himself, and not with religious activity, or with healing, or with emotional experiences (such as falling down and laughing and dancing etc.,) you will begin to be spiritual.

It is not even righteousness that we need, but Jesus Himself.

In 1 Cor.1:30 we are told that "Christ Himself has become to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification". It is not that He gives us wisdom. He Himself is our wisdom. He is our sanctification, our redemption, our healing, our ministry, our everything. When we leave Christ and are taken up instead with some doctrine, then we have been led astray.

What is the secret of godliness (1 Tim.3:16). Is it the doctrine that Christ came in our flesh? No, it isn't. The secret of godliness is Jesus Himself Who came in our flesh. Those who are taken up with this doctrine, I have found, are the greatest Pharisees in Christendom. But those who are taken up with Jesus Himself never become Pharisees.

There is a big dividing line in Christendom today: It is drawn between those who are taken up with the letter of Scripture and those who are taken up with its spirit - or in other words, between those who are occupied with doctrines of holiness and those who are occupied with the person of Jesus Himself.

The more believers look at the letter, the more there will be a veil over their eyes, that they do not see the Lord. God wants us to see the light of His glory in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider the glory of His humility. In Phil.2:8-11, we read that God has exalted the Name of Jesus over every other name, so that at that Name, everyone everywhere should bow down. Every demon has to bow down before that Name today. Why? Not because He was the Son of God or because He lived a holy life. But because He humbled Himself.

If you are not willing to humble yourself, and yet seek to use the Name of Jesus, you will be trying to use it as some sort of magic word. And it won't work. But one who humbles himself and dies to himself and uses the Name of Jesus, will find power in the use of it.

When you preach the Word of God in the Name of Jesus, if you have not understood why God has exalted the Name of Jesus above every other name, you won't have the power of the Spirit backing your preaching. You can preach the same message that another person preaches or that you read in a book. But there won't be the same anointing over your preaching. A man can preach in order to get honour for himself. But the Holy Spirit won't back up that message - and any apparent fruit from his ministry will not last for eternity.

Have you seen the glory of Jesus' humility?

Whatever we do, we are commanded to do in the Name of Jesus. Then we must do everything in the same spirit as Jesus, Who humbled Himself and became a servant and died. All through His earthly life, He refused to be anything other than a servant. This is our calling too. We are to be not only brothers, but servants of one another too.

May we be gripped by the glory of His humility. Then there will be no veil over our faces, but only a powerful, continual anointing.

We read in 2 Cor.3:13 that Moses put a veil over his face, so that the people would not see that the glory was fading away. You can put a veil over your life too - to hide the glory that you've lost. You may want others to think that the glory in your inner life and in your married life is still the same as it was some years back - even though it is not so today.

But Paul says "We have renounced all these hidden, shameful things. With an open, unveiled face we now see the glory of the Lord"

We read in Numbers 6:23-25 that God asked Aaron to bless the children of Israel thus: "The Lord make His face shine on you." This was the greatest blessing that they could receive from the Lord - His shining upon them with His glory. This is the greatest blessing that we can receive today under the new covenant too.

When the sun shines on the moon, it reflects the sun's light. But as the earth comes in between the sun and the moon, the moon gradually becomes invisible. This is how it is with many believers too. The things of earth come between them and the Lord. And soon what started out as a full moon becomes a half moon and finally no moon at all!!

The only way we can avoid this fading away of the glory is by being totally honest and removing every veil. To be honest does not mean that we have to publicly confess our sins. No. But it does mean that we must renounce all dishonesty and pretence.

When people hear someone preaching fantastic truths that are not backed up by a humble, holy life, they are turned away from this glorious gospel. If you wear a badge that says, "JESUS SAVES" and then lose your temper, you must change the badge to read "JESUS SAVES US FROM HELL BUT NOT FROM ANGER". Either that, or remove your badge. At least then the Name of the Lord will not be dishonoured.

Let us be gripped by the glory of Jesus' humility. Nobody could stop Him from being a servant to one and all. People wanted Him to be a king, but he would not oblige them. He never wanted to have a reputation as a great man, a knowledgeable man or any such thing. He came to show us by His life what God was like. Now that is our calling too - to be servants, to die to our Self-life, and to show others what God is like.

We must allow the Holy Spirit first of all to show us the glory of Christ.

Then the Spirit will make us partake of that glory - increasingly.

CHAPTER 16

A CLEAN HEART AND A PURE LIFE

Manifesting The Life Of God

Our Lord said that while He was in the world He was the light of the world (Jn.9:5). After Jesus left the world, he has ordained us to be the light of the world (Matt.5:16).

The light that Jesus brought was not some doctrine or teaching. It was not even the truth of the new covenant. It was His life that was the light - a life that manifested the divine nature.

We often use the expression "We got light on". We can glory in the fact that we have got light on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, victory over sin, etc., But the light that we need to manifest is the life of Jesus.

It is written twice in the New Testament that "no man has seen God at any time". First Jesus came and explained God to us (Jn.1:18). When Jesus put his arms around a leper, He was manifesting what God was like. When He chased the money changers out of the temple, again He manifested what God was like. He told His disciples that those who had seen Him had seen the Father. But Jesus has now gone to heaven.

Now if we love one another, God dwells in us and people will be able to see God in the church, as they saw Him in Jesus (1 Jn.4:12).

Those who observe us in the church should be able to know what Christ is like. If we have failed to reflect this light - the life of Jesus - through our lives, then we must acknowledge that we have failed in our primary calling.

None of us can reflect the light (life) of God in all its aspects and in all its fulness individually. But together as a church we can show forth to others the manifold wisdom of God. It is only as we bear the dying of Jesus in our bodies that we can manifest the life of Jesus too. In a home, if both husband or wife are willing to die to their Adamic life, what peace will reign in that home!

No matter how heavily we are distressed, afflicted, persecuted or tempted, we should be able to say, "Death works in us, and life in you". That is our calling.

Integrity Of Heart

In Genesis 20, we read that King Abimelech took Abraham's wife Sarah to be part of his harem. However, in an unusual way that heathen king went off to sleep that night, without even touching her. Then God spoke to him in a dream and told him that he was a dead man because he had taken another man's wife. Abimelech told God boldly that it was "in the integrity of his heart" that he had taken her, for Abraham himself had said that she was his sister. God acknowledged that there was "integrity in Abimelech's heart", and told him that that was why He had kept him from sinning that night. When God can put a heathen king to sleep and thus keep him from sinning just because He saw integrity in his heart, how much more He will be able to keep us under the new covenant. But what He looks for is integrity of heart. If a heathen king can have integrity of heart to such an extent that even God could acknowledge it to be so, it shouldn't be difficult for us to have the same.

Let us pursue integrity of heart then. It is because God does not see this in many believers that He does not keep them from falling.

