



Zac Poonen

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CHAPTER ONE

DISCIPLES OR CONVERTS?

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

Satan tempted our Lord with the words "*It is written ...*" (*Matt. 4:6*). But the Lord rejected the temptation by saying, "*It is also written ...*" (*Matt. 4:7*). The whole purpose of God, can be understood only when Scripture is compared with Scripture - when "*It is written ...*" is read along with "*It is also written ...*".

Consider the matter of "*the great commission*".

Jesus commanded His disciples saying, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation*" (*Mk. 16:15*). He also commanded them saying, "*Go and make disciples of all nations*" (*Matt. 28:19 NASB*). These two commands are but two parts of ONE great commission. Only through a careful consideration of, and obedience to, both parts of this commission, can we find and fulfil the whole will of God.

Evangelism

The first step obviously is to go out and preach the gospel to everyone (*Mk. 16:15*). This command is not addressed to the individual believer, but to the whole body of Christ. It is humanly impossible for any single individual or any local church by itself, to preach the gospel to every human being in the whole world. Each of us can, at best, have but a small part in this task.

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

An evangelist has a wider field of work than a witness. A witness has to proclaim Christ in the circle in which he moves and works - to relatives, neighbours, fellow workers in his office and to the others he comes across daily, to whom he may happen to be led to while travelling, etc. Here is where we can all be witnesses, whatever our earthly occupations may be.

But Christ has also given evangelists to the church who have a wider ministry of reaching the lost. However the evangelist's task is *NOT* merely that of 'winning souls' or 'bringing people to Christ' (as we commonly hear), but 'building up the body of Christ' (as *Eph. 4:11,12* makes plain). Here is where the biggest failure of much of today's evangelism

lies. Most of today's evangelism is related *NOT* to building up the body of Christ, but to saving individual souls. These souls are then usually sent back to their dead 'churches' where they soon get lost all over again, or at best, become lukewarm and fit for being spat out of the mouth of the Lord one day (*Rev. 3:16*).

Either way, they are not built into the body of Christ. Thus only Satan's purposes are accomplished - for the person has then become twofold a child of hell (*Matt. 23:15*) - first because he was lost to start with, and secondly because he has now been deluded by some evangelist into thinking that he is saved, when he is still lost!! The only thing that is built up through such evangelism is the evangelist's private empire. And the only reason for such evangelism is usually the evangelist's desire to make money or to get the honour of men, or both!!

Jesus called evangelists 'fishers of men'. But evangelism that is done in cooperation with unconverted "Christian" leaders and groups or with the sponsorship of vote-seeking political leaders is like fishing with a net full of holes. One cannot imagine Jesus inviting Annas, or Caiaphas, or Herod, or Pilate to sit with Him on the platform and inaugurate his evangelistic meetings! Yet many of today's evangelists not only do that, but also praise these unconverted leaders from their platforms.

Further, the fish that are caught in such "nets" are allowed to go back into the sea (dead "churches"), to be caught all over again at the next evangelistic meeting, only to be let back into the sea once more!! This process is repeated again and again by the many evangelists conducting interdenominational meetings these days, with each evangelist counting hands, decision cards, etc., Such evangelism brings joy, not to the angels of heaven but to the hosts of Satan! For, after all, how can angels rejoice over those who are made twofold the children of hell? Statistics in today's evangelistic meetings are totally deceptive.

Even if signs and wonders accompany the proclamation of the message that Jesus forgives sins and heals diseases, the question that still remains is how many have been made disciples and built into the body of Christ through such evangelism.

The apostles of our Lord never engaged in this type of evangelism. They placed their converts into local churches to be made into disciples and built up spiritually.

The five ministries mentioned in *Ephesians 4:11 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers)* are listed in their order of priority in *1 Corinthians 12:28*. There we are told, "*God has appointed in the church: first, apostles, second, prophets, third, teachers, then gifts of healing* (that refers to evangelists, since all evangelists in New Testament times had the gifts of healing), *and then administrations* (literally, 'those who steer the ships', referring to shepherds/pastors)."

This makes it clear that in God's eyes, the ministries of the apostle, prophet and teacher are more important to the building up of the body of Christ than that of the evangelist. The evangelist can find his proper place in his ministry only as he takes his appointed

place in subjection to the ministries of the apostle, the prophet and the teacher. Only then can his ministry serve to the building up of the body of Christ. Here is where 20th-century evangelism has gone astray from the word of God.

Making Disciples

The purpose of evangelism can be understood fully only when seen in the light of the second part of the great commission - to make disciples in every nation of the world (*Matt. 28:19*). This is how the plan of God for the unconverted is fully fulfilled.

The convert must be made into a disciple.

Unfortunately, even the so-called convert today is often not a true convert, for in many cases he has not repented properly. In the evangelistic meeting he may have been told only to believe in Jesus, without any mention of repentance or making restitution. Such converts come to Jesus to be blessed and healed - and not to give up their sins. Most of today's converts are therefore like premature babies, pulled out by impatient midwives ('evangelists') in their lust for statistics - when the babies were not yet ready to be born! These premature babies usually die very soon, or live as problem cases for the rest of their lives - causing innumerable problems for their shepherds (pastors). Such people cannot be called "*backsliders*", because they never slid "*forward*" at any time, in the first place!! Jesus said that the angels in heaven rejoiced over sinners who repented, and not over sinners who merely believed, without repenting (*Lk. 15:7,10*).

Jesus said that salvation had come to Zaccheus's house, only when Zaccheus promised to make restitution for all the financial wrongs he had done in his past life - not before that (*Lk.19:9*). Unfortunately, today's evangelists proclaim that "salvation has come", even without any mention of restitution!

But even where there has been a thorough repentance, and a person has been truly converted, he must still be led on to discipleship, if he is to fulfil God's will for his life. Evangelism that does not lead on to discipleship is an incomplete job.

Often, it is the evangelist's desire to build his own kingdom that prevents him from working together with those who can make his 'converts' into disciples. We do not have to judge such evangelists, for we are told not to judge. But such evangelists will certainly have to answer to the Lord in the final day, for hindering their converts from becoming disciples.

The first step of leading people to repentance and faith must be followed by water baptism - as Jesus made plain in *Mk. 16:16*, and as Peter preached on the day of Pentecost (*Acts 2:38*). *Matthew 28:19* also mentions the necessity of water baptism. So this is obviously the next step for all those who are born again.

Thereafter, he must follow Jesus in daily life as His disciple.

The Conditions Of Discipleship

Luke 14: 25-35 reveals these conditions of discipleship very clearly.

There Jesus spoke about a man who had laid a foundation for a tower, but couldn't complete it, because he was unable to pay the cost of construction (v. 28-30). That proves that it does cost something to be a disciple. Jesus told us to sit down first and count that cost before even starting to build.

God doesn't want us to wait for many years after our sins are forgiven, before understanding what discipleship really costs. Jesus told people about the cost of discipleship as soon as they came to Him. He also said that a believer who was unwilling to be a disciple was as useless to God as salt that had lost its savour (*Lk. 14:35*).

For a convert to become a disciple, he must first of all cut off any attachment to his relatives that hinders him from following the Lord (*Lk. 14:26*). Secondly, he must be willing to deny himself and put his Self-life to death daily (*Lk. 14:27*). Thirdly, he must give up his love for material possessions (*Lk. 14:33*). These are the three minimum requirements for anyone wanting to be a disciple.

The *first* condition of discipleship is that we must cut off the natural, inordinate love that we have for our relatives.

Jesus said "*If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, he cannot be My disciple*" (*Lk. 14:26*).

Those are strong words. What does it mean to '*hate*'? To hate is the same as to *kill* (*1 Jn. 3:15*). What we are asked to put to death here is the natural affection that we have for our relatives.

Does that mean that we are not to love them? No. It certainly doesn't mean that. When we give up our human affection for them, God will replace it with Divine love. Our love for our relatives will then be pure - in the sense that God will always be first in our affections, and not our relatives.

Many don't obey God because they are afraid to offend their father, mother or wife etc., The Lord demands first place in our life. And if we don't give Him that place, we can't be His disciples. Jesus must be Lord of all in our lives, or He will not be Lord at all.

Look at Jesus' own example when He was on earth. Although He loved His widowed mother, yet He never allowed her to influence Him away from the perfect will of His Father, even in small matters. We see an example of this at the marriage at Cana where He refused to act on His mother's promptings (*Jn. 2:4*).

Jesus also taught us how to '*hate*' our brothers. When Peter tried to turn Him away from going to the cross, He turned around and rebuked him with the sharpest words that He

ever uttered to any human being. He said, "*Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to Me*" (*Matt. 16:23*). Peter had made his suggestion with a lot of human love. But Jesus rebuked him, because what Peter had suggested was contrary to the Father's will.