Repeated Testings

God tested Abraham again and again and he was found faithful each time. After many trials in which Abraham was faithful, God tested him again, fifty years after first calling him in Ur, and asked him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Again he obeyed God wholeheartedly, just as he had done 50 years earlier.

God does not stop testing us just because we've been faithful for many years. Only one who endures to the end in love who will be saved.

God may test us through our being rejected by our fellow-believers. It is written about Jesus that "He came to His own and those who were His own did not receive Him" (Jn.1:11). If we are to receive the same education that Jesus received on earth, then we have to experience the rejection that He experienced, and we must respond in love as He did.

One young man who was gifted with the Word, found that one of the elders in his local assembly (who was 20 years older than him) was jealous of his ministry and would not permit him to preach, and made him sit quietly in the meeting. This was the test of rejection. The young man submitted to the elder's authority without any rebellion, and maintained a good relationship with him. Thirty years later, when he was a much older man, God tested him again in the same area. God arranged a situation, where again he was not allowed to speak in an assembly. Again he sat quietly in the meeting, submitting to the elders without any rebellion, and maintaining a good relationship with them - even though this time the elders were 20 years younger than him!

God will test all of us in many ways until the end of our lives.

Listening To The Voice Of The Spirit

There are many times in our lives when we have to take decisions but are not sure exactly what we should do. There are many matters on which the Scriptures are silent. At the same time, we cannot always find a godly brother whom we can go to, for advice.

Whenever we have to justify our actions by saying that some godly brother had done things like that or that he had said that it was all right for us to do something, that by itself would prove that what we are doing is being done with a bad conscience.

God has given us the Holy Spirit to guide each of us personally.

For example, a sister may hear an exhortation in the meeting not to love the world. That is a very general exhortation, that does not deal with anything specific. The New Testament gives us only such general exhortations. What should she do then if she has to decide whether or not to wear a gaudy, expensive saree to a wedding-reception. Her mind may give her many reasons why she should wear that saree. But the Holy Spirit will examine her motive and may tell her that she is dressing like that only to seek honour from her worldly friends and relatives. The Spirit will be faithful to tell her the truth. But He will not force her to obey. The final decision will be hers.

The anointing of the Spirit will teach us about many things that no brother or sister in the church can ever teach us about. But we must be careful to listen to the Spirit. If we keep on rejecting that voice, He may stop speaking to us after a while. Then we will backslide and become worldly and carnal.

Submitting To Spiritual Authority

The church is not built by knowledge (doctrine) but by wisdom (Prov.24:3).

Wisdom will make a brother submit to all the authorities whom God has placed over him - whether at home, in the church or in society.

Jesus submitted to imperfect foster-parents (Joseph and Mary) throughout the years He was in Nazareth - just because that was what His heavenly Father wanted Him to do. The question there was not whether Joseph and Mary were perfect, but rather what the Father had appointed for Jesus. Joseph and Mary were no doubt God-fearing people. But we must not forget that they were under the old covenant and so were not under grace and therefore could not possibly have had victory over sin. They must have had fights with each other in their home and also had tensions between them - just like all couples have even today who have not entered into the new covenant. Yet the perfect Son of God submitted to those two imperfect people. His first steps were steps of submission to imperfect authorities.

Now if we are to walk along the same way, we too must be willing to submit to any authority whom God places over us - however imperfect they may be. That is why we teach children to submit to their parents. That is the first commandment for children; and God's promise to all who

obey it is that "it will go well with them". God places so much importance on submission to authority. So if we want it to go well with our children in life, we must teach them obedience.

In the same way, if we want it to go well with us, we too must submit to the imperfect spiritual authorities whom God places over us in the church. The elders who are over us in the Lord are certainly not perfect. But if we are certain that we are in the right local church, then we must submit to the elders appointed by God there. If however you are not sure that the local church you are in at present, is the right one, then you must seek God about leaving it.

But God will never approve of rebellion against authority.

We must not forget that the elders in our churches are battling to maintain a pure testimony for the Lord. That is certainly NOT an easy task. It is an easy task however for brothers and sisters in the church to see faults in their elders and to criticize them and rebel against them.

It is easy for those who have no children to find fault with the way others bring up their children! Those who are wise however will keep quiet, knowing how difficult it is to bring up children in godly ways.

It is also good for you to consider this first of all: Has God ever selected you to lead a church anywhere?

If God Himself has never considered you fit enough to exercise spiritual authority anywhere, why do you judge others to whom God has entrusted such spiritual responsibility? You are rebelling against God's appointment. Those elders may be imperfect in many ways. Yet God found them to be better than you! That is why He made them elders. They were the ones whom God selected first in that locality, long before you arrived on the scene. You may be just an immature rebel, full of bright ideas that have never been put into practice. If God has not given you grace to build even one local church for Him, then the wisest thing for you to do is to humble yourself under your elders and to be quiet.

There could however be serious problems with the elders in a church. In that case, you should speak about it with a mature older brother elsewhere who can help the situation, and not go around backbiting to others in the church. God can never bless those who sow discord or create confusion in a church. We must learn to remain under submission to the authorities appointed by God.

Exercising Spiritual Authority

Just as it is important to submit to spiritual authority in a godly way, in the same way it is equally important to exercise spiritual authority in a godly way. Many elders unfortunately exercise religious authority over their flock, not spiritual authority.

In the parable of the two sons (in Luke 15:11-32), we see this contrast in a clear way in the attitudes of the father and of the elder brother toward the prodigal son.

When the younger son repented of his wayward life and returned home, the father ran out to welcome him. This is a picture of the heart of God and of godly elder brothers, toward repentant sinners.

When the elder son saw the way in which his father welcomed his younger brother, he was so angry (an anger that grew out of jealousy) that he would not even go inside the house. His self-righteousness became evident in his actions and in his words. He would not even refer to his younger brother as his own brother. He told his father, "This son of yours". He despised his brother and imagined the worst about him saying that he had lived with harlots (without verifying whether he had actually done so). That elder brother may have kept all his father's commandments and stayed faithfully in the father's house ("the church"). But his heart was so hard and ungodly. He was religious, not spiritual. He was so self-righteous and Pharisaical. And one proof of this was that he could not share the joy of his father.

Pharisees have a gloomy, stern righteousness - without any of the joy of the Holy Spirit. The Bible clearly says that the righteousness of God's kingdom is "a righteousness with peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom.14:17).

But we see that the father went out to plead with his Pharisaical elder son too. Godly elders (like the father in this story) are good towards both repentant sinners and Pharisees. All elders need to have a large heart like that. Only then can they exercise spiritual authority.

Just as it takes a long time to build a skyscraper, it takes much time, labour, sweat and tears to build a local church as the Body of Christ. And just as that skyscraper can be destroyed by a bomb in a few moments, it is easy to criticise the work that others have done, especially if we ourselves have not invested any sweat or tears to build that work.