The Father was always supreme in Jesus' affections. He expects us to have the same attitude towards Him too. After His resurrection, the Lord asked Peter whether he loved Him more than everything else on earth, before making him a shepherd in the church (*Jn. 21:15-17*). Only those who love the Lord supremely are given responsibilities in His church.

The leader of the Ephesian church was in danger of being rejected because he had lost his initial devotion for the Lord (*Rev. 2:1-5*).

If we can say, like the psalmist, "*Whom have I in heaven, Lord, but Thee? And besides Thee I desire nothing on earth,*" then we have truly fulfilled the first condition of discipleship (*Psa. 73:25*).

The love that Jesus demands from us is not the emotional, sentimental, human affection that expresses itself in singing stirring songs of devotion to Him. No. If we love Him, we will obey Him (*Jn. 14:21*).

The *second* condition of discipleship is that we must hate our own self-life. Jesus said, "*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own life, he cannot be My disciple*" (*Lk. 14:26*).

He amplified that further by saying, "*Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple*" (*Lk. 14:27*). This is one of the least understood of all of Jesus' teachings.

Jesus said that a disciple would have to "*deny himself and take up his cross daily*" (*Lk. 9:23*). More important than reading our Bible daily, or praying daily, we have to deny ourselves daily and take up our cross daily. To deny our Self is the same as to hate our own life - the life that we have inherited from Adam. To take up the cross is to put that Self-life to death. We have to hate that life first, before we can slay it.

Our Self-life is the main enemy of the life of Christ. The Bible calls this '*the flesh*'. The flesh is a store-house of evil lusts within us that tempts us to do our own will at all times - to seek our own gain, our own honour, our own pleasure, our own way etc.,

If we are honest, we'll have to admit that even our best actions are corrupted by evil motives that arise from our corrupt lusts. Unless we hate this "flesh", we will never be able to follow the Lord.

This is why Jesus spoke so much about hating (or losing) our life. In fact, this phrase is repeated six times in the gospels (*Mt. 10:39; 16:25; Mk. 8:35; Lk. 9:24; 14:26; Jn.*

12:25). This is the one saying of our Lord that is repeated most often in the gospels. Yet it is the least preached about and the least understood!

To hate our own life is to give up seeking our own rights and privileges, to stop seeking our own reputation, to forsake our own ambitions and interests, and to stop seeking our own way etc., We can be disciples of Jesus, only if we are willing to go this way.

The *third* condition of discipleship is that we must give up all our own possessions.

Jesus said, "*No one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions*" (*Lk. 14:33*).

Our possessions are what we possess as our own. To give them all up means that we no longer consider anything as our own.

We see an illustration of this in the life of Abraham. Isaac was his own son - his possession. One day God asked him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. And Abraham laid Isaac on the altar and was ready to slay him. But God intervened and told him that the sacrifice was not necessary, because he had proved his willingness to obey (*Gen.22*). After that, Abraham recognised that even though he had Isaac in his house, he no longer possessed him as his own. Isaac now belonged to God.

This is what it means to give up all our possessions. All that we have must be laid on the altar and given up to God.

God may allow us to use some of those things. But we cannot think of them as our own any more. Even if we are living in our own house, we must consider the house as God's; and that He has allowed us to stay in it rent-free! This is true discipleship.

Have we done that with all our possessions? Our possessions include our bank-account, property, job, qualifications, gifts and talents, wife, children and everything else that we value on this earth. We have to lay them all on the altar if we want to be true disciples.

Only then can we love God with all our heart. This is the '*pure heart*' that Jesus spoke of in *Matthew 5:8*. It's not enough to have a clean conscience. A clean conscience only means that we have given up every known *sin*. A pure heart means that we have given up *everything!*

And so we see that true discipleship involves a radical change of attitude towards: *(a) our relatives and loved ones; (b) our self-life; and (c) our possessions.*

Unless we face these issues squarely and honestly, it will be impossible to fulfil the whole purpose of God for our lives.

Unless preachers proclaim this message of discipleship, without "watering it down", it will be impossible for them to build the Body of Christ.

The Pathway Of Discipleship

Matthew 28:20 goes on to say that the disciples must be taught to obey and practise every single command given by our Lord. This is the pathway of discipleship. One has only to read *Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7* to see some of the commands that Jesus gave - that most believers do not even bother to obey.

A disciple is a *learner* and a *follower*.

The need in our land is for people who have been gripped by the calling to proclaim the whole counsel of God, who are themselves obedient themselves to all that Jesus commanded, and who eagerly desire to teach others too to obey all of Jesus' commands - and thus build the body of Christ.

Jesus said that all His disciples would be identified by one mark - their love for one another (*Jn.13:35*).

Mark that! The disciples of Jesus Christ are identified, not by the quality of their preaching or their music, nor by their "speaking in tongues" nor by their carrying Bibles to the meetings, nor by the amount of noise they make in their meetings!! They are identified by their fervent love for one another.

The evangelistic meeting that brings people to Christ must lead on to the establishment of a church in that locality, where the disciples love one another.

Yet the sad thing is that in many places where repeated evangelistic meetings are held year after year, it is difficult to find even one church about which it can be said that the members therein do not fight with one another or backbite against one another, etc, but love one another.

One can understand it, if new converts are unable to live such a victorious life immediately. But what shall we say if strife and immaturity characterise even the elders and Christian leaders in the churches of our land?

This is the clearest proof that the second and most important part of the great commission (mentioned in *Matt. 28:19,20*) - discipleship and total obedience to the commandments of Jesus - has been totally ignored.

The first part of the great commission (*Mk. 16:15*) alone is usually emphasised everywhere. There, the emphasis is on evangelism, the message being confirmed by signs and wonders done by the Lord.

In *Matthew 28:19,20*, however, the emphasis is on discipleship - the disciple's life being manifested by total obedience to Jesus' commandments. Multitudes of Christians are taken up with the former, but very, very few with the latter. Yet the former without the

latter is as incomplete and worthless as half a human body. But how many have seen this?

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

Why are preachers hesitant to proclaim the message of discipleship? Because it will reduce the numbers in their congregations. But what they don't realise is that the quality of their churches will become far better!!

When Jesus preached discipleship to the multitudes, it soon dwindled down to a handful of only eleven disciples (Compare *Jn. 6:2 with 6:70*). The others found the message too hard, and left Him (See *Jn. 6:60,66*). But it was with those eleven disciples who stayed on with Him, that God accomplished His purposes in the world finally.

As Christ's Body on earth today, we are to carry on the same ministry that those eleven apostles commenced in the first century. After people are brought to Christ, they must be led to discipleship and obedience. Thus alone will the body of Christ be built.

The way to life is narrow and few are those who find it.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

CHAPTER TWO

DISCIPLESHIP AND THE HOME

A disciple is a *learner* and a *follower* of the Lord Jesus. He is one who has made Jesus his Example and seeks to conform his life to his Master's in every possible way.

Like charity, *discipleship also begins at home*, first of all.

Discipleship and Parents

The foundation for true discipleship is making Jesus Christ Lord of everything in our lives – giving Him all that we have and all that we are.

Let us consider first of all, how we are to "*hate*" our parents, as the Lord commanded us to, in *Luke 14:26*.

The first step is to *honour* them. This is the first command with a promise attached to it (*Eph.6:2*). We cannot "*hate*" our parents the way the Lord wants us to before we have learnt to *honour* them. There are plenty of ungodly children in the world today who are only too glad to hate their parents!! The cults too, misuse this verse extensively to gather to themselves those young people who have never learnt to honour their parents.

The example of Jesus is what every disciple of His must follow. If we do that, we will never go astray. If however we interpret the sayings of our Lord *without looking at His example*, then we *will* go astray, as so many Christians have done. Our Lord has told us to "*learn from Him*" (*Matt.11:29*).

How did Jesus "*hate*" His earthly mother?? First of all, He *honoured* Joseph and Mary, by submitting to their authority, as long as He was in their home in Nazareth (*Luke 2:51*).

Only two things are mentioned in the Bible about the 30 years that Jesus spent in Nazareth.

First of all, in *Hebrews 4:15*, we are told that He was tempted as we are and never sinned. From that, we learn that He must have faced many temptations during those 30 years at Nazareth – the same temptations that anyone faces during the first 30 years of his life – from childhood to adulthood.

Mark 6:3 tells us that Jesus had at least 4 brothers and 2 sisters in his home. So there were at least 9 members living in His home - and it was a poor home. (We understand that, when we compare *Luke 2:24* with *Leviticus 12:8*, and discover that Mary was too poor to bring even a lamb as an offering to the Lord). So Jesus obviously did not have a private bedroom to retreat to, when things became difficult in the house. *John 7:5* also tells us that His brothers did not believe in Him. They were obviously jealous of this One in their home who never got angry or acted selfishly. They must have all "ganged-up" against Him many a time and teased Him and irritated Him. Anyone who has lived in a large family in a small house, with unconverted relatives will understand the problems that Jesus must have faced in Nazareth. *Yet He never sinned*. To add to all that, it is quite likely that Joseph died, when Jesus was in his teens or twenties (because we never read of Joseph during the years of Jesus' public ministry). Then the burden of supporting the 8-member family fell on Jesus, as the eldest son. He had to work hard to support that family. There must have been many temptations that Jesus faced in such situations. Yet He did not sin.

Secondly, Jesus "*continued in subjection to Joseph and Mary*" (*Luke 2:51*) - as long as He was living in their home - for 30 years. That would not have been easy – as all of us know from our own childhood days. How often in our childhood days, when we wanted to do something, our parents asked us to do something else that we did not naturally like to do!

We can therefore hold up the example of Jesus to all our children. Fathers are commanded to bring up their children in "*the instruction of the Lord*" (*Eph.6:4*). What is "*the instruction of the Lord*"? It is primarily the example that the Lord Himself set for children during His years in Nazareth.

If any boy or girl will follow the example of the Lord that we have looked at in the above two areas, he too will grow in wisdom and in favour with God – as it is written about Jesus Himself (*Luke 2:52*).

Even when we are grown up and married, we must still honour our aged parents. In *Genesis 9:21-27*, we read that Noah's son Ham saw his father drunk and lying naked in a tent. Ham was a grown man at that time, for he was a married man even before the flood came. Ham went and told his brothers about this and thus disgraced his father. What Ham said was true, but he dishonoured his father. And Ham and his family were cursed, as a result. Backbiters are cursed by God, *even when they speak the truth!* No backbiter can be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Noah's other two sons - Shem and Japheth – however honoured their aged father, by walking backwards (so that they would not see their father's nakedness) and covering him. And they and their families were blessed.

What we learn from that example is that God blesses those who honour their parents and He curses those who despise their parents. That example has been placed right at the beginning of the Bible, as a warning and an example for all of us – young or old.

Although Joseph and Mary were God-fearing people (according to the standard of the old covenant), yet we must remember that they did not have victory over sin (which is a distinctively new covenant promise – see *Romans 6:14*). They did not have the Holy Spirit and could not come under grace as we can today. So they must have had arguments at home, lost their temper with each other and sinned in many other ways. (If you find it difficult to believe this, it is probably because you think that Mary was *immaculate!!*) Jesus must have seen Joseph and Mary sin many, many times, in that home of His in Nazareth. Yet He did not despise them. This is a major part of what it means to honour our parents.

Proverbs 23:22 says, "*Don't despise your mother when she is old*". If you see some faults in your parents ("*their nakedness*"), don't despise them. Cover their weaknesses and never speak about those weaknesses to anyone. In fact, that is the way we should treat all people, for we are told that wherever there is true love, it will "*cover a multitude of sins.*"

If you are born-again, and your parents are not, and they ask you to do something contrary to the Scriptures, (for example, to worship an idol or to marry an unbeliever, etc.,), you can tell them *respectfully* that you cannot do such things, because God's Word forbids you to do so. You certainly *must* take a stand for the Lord. But you don't have to do it *arrogantly!* You can do it *graciously.*

But in matters that don't involve disobedience to the Scriptures – children must obey their parents *when they are staying at home*. But once they have left their parents' home and set up their own home, they are no longer obliged to *obey* their parents. But they must still honour their parents and care for them.

We see this also in the example of Jesus - that His disciples must follow. After Jesus left home at the age of 30 and was baptized, one of the first incidents recorded in the gospels is the incident at the marriage-feast at Cana. Mary had already seen Jesus for 30 years as an obedient son who had solved many problems at home. And she knew that Jesus could do something even about the lack of wine there. She probably did not expect a miracle, for Jesus had never done a miracle thus far. But she had seen at home that her Son was wise and ingenious. So she asked Jesus to do something.

And there we see for the first time Jesus speaking sharply to Mary: "*Woman, what do I have to do with you?*" (John 2:4). He had now left His home and was therefore free from having to obey her thereafter.

This is what Jesus meant when He told His disciples to "*hate*" their parents. This is the balance we need to have too. We must obey our parents when we are living in their home and we must "*hate*" them in matters connected with following God's commands. It was when it came to doing the will of God and fulfilling the ministry that the Father had given Him that Jesus said to Mary, "*My time has not yet come.*" (John 2:4). Once we leave our home and set up our own homes, we are no longer under our parents.

It is interesting to note that the *FIRST* command given in the Bible for all men is this: "*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife*" (Gen.2:24). And this command is mentioned at a time when Adam did not even have a father or mother to leave!! It was obviously written for those who would marry subsequently.

Unfortunately, in most marriages in India, the husband does *NOT* obey this command of God. We can understand non-Christians being more attached to their parents than to their wives. But what shall we say about Christians who follow the non-Christian culture of India in this matter? They fail to manifest the type of married life that God wants to show to our country.

It is not a question of leaving one's parents physically primarily, but of being *emotionally* detached from them. A husband's first loyalty and inward attachment must be *to his wife* and not to his parents.

In the same way a wife is commanded to forget her father's house (*Psalm 45:10*).

We must certainly care for our parents when they are old and feeble. Jesus has given us an example here too, by making the provision of a home for his widowed mother with John, when He was dying on the cross (Jn.19:26,27). But parents must never be permitted to come between a husband and wife at any time. Many Christians in India

have been hindered from following the Lord, because of an inordinate, natural attachment to their parents.

In *Deuteronomy 33:8-11*, we are told why the tribe of Levi was chosen by God to be His priests. They were given this ministry as a reward for placing God above their parents, their brothers and their children. When Moses saw Israel worshipping the golden calf and asked who would stand with him on the Lord's side, only the tribe of Levi came forth and stood with Moses that day. The Levites were then told to go into the camp and slay even their own relatives who had practised idolatry. (*Exod.32:26 ff*). These Levites were the forerunners of the true disciples of Jesus.

The Law had been given by Moses to the Israelites just a few days earlier, in which they had been told to honour their parents (*Exod. 20*). But now they were being asked to take out their swords and kill their relatives. There we see the *two sides of truth*. When the Levites saw their relatives worshipping idols, they could have spared them and gone and slain someone else. But they didn't. "*They did not consider father or mother or brothers or sons.....*" (*Deut.33:9*).

How many there are who have *not* followed the Lord's commands, because they were moved by seeing the tears of their mothers or by hearing their parents' words saying, "See how much we have done for you". Thus they render themselves unfit to be the disciples of Jesus.

If, on the other hand, you are one who *already hate* your parents for your own selfish reasons (like many children do), then what has just been said does not apply to you. What you need to learn first is how to *honour* your parents.

Only those who have *first* learnt to "*honour*" their parents can understand what Jesus meant when He said that we are to "*hate*" our parents – for it was to those who had learnt to honour their parents that the Lord first spoke those words about "hating".

The people who don't use the sword (as Jesus did), because of a human softness, and who thus compromise, will suffer spiritually in the long run. It was painful for the sons of Levi to treat their parents thus. But they did it for the Lord's sake.

In *Malachi 2:4,5* the Lord says that He gave Levi the covenant of *life and peace*, because the Levites feared God and revered His Name. But that peace was bought with a *sword!!*

How does all this apply to us today? We don't use *physical* swords against others as the Levites did in old covenant times. The meaning of "*using the sword*" for us today is that we cut off the *human affection* that we have for our parents and our relatives and replace it with a *Divine affection*. Human affection for our parents etc., can make us commit sin in order to help them or please them. Whereas Divine affection will not only prevent us from committing sin, but will enable us to love them far more deeply and purely and will also enable us to love them when they hate us!!

And if in some situation, there is a conflict between what our parents tell us to do and what God tells us to do, then we must obey God. It is in such situations that God tests us to see whether we fear Him and want to please Him or whether we want to please our relatives.

This issue of the place that our parents, wife, children and other relatives have in our life, as opposed to the place that God has in our life must be settled once and for all, right at the beginning of our Christian life. Otherwise, we will have constant problems throughout our life.

God will honour us if we honour Him. Even your parents will be blessed if you take a stand for the Lord. The ultimate purpose of God is our good and the good of others. So those who compromise will not only lose out spiritually themselves, their parents will also lose the blessing of God thereby. You can never lose ultimately, by obeying God's commands.

When God asked Abraham to give up Isaac, it was this same principle that God was emphasising. Isaac had become the darling of Abraham's heart and his idol. So God told Abraham to give Isaac up.

Do you have an attachment to your parents or to your wife or children like that? Then you cannot be a disciple.