Hidden Attitudes Will Be Exposed

If we do not do a thorough work of cleansing ourselves of all sin in our inner beings - especially of wrong attitudes towards those whom we have something against - such attitudes will one day destroy us like an inward cancer.

In the Old Testament, we read of a man called Shimei who was a relative of King Saul. When Saul died and David became king of Israel, this man kept a grudge against David deep down in his heart. He was not happy that David was ruling God's people, even though God Himself had anointed David as king. Shimei's envy and discontentment remained hidden in his heart for a long time, until the day that Absalom rebelled against his father, and David had to flee from Jerusalem (2 Sam.16:5-14). Then what was hidden in Shimei's heart came out. When David was fleeing for his life, Shimei came to David and not only accused him but also cursed him, called him a man of bloodshed who was now being judged by God and threw stones at him. It is only when others are in distress, that all that is hidden in our hearts comes out.

But David was gracious and overlooked Shimei's cursing. Later on when Absalom was killed and David returned as king, Shimei was afraid and ran to ask David for forgiveness. Again David was gracious and forgave him and promised that he would not kill him.

But it is obvious that David had not cleansed himself of his inner bitterness against Shimei. For just before he died, he told his son Solomon, "I forgave Shimei and promised not to kill him. But that promise doesn't bind you. You are a wise man and you can surely find some clever way of ensuring that Shimei is killed." As far as we know those were David's last words, just before he breathed his last (See 1 Kings 2:8-10). Thus he took vengeance on Shimei and died. What a sad way to die, after having been a man of God for so many years.

We cannot judge David by our standards, for he lived under the old covenant. Our calling is higher in the new covenant. Now we are exhorted not to repay evil for evil, for vengeance belongs to God (Rom.12:17-21).

It is important therefore that we search our hearts before God to see if there is the slightest desire for vengeance against anyone in our hearts.

CHAPTER 17

THE SEVEN PILLARS OF WISDOM

The great contrast that we see in the closing pages of the Bible is between Babylon the Harlot (Rev.17,18) and Jerusalem the Bride of Christ (Rev. 21 & 22).

The Bible says that those who are "friends of the world are adulteresses (harlots)" (Jas.4:4). In contrast, the bride consists of those who have separated themselves from the world, keeping themselves chaste and pure for their Heavenly Bridegroom. (Read 2 Cor.11:1-3).

In Proverbs 8:1,27, the Bridegroom is called 'Wisdom'. And then in the next chapter the Bride is also called 'Wisdom' (Proverbs 9:1), because she is one with her Bridegroom in every way and has His Name ('Wisdom') written on her forehead - being an overcomer like her Bridegroom was (See Rev.3:12,21 and 14:1).

In Proverbs chapter 9, we see the Bride and the Harlot clearly contrasted. In the first 12 verses of that chapter, the Bride invites all the foolish to turn from their foolish ways and to quit their sinful company (v.6) and to learn the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom (v.10). In the last 6 verses of that chapter, we read of the call of the Harlot. Many respond to the harlot's call and end up in spiritual death (v.18).

The Bride (Wisdom), we read there, builds her house on **SEVEN PILLARS**. These seven pillars are listed for us in James 3:17, and the true church is built on these pillars. By these characteristics, we can identify the Bride of Christ anywhere:

1. Purity

The first and most important pillar in the true church is purity. This is not a hollow pillar of a merely external purity. No. It is solid through and through. It is purity of the heart, and it grows from the seed of the fear of God deep within the heart. It is not by clever brains but by pure hearts that the true church of Christ is built. We cannot build the church if we don't have spiritual revelation on God and His ways - and only the pure in heart will be allowed to see God in their hearts (Matt.5:8).

2. Peaceableness

Righteousness and peace always go together. They are twins. The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace (Rom.14:17). True wisdom is never argumentative or quarrelsome. It does not strive. It maintains harmonious relationships with everyone, as far as possible. It is impossible to quarrel with a man who is filled with Divine wisdom, for such a man is a peaceable man. He may be firm and he may be hated by compromisers. But he is always peaceable. Jesus told His disciples that when they travel to preach the gospel, they should stay only in the house of "men of peace" (Luke 10:5-7). We must be men of peace, if we are to build God's house.

3. Consideration

The Bride of Christ is always fair to others, gentle, patient, forbearing and courteous. She is never harsh or rough but always considerate of the feelings of others. When the church is supported by this pillar, it becomes easy to bear with one another - even if some are slow of understanding or crude in their manners. The problem, we begin to realise, is not the crudeness of our brother or sister, but the impatience that dwells within us. And so we fight the right enemy - our Self-life - and not our brothers and sisters.

4. Willingness to yield

One who cannot receive admonishment and exhortation, or who feels that he has gone beyond that stage, is truly foolish, even if he is an elder or an older man (See Eccl.4:13). In India especially, many people have the heathen idea that "older people are wiser". This may be true in earthly matters but certainly not in spiritual matters. Jesus did not choose any of the older people in the synagogues to be his apostles. he chose young men. Older people in the church often find it difficult to receive exhortation from a younger brother who may be the elder in the church and also far more godly. But that is because of their pride. Those who are willing to receive correction become wise (Prov.13:10). And so where the brothers and sisters in a church are eager to receive exhortation and correction, a truly glorious church will be built. The wise man loves those who exhort him faithfully and will eagerly seek out their company. 'Submit to one another' (Eph.5:21) are the words written on this pillar.

5. Fulness of mercy and its good fruits

The Bride of Christ is full of mercy - not just occasionally merciful. She has no problem forgiving anyone, freely and cheerfully from the heart. She does not judge or condemn others, but rather exercises compassion towards them like her Bridegroom. This mercy is not just a

mental attitude but finds expression in good fruits that are brought forth in her actions. She does good in all the ways she can to all the people she can at all the times she can.

6. Steadfastness

A brother who has Divine wisdom will be free from all crookedness. He will be wholehearted and straightforward, with a single eye, free from doubts and hesitation. He will not be double-minded, but strong in faith in God, and he won't be looking at his own weaknesses, but at the promises of God. Such a brother knows that victory over all conscious sin is possible here and now. He is a dependable person - who can be trusted at all times to keep his word. He is steadfast and unmovable. You cannot make him bend his convictions or to compromise in any matter. He is straight and upright as a rod.

7. Freedom from hypocrisy

The Bride has more spiritual content inwardly than others can see in her externally. Her hidden life is better than the opinion that others have of her external life. This is the exact opposite of the 'spiritual adulteress' or the 'Harlot,' whose so-called spirituality is only meant for receiving the honour of men. What she has is actually 'religiosity' and not true spirituality. The bride watches her inner thoughts, motives and attitudes far more than her external words and actions. She longs for God's approval over her inner life and cares nothing at all for man's approval of her external life. By this test, each of us can know whether we are part of the Bride or of the Harlot.

Seek God for Wisdom

The Bride of Christ has the seed of wisdom implanted in her heart and so she will have these seven characteristics growing in her year by year. Although she is still far from perfect, she is pressing on and growing towards perfection. But where these characteristics are not found at all, it is presumptuous for any person or so-called 'church' to consider himself/itself a part of the Bride of Christ. Where there are contentions and jealousies and impurity and unbelief and pride, there you certainly have the 'Harlot,' not the Bride.

The Bible says that Divine wisdom can be obtained only if we seek for it as we would for hidden wealth (Prov. 2:4). Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven was like a treasure hidden in a field that a man, when he discovered it, sold everything he had, in order to obtain it (Mt. 13:44). It is only those who forsake all, who give up everything to God, who count everything else on earth as rubbish compared to Divine wisdom, (as Paul did - Phil.3: 8), who will obtain this wisdom and be able to build these seven pillars. And only through such people will the true church of Jesus Christ be built.

It is easy to accumulate knowledge or to be an eloquent speaker. But this will only make you a scribe. Jesus said that every scribe must become a disciple (Mt.13:52). And for this, the scribe has to forsake everything - including his own Adamic life and his right to choose his own way (Lk.14:26,33). Only thus will he receive the wealth (the Divine life and wisdom) that God gives. Then he will be able to give forth from his wealth to others, from his heart and not from his head . He will be able to share with others both what is new (fresh wisdom and revelations from the

Word) as well as what is old (old truths, but that are yet fresh, like the manna that was kept for forty years in the ark, and that never stank) (Mt.13:52).

When we see this high calling and the standard God expects of us, we can feel overwhelmed. And so the Holy Spirit also gives us an encouraging word in James 1:5. If we lack this WISDOM (and who among us can say that we do not need any more wisdom?), we are commanded to ask God. It is the Lord Who gives WISDOM (Prov.2:6). But we are to ask in faith. If we ask in faith, we shall certainly receive these seven pillars in our life and God's House will be built in us and through us.

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

CHAPTER 18

THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD

"This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it" (1 Pet.5:12).

Here at the end of Peter's first letter, he says that what he has written in his letter is all about the true grace of God. In these days when false grace is being preached so much, it is good to go back to 1 Peter to see what the TRUE grace of God really is, and to stand firm in it.

The fact that Peter uses the expression "the TRUE grace of God" in the first century itself indicates that even in those days a counterfeit grace was being proclaimed by the agents of Satan, who had "turned the grace of God into licentiousness (licence to sin) (Jude 4).

Right at the outset, Peter tells us that all believers are "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that they may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood" and for such believers, he prays that God's "grace and peace may be theirs in fullest measure" (1 Pet.1:2).

God chose us in order to sanctify us (make us holy) and to lead us to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the true grace of God is meant to lead us into; and so Peter prays that those who desire this in their lives may experience God's grace in fullest measure.

Peter then says that "as to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry" (1 Pet.1:10). The grace that we experience under the new covenant was not experienced by anyone in old covenant times. Even the prophets could only prophesy about this grace as something that would come in the future. They could not experience it themselves.

Peter then urges all believers to "fix their hope completely on the grace that is to be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet.1:13).

When Christ returns in glory, we will experience a special grace that will transform us totally into His likeness. From the beginning of our Christian life to the very end, God's work in us is entirely one of grace.

Peter also speaks of receiving grace for a happy married life:

"You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." (1 Pet.3:7).

God wants Christian married couples to live together in peace and harmony. Their home must be an island of peace in a strife-torn world. And for this, abundant grace is required.

Peter then goes on to speak of spiritual gifts: "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Pet.4:10)

Every spiritual gift is to be used only to SERVE others, as a means of dispensing the true grace of God to them. The grace of God is many-sided. Therefore God has chosen people from different backgrounds and with different personalities and temperaments and placed them all together in Christ's Body so that each of them can display some unique aspect of God's grace through his/her life and ministry.

The Humble Receive Grace And Revelation

"You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Pet.5:5).

Here Peter speaks about the importance of learning submission to spiritual authority in our younger days itself.

If a young man is saved by the age of 20, it is usually God's purpose that he should have an effective ministry by the time he is 35 years old. But for this to be fulfilled, that man should learn the all-important lessons of brokenness and humility by the time he is 35. And those lessons can be learnt only as he submits to spiritual authority. Only thus can He receive grace to exercise spiritual authority later in his home and in the church. Young people who do not submit to spiritual authority invariably end up losing the ministry God had in mind for them.

This does not mean that we don't have to humble ourselves once we are older!! Subjection to elders must be learnt when we are young. But following Jesus along the way of humility is something that we have to keep on doing until our dying day. That is the only way to keep on receiving grace until the very end of our lives.

Bible-knowledge cannot give us grace. It is an amazing fact that our Lord was crucified by Bible-believing Jewish zealots, and not by the heathen Romans or Greeks who had no knowledge of the true God.

The leaders of the only true religion on earth in Jesus' day (Judaism) and the scholars of the only true Scriptures (Genesis to Malachi), were the ones who called Jesus a deceiver, a heretic and the prince of devils. Those scribes and Pharisees were intelligent, Bible-believing, well-educated and ardent for the truth of the Scriptures. Yet they were totally blind spiritually. They did not get grace. Why?

The answer to that question is important, because history has repeated itself again and again in the Christendom.

Ardent Bible scholars even today, are totally blind to the true Jesus of the Scriptures and to the true grace of God. Like the Pharisees of old, they too are unable to receive the hidden wisdom of God (1 Cor.2:7-10). The reason in both cases is just the same: They are proud and seek the honour of men.

Jesus said to the Pharisees, "How can you have faith who receive honour from one another and do not seek the honour that comes from God" (Jn. 5:44).

Those who live before the face of men, seeking their own honour can never receive revelation on the true meaning of the Scriptures, for God blinds them to the truth (Mt.11:25).

God has written the Scriptures in such a way that the wise and intelligent will not be able to understand it, if they do not humble themselves. That cannot be said about any earthly book. There is no book in the world that requires humility as an essential qualification in order to understand it, except the Bible.

The natural mind (no matter how clever) will consider the revelation of the Spirit that comes forth from a humble brother as foolishness (1 Cor.2:14). One requires grace to understand God's Word.

Proud theologians today proclaim many different interpretations of the Scriptures. But they are totally unaware of their blindness.

We have to humble ourselves before the face of God, and finish with seeking the honour and approval of men. Then God will REVEAL to us what He hides from others.

God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.

If we are proud, then even if all our doctrines are right, we shall end up like the Pharisees, deceived and blind concerning spiritual realities. Then we shall not be able to recognise the true prophets of God in our day, any more than the Pharisees could recognise Jesus, the True Prophet of the Lord in their day.