When your wife comes to you and gossips about one of the brothers in the assembly, do you cooperate with that gossiping spirit or do you inwardly reject it. Do you seek to please your wife? If you do, then you will be lost yourself and you will lose your wife too. If however you keep yourself pure, you will at least save yourself. And in the long run, your wife may be saved too. So the way of "hating" is the best way for all concerned.

Nobody can stop us from being new covenant priests, if we are radical in such matters.

Let me say this once again: When you have to take a stand against parents, *you must NOT be rude*. Be gracious and say, "I am sorry, Dad. I can't do that because it is against the Word of God." A lot of problems are caused just because many young believers have not learnt to distinguish between being rude and standing for the truth.

Discipleship and Marriage

Marriage is a very important step because it can make or mar a person's entire life.

Young people who are seeking God's will in marriage must tell the Lord that they are first of all His disciples and therefore marriage is not the *biggest* thing in life for them, but following Jesus *IS*.

A disciple is one who has forsaken all. He is even willing to be single if the Lord desires that of him. Only such young people find God's best in marriage. When we see the

number of unhappy marriages among believers today and the lack of harmony in such marriages, it is clear that these couples did not enter into marriage as disciples of the Lord first of all.

Once we have put the Lord first, we can seek God's will from a foundation of "rest." Remember that God put Adam to sleep, while preparing a wife for him. Adam did not have to run around the garden looking for a partner! We too need to be "at rest" doing the will of God. Then at the right time God Himself will bring our life-partner to us. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't be looking for a partner, but it does mean that we need not panic.

Young men when they reach the age of 25 and young women when they reach the age of 20 should start *praying* about their future life-partner. Before you reach that age, you should be occupied *only* with the Lord and His Word and His work, without a thought of marriage. Don't waste your time considering every attractive girl or boy you meet as a possible life-partner. And when you find a really attractive one, don't say, "I better grab her/him quickly, before someone else gets her/him!!" If God has indeed chosen that person for you, He will keep her/him reserved for you. Nobody else will be able to grab her/him!! If you are a true disciple of the Lord, He will reserve the best for you.

David did not grab the throne from Saul, but waited for God's time and God called David "*a man after My own heart*" (*Acts 13:22*). He will say the same about you, if you too are willing to wait and receive everything from His hand. You can safely leave the matter of your marriage in God's hands, if you spend your time seeking God's kingdom first. If you honour Him He will honour you.

Proverbs 19:14 states that a father can give his sons lands and riches, but only the Lord can give them good wives. So seek your marriage partner from the Lord.

How should a disciple go about finding his life-partner?

I am a firm believer in "*arranged*" marriages – marriages arranged by God!! In the Bible we are told of two such marriages. God arranged a partner for Adam. And God arranged a partner for Isaac. And my own testimony is that God arranged a partner for me too – the best I could have possibly got.

The eyes of the Lord still run to and fro throughout the whole earth looking for ways to help those whose hearts are totally His (*2 Chron.16:9*). No-one can search the whole world like God can. And those who trust in Him will *NEVER* be disappointed.

So, if you want a good wife or husband, be a whole-hearted disciple of Jesus first. And God Himself will arrange your marriage. "*According to your faith be it unto you.*" Abraham's servant prayed and asked the Lord to lead him to the right girl for Isaac - and the Lord did (*Gen.24*). *This God is your Father and He can do the same for you too.*

The Bible says that God reveals His will to us through a renewed mind (*Rom.12:2*). So we must allow our minds to be transformed to prove the perfect will of God. A renewed mind is one that has learnt to look at people from God's point of view.

We find in *Proverbs 31:10-31*, the type of wife God recommends. The virtues given there are what all young men should look for when considering a girl in marriage. And those are the values that all young women should pursue in their lives.

Many young men look only for beauty and charm in a woman – the very things that *Proverbs 31:30* says are empty and deceptive. *Proverbs 11:22* uses very strong language when it says that a beautiful girl who does not have discretion (and the fear of God is the first step to discretion) is like a pig with a golden ring in its nose. Some men get so taken up with the "ring" (the pretty face) that they marry the pig (the girl)!!

The woman described in *Proverbs 31* is one who works hard with her hands, rising up early every morning (*v.13,15*). She plants a vineyard in order to earn something extra for her family (*v.16*), she is careful in spending money, she helps the poor and has "*the law of kindness on her tongue*" (*v.26*) – in other words, she is hardworking, frugal and generous, and her speech is gracious.

Her hands are *hard* (through hard work) and her tongue is *soft*. Unfortunately, what we find with many Christian girls today is the exact opposite - their hands are *soft* (through laziness) and their tongues are *hard* (through arrogance)!! Woe unto the man who marries such a woman!!

A good wife is not necessarily found among those girls who are always taking Bible studies here and there. Young men should beware of mistaking *religious activity* for *spirituality*!! When you get married, what you will need is a wife and your children will need a mother. Neither of you will need a woamn who is a Bible-teacher! Remember that!

Song of Solomon 8:9 speaks of two types of girls – those who are like *walls* and those who are like *doors*. The *door* is the "forward" type of girl who comes at you, with her heart wide open. The *wall* is the girl who is modest and reserved, like God created all girls to be. If a girl is like a door, the verse goes on to say that her parents will have to barricade her in (that is, restrain her in many ways). If however, she is like a wall, a palace (*KJV*) – a godly home - can be built through her life!

1 Peter 3: 3-4 urges all women who want to be disciples of Jesus to avoid expensive clothing and jewellery, since the most valuable thing that God looks for in a woman, is "*a gentle and quiet spirit*". Although discipleship is not *primarily* seen in the way a person dresses, yet it is true that a woman's dress reveals a great deal about her character. The values she cherishes in her heart are often revealed in the way she dresses. A disciple of Jesus will not be slovenly or carelessly dressed. But neither will she waste her money on gaudy, expensive clothing or jewellery.

So young men who are looking for a godly wife, should look primarily for the fear of God coupled with a gentle, quiet spirit, diligence, kind speech, modesty and simplicity.

When girls consider marriage, they usually look for education, money and good looks in the man. It is true that a woman should not consider a man in marriage who does not have the means to support a family, for the Bible exhorts all men to first develop their business (means of earning an income), before building their home and family (*Prov.24:27*). But that is not everything!

What you as a girl, need to ensure first of all is whether the boy you are considering is a wholehearted disciple of Jesus, *whom you can look up to*. Can you make him your head – joyfully and not just because the Bible commands you to do so? This is one of the *first things* you need to ask yourself, when considering any boy.

For more information on this subject, please read my book "*Sex, Love & Marriage – The Christian Approach*".

Discipleship and the Home

In *Malachi 2:15*, we read that God made a man and his wife one in order that through them He might receive *godly* children. Anyone can raise children. But the disciple of Jesus raises *godly* children.

And for this, the very first requirement is that at least one of the two parents must be a wholehearted disciple of Jesus who loves the Lord with *ALL* his/her heart. Half-hearted Christians will not be able to raise godly children.

A second important requirement is *unity* between husband and wife. This may not be possible if one partner is not a disciple. Then the other partner must battle it out alone against Satan, for his/her children. But if both are wholehearted, the work is much easier. This is why the right choice of a marriage-partner is so very important.

It is very difficult to bring up children in a godly way if the husband and wife are always quarrelling with each other and blaming each other. If you want to build a godly home, seek unity with your husband /wife at any cost - even if, as a result, you have to give up many of your rights. It will be worth it in the long run, when you see the way your children follow the Lord.

There is tremendous power in unity between two disciples. Jesus said in *Matthew 18:18-20* that when two disciples are united together on earth, they have authority to bind the activities of the Satanic forces in "*the heavenlies*" (*Eph.6:12*). That is how we can keep evil spirits away from our homes and away from influencing our children.

In *Ephesians 5:22 to 6:9*, the Holy Spirit speaks of home relationships – between wives and husbands, children and parents, and servants and masters. Immediately thereafter, (*verse 10 onwards*) the Holy Spirit goes on to speak about wrestling with evil spirits in

the heavenlies. What does that teach us? Just this - that Satan's attacks are primarily directed at home relationships. Here is where we must overcome Satan first of all.

Husbands and wives who quarrel with each other don't realise that they are opening the door (through the gap thus created between them) for Satan to enter their homes and attack their children. A rebellious child who answers his parents rudely may have caught the infection from his mother who speaks in a similar way to her husband or from his father who is rebellious against the Lord in some area. It is no use blaming the poor child for the infection that the parents brought into that home first of all!! It is the parents who need to repent first.

Unity in the home is far more important than the size or the beauty of your home or the gadgets you have therein. The glory of God can be manifested in a family that lives in a shack, if they are disciples of the Lord first of all.

A true disciple of Jesus will be free from the terrible disease of "*blaming others*" that Adam and Eve were infected with in Eden. Adam blamed Eve for his sin and Eve blamed the serpent for hers.

The kingdom of heaven belongs to "*the poor in spirit*" (*Matt.5:3*) – and the first characteristic of one who is poor in spirit is that he has an awareness of his *own* failure and need first of all. A husband and wife who are both poor in spirit will convert their home into a foretaste of heaven on earth. In such a home, each will be judging himself and not blaming the other. The Devil can never have any access into such a home. Can you imagine what tremendous blessing the children in such a home will inherit?

Let me say a word about "*working mothers*". In our day and age, this has unfortunately become a necessity in some cities, because of the high cost of living. But certain principles must be borne in mind by such mothers.

Titus 2:5 tells us that God's will for women is that they be "workers at home", first of all. So, no mother should neglect her home responsibilities to pursue a profession outside the home. *The Lord, her husband and her children* must always be primary in her affection and devotion – *in that order*. Her job (if at all she has to take one) must be *Number Four* priority, after the above three.

Married women who do not have any children at home can go to work, without much of a problem.

There are usually *TWO* reasons why mothers with small children, go to work these days:

1. *For survival*, where the income of the husband is just not sufficient to meet the family's needs.
2. *For luxury*, because the husband and wife want to enjoy a higher standard of living.

If you can honestly say before God, that in your case the reason is *survival*, then you can be certain that God will give you special grace for all your family responsibilities.

If however, the real reason is *luxury*, then I must warn you that you are in real danger. You may reap the consequences only many years later, when your children have left home and become wayward and useless to God. Then it will be too late to do anything about it.

God is my witness that *I am preaching only what I have practised*. My wife was working as a medical doctor, when our first son was born in 1969. At that time, our only income was the little that I received from month to month, and we had no savings at all. But we decided that my wife would give up her job and stay at home to look after the family. For 28 years thereafter, she never took a job but stayed at home and brought up our four sons to love and follow the Lord. What is the result? Today, we have the joy of seeing all our four sons born-again, baptized, following the Lord and witnessing for Him. *Such a blessing* is far greater than the *three or four million rupees* that my wife could have earned as a doctor in 28 years. We have no regrets at all today. We give our testimony here only to encourage other mothers who are seeking the Lord's will in this area.

A true disciple will also be careful about the magazines and books that are brought into his home and the type of television and video programmes that are watched by his family members. The husband as the head of the home must be like *a strict doorkeeper* who ensures that nothing worldly enters his home. He has to be like the head of the quality-control department in a factory who examines each product and certifies it. Parents who want their children to be disciples of the Lord must ensure that they do not give in to their children's whims and fancies, in such matters, for that is not love, but foolishness and unfaithfulness to the Lord.

The strength of any church is found in the strength of its homes. *If the homes are weak, the church is weak*. It is not in loud noise or in melodious singing or even in good preaching that the strength of a church lies, but in the godliness of the homes that constitute that church.

May we build homes in our land then that glorify our Lord.

CHAPTER THREE

DISCIPLESHIP AND MONEY MATTERS

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon."
(Luke 16:13)

Here our Lord made it clear that the alternate master to God, is Mammon (money and material riches). The alternate master is not Satan, because no disciple of Jesus is in danger of loving Satan, and imagining that he loves God at the same time!! But that danger does exist as far as Mammon is concerned.

As long as we live in the world, we have to deal with Mammon every day. And if we are not careful, as disciples of Jesus, we face the danger of imagining that we can love God and Mammon at the same time.

Money can easily get a hold of us and hinder us from being disciples of the Lord. So we cannot have a neutral attitude to money, just like we cannot have a neutral attitude to Satan. Either we are disciples of the Lord Jesus or disciples of Mammon. We cannot be disciples of both! Either we aim to please God or we aim to make money. These two are opposites, just like the north and south poles of a magnet. If we are genuinely attracted to God, we will be drawn away from money. *To love God fully you must hate mammon.* You must either accept that statement as true or accuse Jesus of telling a lie!!

Despising money means that you do not care for it. You *use* it, but you are not *attached* to it. In heaven, the streets are made of gold. Here on earth, people put gold on their heads, but in heaven, gold will be underneath our feet. Heaven has been prepared for those who have learnt to put money under their feet on earth itself.

Jesus made radical statements to His disciples on many subjects. He said that if our right eye caused us to lust, we should "*pluck it out*". Thereby he was telling us how serious a matter it was to lust with our eyes. He also said that to follow Him we had to "*hate*" our relatives. Thereby He indicated how the main objections to our following Him would come from our family members. In exactly the same way, Jesus also made a radical statement here about money. He said that in order to love God one must "*hate*" money. Money clings to the hands of many Christians. This is why they cannot cling on to God. Very few believers however have taken these commands seriously. And that is why they never walk the pathway of discipleship.

The Lord did not call His disciples to be ascetics who live in jungles, giving up marriage, job, property and money. Christians are not disciples of John the Baptist but of Jesus. And Jesus worked for most of His life as a carpenter to earn money to support His earthly family.

Jesus was balanced in His attitude to earthly things. He could make an abundance of wine at a marriage feast, and He could also fast for 40 days. A true disciple too will know how to enjoy a good meal and also how to fast when necessary.

Love of money is something found inside all of us. The one who thinks he does not love money is either self-deceived or a liar, for every human being loves money. The Bible says that "*the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil*". Only the Lord can deliver us from it.

There are many examples in the Bible of those who started out well but later missed God's best by running after money. Lot went to Sodom to make money and destroyed his whole family thereby. Balaam destroyed himself through prophesying for money. Gehazi missed the opportunity to become a prophet of God, because he went after Naaman's money. Demas left Paul because he loved the things of this world (*2 Tim.4:10*). There have been many such instances in the history of Christendom.

Righteousness in Money Matters

If one has been unrighteous in financial matters in his unconverted days, he cannot say after being converted, that since God has forgiven his past, he need not make any effort to set right his past wrongs. Money stolen must be returned as soon as possible after conversion. Debts must be repaid at the earliest too. Even if you have to skip a few meals and sell something unnecessary from your house, you must do that and settle such matters quickly. That is the way of discipleship.

Perhaps you do not have enough money to make restitution. You could always start by paying back a little – perhaps just ten rupees - each month. God will honour those who honour Him. The Bible says that where the willingness is present, God accepts us according to what we are *able to do* (*2 Cor.8:12*). It was when Zaccheus promised to make restitution that Jesus said that salvation had come to him – not before that (*Lk.19:9*). God can never bless unrighteousness. It is because restitution has not been made by many Christians that they do not grow spiritually.

Romans 13:8 exhorts us not to owe anyone anything. If we have borrowed money, we should repay it as soon as possible. One of the blessings that God promised the Israelites was that if they obeyed Him they would never have to borrow money (*Deut. 28:12*). Buying things on credit is just another way of borrowing and getting into debt. It is better to live without some gadget than to live without the blessing of God.

What about taking loans from a bank or from one's office? Is it right to take a loan for building a house or for buying a vehicle? The principle to be borne in mind here is the principle of "*the weighing balance*". If you have an item corresponding to the money you borrowed on the other side of the balance (such as a house or a car or a scooter), then you are really *not* in debt, because you have something of equal value to show for the money borrowed. If you die suddenly, your wife will not be burdened with a debt. The house (or vehicle) can be sold and the debt repaid. If however you have borrowed money to celebrate a wedding and spent it all, then you do not have anything to show on the other side of the balance. Then you *are* in debt. This is the type of debt that we must avoid.

Many Christians are very foolish when it comes to spending money for their weddings. Many married couples start their married life with the curse of a debt hanging over their heads, just because they wanted to have a grand reception on their wedding day. It may take many years for them thereafter to clear that debt – and all because they wanted to impress people with a grand reception. They were afraid of what people would say if they had had a simple reception, but they were not afraid of *what God would think of their being in debt* for so many years thereafter. I praise God for those believers who were bold enough to have a wedding reception with just coffee and biscuits, *because that was all they could afford*. If you have the resources to have a grand wedding reception, you may do as you please. But it is dishonouring to God if you have to get into debt in order to have a grand reception. This may sound radical, but then discipleship is a radical thing.

Dowry is another evil that is found among many believers. No true disciple of Jesus will ever ask for dowry from a girl or from her parents as a condition for marrying the girl. There is nothing wrong in the girl's father giving her a gift *after she is married*. But there is everything wrong in making money *a factor in deciding about a marriage!* The present-day dowry system in India is Satanic. Yet we find Christians in almost all denominations (evangelical and liberal) receiving it.