All sin has its origin in PRIDE and SELFISHNESS. In the same way, all the virtues of Christ have their origin in HUMILITY and SELFLESSNESS. The more we humble ourselves, the more we will receive grace from God. Then we shall live in victory and manifest Christ's character more and more in our lives. If anyone does not have victory over sin, that would indicate clearly

that he has not humbled himself - because all who humble themselves will certainly receive grace (1 Pet.5:6), and all who come under God's grace will certainly get victory (Rom.6:14).

There are many false ideas of humility in Christendom.

But this is the test by which we can evaluate ourselves unfailingly: Have we got victory over sin and is the character of Christ being manifested increasingly in us?

Perfection Through Suffering

"After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." (1 Pet.5:10)

Here God is called the God of ALL GRACE. He leads His people through suffering in order that He might impart His grace to them and "perfect and establish them". Paul experienced God's all-sufficient grace through receiving a thorn in his flesh (2 Cor.12:7-10).

Peter's first letter too has much to say about suffering as the means by which God dispenses His grace to us.

We read that, "Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example for you to FOLLOW IN HIS STEPS WHO COMMITTED NO SIN Since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered In the flesh HAS CEASED FROM SIN" (1 Pet.2:21,22, 4:1).

Here we are clearly told to follow the example of Christ Who suffered, so that we might not sin at any time. Grace is meant to make us holy,"as He Who called us is Holy" (1 Pet.1:16).

Peter reminds us that "if we suffer in the flesh, we shall cease from sin and live the rest of our life, doing the will of God" (1 Pet.4:1,2).

To "suffer in the flesh" does not mean becoming sick in the body, for no-one has ever stopped sinning thereby. It does not mean being beaten and bruised for Christ's sake either, for no-one has stopped sinning that way either. It refers rather to denying the desires of Self, which are in opposition to the will of God. Sin brings a certain pleasure. To suffer is the opposite of enjoying that pleasure. If we are willing to suffer in each and every situation, then we can cease from sin. God will help us if we are willing. In fact, He even works to make us willing (Phil.2:12,13). But so often we resist His workings. That is why we remain defeated.

Christ suffered in the flesh, and we are to arm ourselves with the same mind. Jesus walked this way of self-denial all His life. He came to earth in the flesh and never did His own will but always the will of His Father, no matter how much suffering that may have involved (Jn.6:38). Thus He never sinned. Now we also have the opportunity to "follow In His steps Who committed no sin" (1 Pet. 2:21,22).

This is the gospel (good news) of the grace of God.

In his second letter, Peter reminds us that the good news is that God by His divine power has granted us "EVERYTHING necessary for a godly life" here on this earth (2 Pet.1:3,4). And if we have received a faith "of the same value" (2 Pet.1:1 margin) as Peter's, we shall receive the same grace that he received and partake of God's nature as he did.

Then the character of Christ - "moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love will be ours in increasing measure" (2 Pet.1:5-11), making us fruitful and freeing us from all blindness and shortsightedness (v.8,9).

Everyone who abides in Jesus will bear MUCH FRUIT (Jn.15:5). And so if these virtues of Christ are not being manifested increasingly in us, it would indicate that we are not abiding in Jesus and that we are not living under the true grace of God.

Grace Makes Us One

Those who humble themselves not only receive grace for victory, but also grace to become one with each other. Just as we saw earlier that husband and wife can receive grace together as "joint-heirs of the grace of life", even so believers too can receive that grace that makes them joint-heirs along with other believers in Christ's Body.

Jesus prayed on the last night of His earthly life that we might be ONE AS HE AND THE FATHER ARE ONE (Jn.17:22). And He prayed that we experience this oneness here in this world (Jn.17:21,23).

This is not a unity of understanding but a unity of spirit . Because of the sinfulness of our nature and the limitations of our minds that have been warped by sin, we may not see "eye to eye" in every matter with each other here on earth. But that has nothing to do with our spiritual unity. In our hearts, we can still be one.

All lack of unity is because we want to do our own will and not the will of the Head. This has nothing to do with our understanding of doctrine. It has only to do with whether we are willing to deny our own will and do the Father's will alone.

Jesus always obeyed what He heard from His Father. His food was obedience to His Father's will (Jn.4:34).

Jesus was one with the Father. It is into this oneness that we too are called through the true grace of God.

Jesus always overcame evil with good. Evil had no power over Him, because He was always rooted in doing good. So shall it be with us, if we too obey the word to "overcome evil with good" (Rom.12:21). When others hate us and scandalise us, we can conquer their evil by doing them good. This is possible when we receive the true grace of God.

Then we shall be kept, as Jesus prayed, from the evil that is in the world (Jn.17:16), and we shall become one with all others who walk the same way.

The church that Jesus is building is one that has received grace - the true grace of God - to be built together in unity, under Christ the Head. Only such a church will triumph over the gates of Hell (Matt.16:18).

CHAPTER 19

THE TRUTH ABOUT SPEAKING IN TONGUES

"Every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation (change)" (James. 1:17).

God never makes a mistake, He never changes and He gives only perfect gifts. Therefore when He gave the gift of "speaking in unknown languages" ("tongues") to the church on the day of Pentecost, He knew exactly what He was doing. The gift of "tongues" was a perfect gift. God has not changed His mind about the gift, for He never changes.

God knew the controversies that would surround this gift in the 20th century. Yet He felt the church needed this gift to fulfil its ministry.

Even major truths such as the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the Humanity of Christ and the Person of the Holy Spirit have been opposed and have faced controversy in the history of Christendom. So it should not surprise us if the gift of "tongues" has been controversial too.

It is always best to stick exactly to what Scripture says on all doctrinal matters. Let us look then, with an unprejudiced mind, at every single verse in the Bible on the subject of "speaking in tongues" :

Truth No. 1:

Mark 16:17: [Jesus said,] "These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues... they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Jesus said that some of the signs accompanying the company of "those who have believed" would be speaking in tongues, casting out demons and healing the sick. He did not say that ALL these signs would accompany EVERY believer. But He said that these signs would be found among the company of "those who have believed".

So every believer need not have all these gifts. Neither need every church have all these gifts. But they will be found in the whole church worldwide. The Holy Spirit sovereignly decides whom to give the gifts to.

Truth No. 2:

Acts 2:4,7,11: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance..... And the Jews from every nation marvelled saying....`We hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.'"

The first time that believers were filled with the Holy Spirit, they ALL spoke in tongues. The "tongues" were languages that others understood immediately. So there was no need for the gift of interpretation.

Notice also in verse 4 that it was the persons themselves who began to speak in tongues and not the Holy Spirit. The Spirit did not move their tongues. The Spirit only gave them utterance. They spoke themselves.