The French infidel Voltaire, after observing Christians in Europe for many years in the 18th century, said that in whatever doctrines the many Christian denominations differed, they all had the same doctrine as far as *money* was concerned - *they all loved it*! When it comes to dowry too, they all have the same doctrine - *they love it!!*

It is more important to have the right Scriptural view on dowry than on water baptism. Because one may enter the kingdom of God, even if he is only baptized as an infant. But no-one who is covetous can ever enter God's kingdom (*according to 1 Cor.6:10*).

Contentment with what God has given us is another important part of godliness. All disciples of Jesus must learn to live within the circle of the income that they earn. God is the One Who determines how much His children earn. So we should not compare ourselves with other Christians who earn more. The Bible says that those who compare themselves with others are unwise (*2 Cor.10:12*). To live within the circle God has drawn around us means, for example, that we do not buy things we cannot afford just because other families have them in their homes. We must learn to be satisfied with what we *can* afford.

Consider the attitude of Mary who gave birth to Jesus in a cow-shed. She did not have a clean room or even any privacy, when delivering her baby!! But she did not complain. She humbled herself and accepted her God-appointed lot. That is to be content within one's circle.

Faithfulness in Money Matters

It is not enough that we live within our income, avoid debt and are *righteous* in money matters. We must then go on to be *faithful* with the money God gives us.

Deuteronomy 8:18 tells us that it is God Who gives us the power to make wealth. We must never forget that. God could have allowed you to be born in a beggar's family. He could have allowed you to be stupid or retarded. You should never forget that God is the One Who gave you your intellectual ability and the cleverness that enabled you to earn wealth.

Faithfulness with money involves recognising first of all, that all that we have earned belongs to God – not just 10% of it (as they understood it in the Old Testament) but *ALL* of it, as Jesus taught us. None of it is ours. So we must lay it all on the altar and give it all back to God. And we must use what He gives back to us, frugally and faithfully, for our earthly needs.

In the feeding of the 5000, we learn at least two lessons. *First of all*, that a little bit is enough to meet all our needs, if it is blessed by God. *Secondly*, that God hates wastage. Jesus told His disciples to pick up the extra loaves and fishes, so that nothing was wasted. Our Lord could have adopted the attitude that since His Father had multiplied the loaves and fishes so abundantly, He might as well leave the extra lying there on the mountainside to be wasted. But He didn't do that. Just because God has blessed us abundantly does not mean that we can be careless with our expenditure.

Do you throw away things just because they are slightly damaged? That is the attitude of the rich. A godly man will try and repair damaged items. Do you think that spirituality doesn't have anything to do with such matters? It certainly does.

As disciples of Jesus, we must be disciplined in our spending habits. The husband as the head of the home must be the one who handles the finances in a home. It is his responsibility to see that unnecessary expenses are cut out. He must explain to his wife when they cannot afford to buy certain things that *she* may want to buy.

Only one who is faithful in a little will be faithful also in much. This is a fundamental principle with God: *If we are not faithful with little things and with material things, God will not give us the true riches – the riches of revelation on his Word and the riches of His nature.*

If we want to make spiritual progress, we must learn to avoid all wastage. If you want to be a faithful servant of God, then don't waste money on unnecessary purchases. Don't waste money on grand meals or on a lavish lifestyle. Don't throw away things that can still be used. If you don't need them, at least give them away freely to poorer people.

Luke 14:33 tells us that we must not *possess* anything. We can *have* many things, but we must not *possess* any of them. So, if something expensive of ours, is stolen or spoilt, we need not be disturbed or worried over it, because it is not ours really. We are only stewards of our Master's possessions. God gives us many things so that we can use them all for His glory! But we are only pilgrims here.

A man cannot have a pure heart unless he has given up everything to God. A *pure heart* is different from a *clear conscience*. A clear conscience comes through being *righteous* in money matters. But a pure heart comes through being *faithful* in money matters. You may have a clear conscience, yet your heart may be attached to some earthly possession or a job. Then you can't say that you love God with *ALL* your heart. Then your heart is not pure.

Giving To God

The Israelites gave the Lord about 15% of their income – their tithes (10%) plus other offerings. The principle behind "tithing" is described in *Deut. 14: 22 & 23 (Living)* thus: "*The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your life*". When the Israelites gathered in their harvest they had to give God 10% of it, as an acknowledgement of the fact that they had received everything from Him and wanted to give Him first place in their lives. But gradually tithing became a ritual and a burden, even as it is to many believers today!

Under the new covenant, the same principle remains - of giving God first place above Mammon. But how *much* should we give to God now? The New Testament says that we must give as God has prospered us (*1Cor 16:2*). But the important thing now is that whatever is given must be given cheerfully (*2 Cor.9:7*).

Luke 6:38 tells us that if we give, it will be given to us too. But if you *give with the hope of receiving back again*, then you may be disappointed – for God looks at the motive in all giving and then you may receive nothing at all from Him. It is only those who give cheerfully *hoping for nothing in return* who will actually receive God's best.

I heard of a brother once, who although he didn't earn much, never seemed to lack anything that he needed in his home and he was never in debt either. When someone asked him the secret of his life, he said, "From what God gives me, I shovel some back to Him and He keeps shovelling back to me again. And I've discovered that God has the *bigger shovel!!*" We always get more from God than we give Him.

2Corinthians 9:6 says, "*He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully*".

It is a well-known fact everywhere that I preach against tithing. But what people haven't realized is that I preach something more difficult than tithing – *giving 100% to God joyfully*. This is what Jesus preached. He told the Pharisees who were under the *Law* to give 10% to God (*Matt.23:23*). But He told His disciples, who were going to be under the new covenant after Pentecost, to give "*everything*" (*Lk.14:33*). This is what I too have sought to practise and preach for the last 40 years.

If we honour God He will honour us. If we seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first, all the earthly things that we need in this life will be added to us (*Matt.6:33*). God is not foolish to give us all that we *want*, for He is wiser than us earthly

fathers. But He is faithful to give us all that we *need*. There is a vast difference between what we *need* and what we *want*. The promise in *Philippians 4:19* is that God will supply all our *need*.

We must also learn to be *wise* in our giving. Many poor people give *faithfully, but not wisely*. They give money for what they think is God's work. But their money only enables some unfaithful Christian worker somewhere to live in grand style. Such poor people may be sincere but they are not wise. We must know where exactly our money is going and how it is being spent.

Giving To The Poor

We are commanded to "*do good to all men and especially to those of the household of faith*" (*Gal.6:10*). We have a responsibility to help those who are *poor* among believers everywhere. But we have to be careful that we do not draw people to the church whose main aim is to get some financial benefit from the generous people in the church. The only way to avoid such a danger in a poor country like India is by ensuring first of all that a person first proves himself to be a true brother in a local body of believers. Only then should he be helped financially. Otherwise we will be adding parasites to the church and not disciples.

In *Acts 4:34*, we read that there was not a single needy person among the early Christians, because those who had wealth helped those who were poor. Nobody compelled the rich to give to the poor. They gave freely, from their hearts.

But many believers do not have wisdom in helping the poor. They give foolishly with a soulish generosity, to the wrong people. This results not only in the Lord's money being wasted, but also in parasites being added to the church, who come only for the help that the rich can give. A lot of such giving is done by rich believers with the aim of becoming popular with the poor and attaching those poor people to themselves. If only small amounts are given and that too occasionally, this may not be serious. But whenever you plan to give large amounts or regular support to someone in the church, it is always better to seek the advice of some godly elder brother who has more wisdom than you. Besides, those elders are more likely to know who in the church are in *greatest need*.

The early Christians were humble enough to acknowledge their lack of wisdom in such matters. That was why they gave their gifts to the apostles to be distributed to the poor. But those apostles never touched any of that money themselves. Peter and John who received all those millions were so faithful to pass on that money to others, that they could say to a poor beggar once, "*Silver and gold I have none*". All the money passed through their hands, without anything sticking to their hands. That was why they retained the anointing of the Spirit until the end of their lives. The story is vastly different today, where so much sticks to the hands of the preachers who receive money.

What about lending money to those who want to borrow from us? I remember, when I was working in the Navy, a believer in our local church approached me one day for a

loan. I knew that God's Word said, "*Give to him who asks of you and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you*" (*Matt.5:42*). The man told me that he would return the loan the very next month. So I gave him what he wanted. But the next month he could not return the loan and asked for some more. I earned a large salary, lived very simply and did not have a family. So I had plenty of money to spare. I gave him some more money - and once again the next month, when he asked me again. A little later, this man backslid and began to drink and waste his money. When I saw that, I told him that if he had money to give to the devil like that, he might as well return my loan, so that I could give that money back to the Lord. He became very angry with me and told me that I was harassing him. So I stopped asking him to return my loan.

I then went to the Lord and asked Him where I had gone wrong. He showed me my mistake. The Lord told me, "You treated that money as if it were your own. It was actually Mine. You should have consulted Me before giving it, even as a loan."

If someone had given me ten thousand rupees to keep safely, and you, knowing about it, came and asked me for a loan from that money, I would have told you that I would have to ask the owner of the money before giving you the loan, for it was not my money. But I did not do that in the above case, because I did not recognise that my money was the Lord's. If I had actually forsaken all (to the Lord), as Jesus commanded (*Luke 14:33*), then I would have told that man that all that I had was the Lord's and that I had to consult the Lord about it. But instead, I mechanically obeyed the letter of Scripture and thus lost some of the Lord's money. Even the devil quoted a verse to Jesus once. I should have compared Scripture with Scripture.

We must certainly be willing to give to those in need, but we need to ask the Lord about it each time. We must live by "*every word that proceeds from God's mouth*". When we meet someone who is genuinely in need, if we seek the Lord, we will get a witness in our spirit as to whether to give him money or not. For all you know, the man asking you for help may be "*a prodigal son*" whom God is disciplining "*among the pigs*". If so, any money you give him will only *hinder* him from returning to the Father's house and not help him.

Thank God that we don't have to live under the Law today with its rules and regulations, but by the leading of the Holy Spirit Who will tell us in each situation, dynamically, what we are to do or not to do.

Full Time Christian Workers

1 Corinthians 9:14 tells us that the Lord has directed that those who preach the gospel should get their living through the gospel. But Paul then went on to say in *verses 15 to 18* that he did not want such support for himself, because he worked on the principle of supporting himself and serving the Lord. That was why Paul could speak freely to the Corinthian Christians about giving money to the Lord - *because he never received any financial support for himself from them*. He urged them to give their money to *poor believers who were in need*.

We never find Jesus or any of the apostles ever asking anyone to support them or their own ministry financially. They spoke only of giving money to the poor (*See Mark 10:21; John 13:29; 2 Cor.8 & 9 and Gal.2:10*). This is the way of discipleship in money matters.

This message is especially needed by full-time Christian workers today, because many of them unashamedly ask and even pressurise believers to support them and their ministry – even going to the extent of saying that God will punish those who don't give!! This is not God's way. God's way is one where we spend our time and energy watering (caring for) *others* and God then waters (cares for) us (*Proverbs 11:25*). This is the way of faith in God, where we do not depend on men.

When I worked in the Indian Navy, it was the Navy that took care of my salary and all my bodily needs. I did not have to go and ask anyone else for financial help. Isn't God greater than the Navy or any other employer? If we are indeed servants of an Almighty God, do we have to go and ask mortal men for help? It is an insult to the dignity of our God when His servants go begging for money from other believers. God is jealous that His servants should depend on Him alone and not on any man.

Let me illustrate: Suppose a Westerner, dressed in a suit came to your house one day and introduced himself as *the Ambassador of the United States of America*. If he then told you that his country was going through a financial crisis and asked you to contribute some amount (however small) for his country's needs, what would you think? You would immediately know that he was a trickster, who was trying to deceive you. Why? Because you know very well that the government of the U.S.A. would never descend to the level of begging for money from people, door to door!

Now consider if a man came to your house or sent you a magazine, and introduced himself as an *Ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ* and told you that the kingdom God was hard up for money and asked you to help God out of a tight spot, by giving any amount (however small) for His work. You would believe Him. Why? Because you consider the kingdom of God to be far inferior to the government of the U.S.A. That is the sad truth!! And that is the reason why confidence tricksters posing as "servants of God", are able to dupe thousands of believers today.

What a shame it is that many so-called "servants of God" have lowered the dignity of God's kingdom to such a low level. This is because they have not become disciples of Jesus themselves in money matters. Therefore they cannot obviously make anyone else disciples of Jesus in money matters either.

Today many preachers have started Bible-schools and orphanages, not to help others but only to earn a fat salary themselves and to enable their families to live at a high standard of living. Glorious reports of the success of their labours are sent out regularly through newsletters to foreign countries to rake in the "almighty dollar"!! The pursuit of money has indeed destroyed many servants of God in our land.

Money given for the Lord's work is the most sacred of all money in the world. If we take any of that money for our personal or family use, without it having been given specifically for that purpose, then we stand in great danger. We stand in danger of being lost eternally. We can lose our birthright for a bowl of porridge (money).

There is a great need for Christian workers *to live frugally*. This too is part of being free from the love of Mammon. I have seen Christian workers who are very careful when it comes to spending money from their own salary. But they are spendthrifts when it comes to spending "mission money". Some poor widows in America send their mites for the Lord's work in India. And the Indian worker uses such money to build an expensive house for himself and to eat lavish meals etc., This is unfaithfulness. This is the main reason why such workers do not have a prophetic voice when they speak.

Why does the Indian church lack prophets? Is it possible that the Lord does not care for this land of nearly 1000 million people that He has not sent any prophets to this land in our day. The Lord certainly cares for India and He probably called many to be prophets in our land. But most of them have sold their prophetic gift for Mammon and gone the way of Balaam and Gehazi. The result is that there are hardly any prophets left today.

The church in India needs to learn to stand on her own feet. And for this purpose, the Lord may one day stop all foreign money coming in for Christian work in India. If the Lord does that, the hirelings will immediately be exposed, because they will run away from the work that they are doing. Then perhaps true prophets will arise, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ will be built, and the Name of the Lord will be glorified in our land.

If God has called you to serve Him full time, make sure that you remain a servant of God and never become a servant of men. When rich people start to give you money personally, it will be easy for you to compromise the message of God, so that you never say anything that will offend them. The Bible says in *1 Corinthians 7:21 &23*, that we are bought with a price and should never become the servants of men. Many believers will try to make you their slaves through their gifts. You must beware of them.

Other Areas

One of the areas where the faith and loyalty of many Christians to the Lord is being tested in India today, is when non-Christians approach them for *money to celebrate their religious festivals*. A disciple of Christ must be gracious but *firm* at such times and say that although he would gladly give money for any collection taken for poor people, he cannot give for non-Christian religious festivals, because he does not believe in them. In some places in India today, such a refusal can even endanger a Christian's life. In such cases, the disciple must be wise. He should not deny the Lord at any cost. But if people force money out of him, like a thief would, then he need not condemn himself, for God understands His situation.

Another problem that many people face in our land is that *of having to give money to government officials* in order to get a legitimate permit or licence or sanction etc., Many

preachers are afraid to preach on this subject for fear of losing their reputation for "holiness". But there is a great need for clear teaching on this matter, for Christians are faced with this problem every day in our land. So here is some sane advice that I would like to give, that can lift an unnecessary burden of guilt from the shoulders of many believers.

There are three levels at which people can live, as we read in *1 Cor.6:12* and *10:23*:

- (1) *Unlawful*. This is where *unrighteousness* is practised.
- (2) *Lawful*. This is the bare minimum level - of *righteousness*.
- (3) *Profitable*. This is the highest level of *faith*.

We must obviously never descend to the level of doing something *unlawful*.

Therefore we must never give any money to anyone to get anything *unrighteous* done. That would be cheating the government (or the organisation), and what you give would be a *bribe*.

But what if some official asks you for money to give you a permit *for something that is perfectly legal* and you give him the money in order to avoid the hassle of going back again and again to that office? In such a case, you are *not* cheating anyone. You are voluntarily giving your own money. This could be compared to your giving a "*tip*" to a waiter in a restaurant; or perhaps more accurately, to your giving your money to a dacoit who sticks a gun at you! You would give the dacoit your money to save your life. The only difference in this case is that the official stuck an *ultimatum* at you and not a *gun!!* It was still "*daylight robbery*". But at least you didn't get anything *unrighteous* done for your own benefit and you didn't *cheat* anyone. That is the second level – the *lawful* level.

However, another brother, in a similar situation, may have *faith* to believe that the Lord will get him the sanction without his giving any money to the clerk. This is the *highest* level. *But all may not have this level of faith*. Those who have such faith can live at this level. But they should not judge others who do not have their level of faith. This is clearly taught in *Romans 14*.

We must recognise however that there could be occasions when we try to escape out of a difficult situation, by giving money to a corrupt official, when God may actually have wanted to do a miracle for us, if we had only trusted Him. So we must seek God in each difficult situation we face and ask for wisdom to do what pleases Him. We should press on to perfection. But we need not feel condemned if our faith does not rise to the level of another's.

Salaries And Savings

Is it right when seeking for a job to look for one with the highest salary? That is all right, so long as the job does not ruin your spiritual life or your body or soul in any way. If however, your pursuit of money involves sacrificing God's kingdom or His righteousness, even slightly, then it is wrong. It is actually good to look for a job with a high salary, because that will enable you to have more money to spare for the work of the Lord. But if such a job means that your usefulness for the Lord in terms of time is decreased, then that cannot be the will of God. So one must be careful when taking a decision in such cases.