In no gift, does the Holy Spirit take away freedom of choice from us. In fact, the fruit of the Spirit is "self-control" (Gal.5:23). Only demon-possessed people lose control of themselves. One who is filled with the Spirit will have more control over himself than anyone else. "The spirit of the prophets is subject to the control of the prophets" (1 Cor.14:32).

Truth No. 3:

Acts 10:46: "They were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God."

Here, in the house of Cornelius, all who were in his house were baptized in the Holy Spirit, at the same moment as they were converted to Christ. They spoke in "tongues" exalting God (praising Him) - not speaking to people, as was the case on the day of Pentecost.

Truth No. 4:

Acts 19:6: "When Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying"

The Holy Spirit came upon the believers in Ephesus, when Paul laid hands on them. The "tongues" here seems to have been prophesying.

[Note the following facts from the above instances in "Acts":

(a) In Acts 2 they received the Spirit, AFTER water baptism. In Acts 10, they received the Spirit BEFORE water baptism.

(b) In Acts 2 and 10, they received the Spirit WITHOUT anyone laying hands on them. In Acts 19, they received the Spirit AFTER Paul laid hands on them.

(This proves that there is no standard pattern for receiving the Spirit. It could be either before or after water-baptism, and also with or without the laying on of hands).

(c) In Acts 8:14-18, when the disciples in Samaria received the Holy Spirit, there is no mention that they spoke in tongues. But Simon the magician did see some evidence (we are not told what it was) which made him want the same ability that Peter had.]

Truth No. 5:

1 Cor. 12:7,8,10: "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit.... to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues."

The gift of tongues is for "the common good" - the good of the church. This was written 25 years after the day of Pentecost. And the gift of tongues was still being given then by the Spirit "for the common good".

Truth No. 6:

1 Cor.12:11: "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills".

This is perhaps the clearest Scripture that teaches that the Holy Spirit sovereignly decides to whom to give each gift (including the gift of tongues). We cannot dictate to Him whom He should give any gift to.

Truth No. 7:

1 Cor. 12:28: "God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then... various kinds of tongues."

It is God Who appointed the gift of tongues in the church - for some purpose. So we should never oppose this gift, lest we be found opposing God. Remember that He has more wisdom than we have.

Truth No. 8:

1 Cor. 12:30: "All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?"

All believers DO NOT speak in tongues, just like all believers do not have the gifts of healing.

So obviously, God does NOT feel that "tongues" is an essential gift for all believers - either for being holy or for being effective in His service. If it were, He would have given this gift to everyone.

Truth No. 9:

1 Cor. 13:1: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."

Speaking in tongues without love is useless. All pride in those who speak in tongues, and all "looking down" on others who don't speak in tongues is because of a lack of love. Such unloving believers who speak in tongues are as repulsive to God as a noisy gong is to us.

Truth No. 10:

1 Cor. 13:8: "Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away."

When perfection comes at Christ's return, there will be no more need for speaking in tongues.

In heaven, there will be no need for "tongues" - just like there will be no more need for Bible-knowledge or prophecy.

So "tongues" is a temporary gift needed only under the imperfect conditions prevalent on earth.

This explains why Jesus never needed the gift of tongues. It was because His mind was perfectly pure and because He lived in perfect communion with His Father at all times,

Truth No. 11:

1 Cor. 14:2: "One who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries."

The gift of tongues mentioned here is obviously different from the one manifested on the day of Pentecost - for this gift is NOT to "speak to men but to God" and no-one can understand what the speaker is saying.

Truth No. 12:

1 Cor. 14:4: "One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself

The gift of tongues enables a believer to build himself up spiritually.

Truth No. 13:

1 Cor. 14:5: "I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying. But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?"

Paul wished that ALL spoke in tongues. This is yet another verse that clearly indicates that all believers do NOT speak in tongues.

Paul's wish here is similar to his wish that ALL should be single like he himself was (as he states earlier in the same letter - 1 Cor.7:7). Paul saw some benefits in being single. He also saw some benefits in speaking in tongues. But Paul recognised that just as God was sovereign in giving the "gift of being single" only to some believers, He was equally sovereign in giving the "gift of tongues" also only to some believers.

Therefore it is as foolish to expect all believers to speak in tongues as it is to expect all believers to be single!!

In the church-meeting, it is far better to prophesy (that is, to speak God's Word "to encourage, edify and console" others - 1 Cor. 14:3). If however a 'tongue' is interpreted, then it is equal to prophecy.

Truth No. 14:

1 Cor. 14:9,13: "Unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear (understandable), how will it be known what is spoken?.....Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret."

"Tongues" must be interpreted when used in a church meeting.

Truth No. 15:

1 Cor. 14:14: "If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind.I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind."

When praying in tongues, a person cannot understand what he is praying. But Paul still felt that he should pray and sing "with the spirit" (in tongues), as much as he did with his mind (in a known language).

Truth No. 16:

1 Cor. 14:18: "I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all."

Paul was thankful to God for this gift. So it must have helped him.

Truth No. 17:

1 Cor. 14:19: "However, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind, that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue."

In the church, speaking in a known language is always the best.

Truth No. 18:

1 Cor. 14:22: "Tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers"

Tongues are for a sign to unbelievers - as on the day of Pentecost.

Truth No. 19:

1 Cor. 14:23: "If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?"

It is madness for all to speak in tongues in a church-meeting - for no-one will understand what anyone is saying. (This must obviously be referring to people speaking in tongues individually and not when all are praying together - for in the latter case, we do not listen to the prayers of even those who pray in a known tongue.)

Truth No. 20:

1 Cor. 14:26, 27: "What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret;"

Not more than two or three should speak in tongues in a meeting of the church, but each "tongue" must be interpreted. "Interpretation" is NOT the same as "translation". Translation is "word for word". Interpretation is "expressing the thought in one's own words".

Truth No. 21:

1 Cor. 14:39: "Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues."

This then is the conclusion. Don't forbid the exercise of the gift of tongues. But if you are desiring a gift, seek for the gift of prophecy more than for the gift of tongues.

The True And The Counterfeit

There is a certain amount of mystery about the gift of tongues, as all those who have received the gift will acknowledge - if they are honest. We do not know everything about it. We know only in part (1 Cor.13:12).

As one who has spoken in tongues for the past 24 years, let me add a few words concerning what I presently understand about the gift, from my own experience.

When a person speaks in tongues, his spirit (heart) speaks forth syllables (directly from his heart to his mouth, bypassing his mind) and thus he pours out whatever is in his heart to God - whether

that be an overflow of joy or a burden caused by sorrow or discouragement. Thus the pressure on his heart is relieved. That is how he is 'edified'.

As we saw earlier in Acts 2:4, when anyone speaks in tongues, it is the person himself who speaks, and not the Holy Spirit. The believer forms the syllables himself, just as he does when speaking in a known language. The only difference is that now, he does NOT use a known language to pray, but concentrating on the Lord, speaks forth syllables with his mouth, straight from his heart, bypassing his mind - knowing that God understands the longings and pressures in his heart, even if he cannot understand himself what he is saying.

Unburdening himself like that in moments of pressure helps a believer, especially if his mind is too tired to pray in a known language. We may not be able to explain how this works, but it does.

Let us now look at the gift of interpretation: As we have already seen, interpretation of a tongue is equivalent to prophesying. So this gift will usually be given by the Spirit to one who has the gift of prophecy as well.

In a church-meeting, if someone speaks in a tongue, one of those having the gift of prophecy (usually one of the elders), if he is walking in the light of God, will find a thought being impressed on his mind, if the "tongue" is genuinely from God. He speaks forth that thought in his own words - for it is NOT a translation, but an interpretation.

If another elder (who also has the gift of interpretation) had interpreted the "tongue", the interpretation would have been the same (although couched in that elder's own words). This would be the case if both elders were in perfect touch with the Lord.

Since no revelation from God can contradict what is written in the Bible, the interpretation will be in accordance with Scripture - just like all true prophecy will also be in line with the Scriptures.

Some who are sceptical of spiritual gifts have asked this question: If a "tongue" that was interpreted in a meeting, is copied on to a tape and someone else (with the gift of interpretation) in another place is asked to interpret it, will the interpretation be the same as the first one? The answer is: It should be, if both interpreters had a perfect understanding of the mind of the Lord. If the interpretation is different in content, (and not just in words), that would only indicate that one or both interpreters are not in such perfect touch with the Lord as to understand His mind perfectly. That is not abnormal, because no believer in the world is in such perfect touch with the Lord as to know His mind perfectly.

The following example will prove this fact beyond any doubt: Suppose you have to speak in a meeting and you have a particular message on your heart which you feel is the burden of the Lord for that meeting. Then, if you are unable to be at that meeting and someone else speaks in your stead, strictly speaking, he should give the same message as you had on your heart (even if it be in his own words). If that brother doesn't give the same message as you had on your heart, it would indicate that one of you did not have a perfect understanding of the Lord's mind for that

meeting. So we see that believers could fail such a test even when giving a message in a known language.

That's why the Bible tells us to judge even a prophet's message (1 Cor.14:29). Similarly, we should judge, all messages in "tongues" and their "interpretations". What should we judge in such cases? Just this: Whether our spirit witnesses that the utterance (prophecy, tongues or interpretation) was Scriptural (and from the Lord) or not.

We are warned (in 1 John 4:1) not to believe every spirit but to "test the spirits whether they are of God". So every time, we hear "tongues" or interpretation in public, we must test it in our spirits. Many of the "supernatural utterances" we hear may not be from God. We must always reject a prophecy (or any part of it), a "tongue", or an interpretation, if we feel uneasy about it in our spirits, for any reason.

It is the unquestioning acceptance of everything supernatural and abnormal that has brought tremendous confusion into Christendom in this century - and tremendous dishonor to the Lord's Name as well.

Notice these facts in all instances of speaking in tongues in "Acts" :

- (a) In every case, the speaking in tongues was spontaneous;
- (b) In every case, ALL spoke in tongues - there were no exceptions;
- (c) In every case, there was no coaching or urging or instruction given on how to speak in tongues;

Today however, in most places, NONE of the above characteristics are found. Only where the gift of tongues is spontaneously received without any coaching, can we conclude that it COULD BE genuine.

Of all the "speaking in tongues" that I have heard, my spirit has borne witness to only a small percentage of it as genuine. Most of the rest I have felt was an attempt to imitate the gift - either to be accepted by others in a group or to impress them. A small percentage could even be of demonic origin. My observations are based on the fruit and the results that I have seen in the lives of many people in many lands. Speaking and singing in tongues often appears to be a form of "exhibitionism" in many churches - and exhibitionism is characteristic of little children.

It is also a well-established fact that, at this present time, the maximum exploitation of believers for financial gain is practised by those preachers and pastors who claim to "speak in tongues". Most of the cults in the 20th century have also developed from tongue-speaking groups.

My advice to all believers therefore is: "Avoid churches that major on the gifts of tongues and healing - because many of them go to dangerous extremes and usually don't have spiritually-minded leaders. Seek instead for fellowship with a church that emphasises holiness and disciple-

making primarily, that accepts the genuine gift of tongues and that does not covet your money or seek to control your life.

Let me also emphasise that we need to use our mind (renewed by the Holy Spirit) if we are to understand God's will and His Word aright (Rom.12:2). Many believers tend to despise their minds. Our mind is to be like a wife. She should not be the head of the home. But she should not be killed either!! Jesus is our husband and head. Our mind should be submissive to Him through our heart.

In a nutshell then, here is a bit of sane advice on "tongues":

"If God gives you the gift of tongues, receive it and exercise it. Speak forth the syllables from your heart to God when you are alone with Him - anywhere - and especially when your heart is under pressure (through discouragement) or overflowing with joy. If you don't have the gift, don't worry about it. But be open to the Lord to receive it, at all times. Don't be against it and don't get into a frenzy to receive it. God will give it to you, if He wants you to have it, without any frenzy on your part. At the same time, don't believe that everything you see and hear in Christendom is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Test everything. Use your God-given faculties of discernment. If you don't have the gift of tongues, don't consider yourself inferior to those who have it. And if you do have the gift, don't imagine that it makes you spiritual or superior to those who don't have it. (Paul and the Corinthian Christians both spoke in tongues. But Paul was a spiritual giant, while the Corinthians were carnal!!).

What Is Absolutely Essential

What is absolutely essential for all of us is to be ENDUED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S POWER. It is POWER, and not speaking in tongues that is the evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

The Holy Spirit is to be received BY FAITH (Jn.7:37-39), just as we received the forgiveness of our sins - on the basis of Christ's merit alone, and not on our own merit. We do not receive the GIFT of the Spirit by fasting or praying or by any other work. He is a GIFT (Acts 2:38).

We ask and receive - immediately by faith - and go forth believing in God's promise that He gives the Holy Spirit more readily to those who ask Him than any earthly father would give food to a hungry son (Lk.11:13). If we are unsure about having received the Spirit, we can ask God to give us an assurance. He will not deny us such an assurance.

But we need to be filled with the Spirit continually (because we are leaky vessels - Eph.5:18), just like we need to be forgiven continually (because we sin - often without knowing it - Matt.6:12).

The devotion of our heart to Christ is FAR MORE important than our speaking in tongues. "Do you love Me more than everything else?", was our Lord's question to Peter, before commissioning him for His service. Arguments about "speaking in tongues" are therefore a diversion arranged by Satan to sidetrack believers from total devotion to Christ.

The greatest Christians in the world have been those who loved the Lord Jesus supremely - whether they spoke in tongues or not. Some like Peter, James, John and Paul spoke in tongues. Others like John Wesley, Charles Finney, D.L.Moody, A.B.Simpson, William Booth, C.T.Studd and Watchman Nee never spoke in tongues (as far as we know). But they ALL received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, they ALL loved the Lord with all their hearts and they ALL walked the way of the cross. These truths were central in their lives. Other things were secondary.

Let us follow their example and we won't go wrong..

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

CHAPTER 20

SHIBBOLETHS AMONG BELIEVERS

In the days of the judges in Israel, the Gileadites devised an unique method of testing who belonged to their camp and who didn't. They asked everyone to say the word "Shibboleth". Their enemies, the Ephraimites, would pronounce this as "Sibboleth", and that was sufficient to seal their doom. 42,000 Israelites were killed by their brothers because they did not pronounce one syllable correctly (Judges 12:6)!!!

During the last 20 centuries, various Christian groups have devised their own "Shibboleths" to identify those who belong to their group and those who don't. All those who cannot "pronounce" the Shibboleths (the acceptable theological terminology of the group) correctly are slain - with the sword (in the Middle ages), and with the tongue (in these more civilized days).

Good believers have been destroyed psychologically and by blackmail in these times, just because they could not pronounce the acceptable Shibboleth of a group, and because they were too weak to stand up to the strong soul-power of the group's leaders.

It is certainly not by the use or non-use of a particular phrase that we identify whether people have the correct doctrine or not.

Consider the phrase "the dying of Jesus" (2 Cor.4:10). That is not necessarily the only way of expressing the truth that that phrase represents. Jesus spoke of it as "taking up the cross daily" (Lk.9:23).

We are all in danger of becoming slaves to a particular terminology, rather than becoming bondslaves of Christ.

What would you think of an apostle who never once spoke of "taking up the cross daily" in any of his writings? Would you accuse him of ignoring the centrality of the cross? If so, you would have to accuse Peter, John, James and Jude of such a deviation, because they never once use this phrase in any of their writings.

Paul himself talks of "the dying of Jesus" only once in all the letters that he wrote. Was that because Paul did not emphasise the centrality of the cross in his ministry? It would be blasphemy to think so - for it was the Holy Spirit Who inspired all of Paul's letters in Scripture!

John certainly bore the cross every day. But when he speaks of the Christian life in his first epistle, he speaks of it in a positive way - as partaking of, and manifesting eternal life - the life of Jesus. "We proclaim to you the eternal life," he says, "which was with the Father and was manifested to us" (1 Jn.1:2).

Eternal life - the life of Jesus - is the one theme of all the epistles, and in fact of the entire New Testament. And this is what we should be proclaiming in every meeting of the church.

We must not use human logic when we come to the Scriptures. Such logic is all right in mathematics, but not with God's Word.

When we come to God's Word, it is best to put aside the clever arguments of human reason and to accept Scripture exactly as it is written. God has given us His perfect revelation in His Word. And if the New Testament Scriptures speak of "eternal life", we must speak of that.

Remember that Jesus "for the joy set before Him, endured the cross" (Heb.12:2). He did not enjoy the cross. He endured it. And He endured it because of the joy set before Him - the joy of fellowship with the Father in whose presence is life and fulness of joy (Psa.16:11).

The Father dwelt in the Most Holy Place (of the Old testament temple), and the only way into that place was through the rent veil (symbolising the crucified flesh).

Jesus died to His own will daily and thus fellowshipped with the Father. But Jesus did not concentrate on crucifying His will. His goal was fellowship with His Father. His goal was life, not death.

Our goal too must be LIFE - the same as Jesus'. We do not follow the way of the cross. That would be following a technique! We follow Jesus - Who walked along the way of the cross. We run the race, not looking at a doctrine, or even at the way, but at a Person - JESUS HIMSELF (Heb. 12:2).

People who always think and speak of "Death to Self" tend to become negative in many ways, and end up being negative to other human-beings too. We have seen numerous examples of this.

Does this mean that we should not preach about taking up the cross? No. But the truth about taking up the cross does not have to be proclaimed, by using this very phrase each time. The letter kills. It is the spirit that gives life.

A brother's message may contain the spirit of the cross, (as the entire New Testament does), even if he does not use that phrase (the letter) even once in his message. If we are spiritually minded, we will listen to his spirit - and not just to his words. It would be totally wrong to imagine that a brother has not understood the centrality of the cross, just because he does not use your particular "Shibboleth".

The apostles did not follow a rule-book ('the tree of knowledge of good and evil') to decide what phrases to use and what not to use, when writing Scripture. They spoke out of the abundance of their hearts and from their lives, and expressed spiritual truths with the words that came to them naturally. The Holy Spirit did not pour them all into one mould and make them all use the same expressions and phrases.

"The wind blows freely where it wishes.....so is everyone born of the Spirit (every child of God)" (Jn.3:8).

Bondage comes through following human rules and regulations. The apostles were free to express even Divine truth in their own language. Only cultists compel their adherents to use the same phrases used by their leaders. This results in cultists becoming like programmed robots who do not have any individual contact with God and no boldness to use language that comes naturally to them. They blindly and dumbly imitate their leaders.

We must certainly avoid the many un-Scriptural expressions that are common in Christendom. We must also be careful not to use Biblical expressions carelessly.

Some believers speak about "rending the veil" today, not realising that Christ has already rent the veil once for all. It does not have to be rent again!!

Others speak about "condemning sin in their flesh", not realising that God has already condemned sin in the flesh once for all (Rom.8:3).

Such careless use of Scripture is often due to a desire to use the same "Shibboleth" that the leaders in a group are using.

Elders must never insist that others should use only the phrases that they themselves use. Everyone must be free to express the life of Christ in him in Scriptural words that he himself feels most free to use.

We must not slavishly imitate the favourite phrases found within our group, just in order to be acceptable to the others. It is the power of godliness that we are to pursue, not the form.

Let us also beware of going to the fanatic extreme of imagining that a brother belongs to the Bride of Christ only if he joins our group and uses our Shibboleths!!! Men's opinions are fit only for the garbage bin! Let us allow Christ to choose His own Bride, without our being busybodies in His matters, and trying to select a Bride for Him!!

We are warned in Scripture never to be engaged in "a dispute about words" (1 Tim.6:4). So we have to be careful that we don't use our favourite Shibboleths to evaluate others or to judge or condemn them.

"Let God (and His Word) be true, and every man (however godly he may be) a liar" (Rom.3:4).

"If people do not speak according to God's Word, it is because they have no light" (Isa.8:20).

CHAPTER 21

UNDERSTANDING THE TRUTH ACCURATELY

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 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).

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