Think of the case of Balaam. God had clearly told him not to go to King Balak. But when the king offered him more money, Balaam wanted "*to seek God's will again*". God saw the covetousness in Balaam's heart and allowed him to go. There are many believers like that too, who pretend to seek God's will, whereas their hearts go after their covetous desires. God allows them to go wherever they want, for He knows their motives.

Believers nowadays go abroad for employment – but for different reasons. One may be going in order to help his poor family members in India. That is a very good reason. But another may be going only to make more money for himself – far beyond his needs. The final end of these two believers will not be the same. The first one who went out of necessity will grow spiritually, whereas the latter who went out of covetousness will backslide.

Is it right to join a trade-union in a factory and to ask for higher wages through them? There is nothing wrong with that, *provided you don't indulge in any violence*. You can always ask the higher authorities, or send a petition to them, for a higher salary or allowance. But you should never become rebellious or strike work to get what you want. You must have faith that God will provide you with what you need, and be content with whatever you receive. The Divine method is to pray and tell the Lord that you are not earning enough to meet your needs. God will then provide your need.

What about saving money for the future? Can a disciple of Jesus have a savings account, or fixed deposits, or company-shares, or wealth in other forms? Jesus said that we were not to lay up treasures for ourselves on earth but in heaven. But the question here is at what point any savings becomes "*a treasure laid up for oneself*"? There is no easy answer to this question and we certainly cannot lay down rules for others. The Lord treats us like adults, and places the responsibility on ourselves to decide at what point something has become a treasure. One way to find out is by asking ourselves what *we think about most often*. If it is "*money*", then money has certainly become our treasure. If however, it is "*the Lord and His work*", then our treasure is in heaven, even if we have much earthly wealth.

The Bible exhorts us to learn from the ant how to save for the future (*Prov.6:6-11*). The ants have no leader who exhorts them to save food for the winter season. They have wisdom to do that themselves. But many believers do not have such wisdom. When they suddenly have a large unexpected expenditure, they have to beg or borrow from others.

There would have been no need to do that, if they had been careful with their expenditure in previous years, and saved something for the future. So it is good to have some savings.

Jesus did not use up all the money He received as gifts on the very same day He received them. He and His disciples saved some of it. Judas kept those savings in a bag, and they used it as and when a need arose. What percentage did they save? It is a good thing the Bible doesn't tell us! God gives us freedom under the new covenant in all matters. We are not under any law. We are to be led by the Holy Spirit.

Is it right to own a house? Building a house requires a considerable amount of money these days. If God has given you the ability to earn enough money to be able to build a house of your own, He may perhaps want you to save money and build a house. But how can you build a house, if you don't save money consistently. You can't expect the money to fall down from heaven suddenly. So you have to save.

God told the Levites in the Old Testament, that they were never to own any property (*Numbers 18:20*). But the other eleven tribes of Jacob were permitted to own land. In the same way today, God may allow one brother to build a house and tell another that He should not build a house. God's will is not the same for all of us, in such matters.

Two of Levi's sons and their descendants were permitted to have *carts* to transport the items of the tabernacle. But another son of Levi's and his descendants had to carry their items on their shoulders (*Number 7:7-9*). In the same way today, God gives some believers *cars*, while others of His children cannot even afford a cycle and *have to walk!!*

God's will is different for each believer. Each person must find out the will of God for Himself and live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, without comparing his lot with another's.

If we find ourselves in some financially tricky situation where we don't know what to do, let us go to God and ask Him for wisdom. He has promised to give it to us, if we ask Him in faith (*Jas.1:5*).

We must understand the principles of the use of money that the Lord has given us in His Word.. The Holy Spirit will then show us how to apply those principles in each situation.

Let us all walk the pathway of discipleship in this most important of matters – *money!*

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCIPLESHIP AND CHURCH MATTERS

A disciple of Jesus can never be a loner. He will always live in fellowship with other disciples in a local church.

Jesus said that the primary mark of His disciples would be "*love for one another*" (*John 13:35*). This is possible only when the disciple is related to other disciples. So there cannot be any such thing as a *lonely* disciple.

John 12:24 makes it clear that only the grain of wheat that does *not* fall into the ground and die *will remain alone*. The grain that dies however will bear much fruit: *Such a disciple will either find other disciples or make other disciples* and then be built together with them to form a local church that will be an expression of the Body of Christ. Every disciple must be a part of such a local church. If you are alone, it must be because you have *not* fallen into the ground and died to yourself.

The Fear Of The Lord

The church is pictured in the New Testament as a house that God is building; and *Proverbs 24:3* states that a house can be built only by *wisdom*.

A disciple does not become wise by *merely* studying the Scriptures. That only increases his *knowledge*. It is the fear of the Lord that is the *beginning* of wisdom (*Prov.9:10*). The fear of the Lord is the ABC of the Christian life. *James 3:17* states that "*the wisdom from above is first of all pure*." Therefore all who want to build the Body of Christ must learn the fear of the Lord first. They must be able to say to others: "*Come and I will teach you the fear of the Lord*" (*Psa. 34:10*).

We may emphasise doctrinal accuracy, emotional experiences, praise and worship, evangelism and whatever. But if the foundation of the fear of the Lord is absent underneath it all, everything that we've built will collapse one day.

The church cannot be built by programs, activities, money, human strategies or by any principle of the business world. Christian work that is done by such principles may look impressive to human eyes. But when God tests it by fire, it will be seen to be only wood, hay and straw (*1 Cor.3:11-15*).

The distinguishing feature of God's house is self-judgment (*1 Pet.4:17*) - a self-judgment that is the result of living before God's face. Isaiah, Job and John all saw their own nothingness and sin when they saw God (*See Isa.6:5; Job 42:5,6; Rev.1:17*).

When Adam and Eve violated God's holiness, they were driven out of Eden. God then stationed cherubs with a flaming sword in front of the tree of life to guard it. This tree of Life represents the eternal life (the divine nature) that Jesus came to give us. The sword

typifies the cross that has to slay our Self-life, before we can partake of the divine nature. It is true that the sword first fell on Jesus. But we were crucified with Him too (*Gal.2:20*). And "*those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*" (*Gal.5:24*).

Like the cherubs, the elders in a church must wield this *sword* and proclaim that the only way to the divine life is through death to the flesh. The way back to fellowship with God is via that sword. It is because this sword is not wielded, that most churches today are filled with compromisers and have ceased to be expressions of the body of Christ.

In *Numbers 25:1*, we read of a time when the Israelites began "*to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab*". One of the Israelites even brought a Moabite woman into his tent (v.6). But one priest saved Israel from being destroyed as a nation that day - Phinehas. He was so zealous for God's honour, that he took a spear immediately, went inside that tent and killed both the man and the woman (v.7,8). Then God stopped the plague (v.9). But by then, 24,000 people had already been killed. The plague was spreading so rapidly that if it had not been for that one "*cherub who wielded a sword*" that day, the plague would have killed the whole camp of Israel.

Do you see how valuable it is to have "*a cherub with a sword*" in every church?

The plague is spreading rapidly in Christendom today, because there are not enough Phinehases who know how to use the sword. Far too many elders and preachers are men-pleasers who constantly urge us "*to love the Midianites*". The devil will give us a hundred arguments as to why we should not use the sword in the church. He will even quote Scripture to support his arguments - as he quoted scripture to Jesus.

What did Phinehas have to gain personally by his using the sword? Nothing. On the other hand, he had much to lose - especially a reputation for being kind and gentle!! He would also have been the object of a lot of backbiting and anger from the relatives and friends of the man he killed. But it was the glory and honour of God's Name that motivated Phinehas. And God put His seal of approval on Phinehas' ministry, by saying, "*He was jealous with My jealousy*" (*Num.25:11*). In the final analysis, God's seal of approval is the only thing that matters. The Lord went on to say about Phinehas, "*Behold I give him my covenant of peace, because he was jealous for his God*" (*Num.25:12,13*). In a previous chapter, we saw how the Lord had given the Levites too His covenant of peace because they used the sword (*Mal.2:4,5*).

There is no peace in many churches today because they have sought for peace in a human way - without using God's sword. The result is strife and contention. The peace of Christ is bought with a sword (that slays the Self-life) - both at home and in the church.

Those who are in leadership in a church must burn with a jealous passion for the honour of God's Name, if they are to preserve the church in purity. They must forget about getting a reputation for being kind and gentle, and be concerned only about the glory of God's Name.

It was this passion for the honour of God's Name that made Jesus drive the money-changers and the sellers of doves out of the temple. *Zeal for God's house consumed him* (*John 2:17*). This is a major part of what it means to be Christlike. But who is interested in being Christlike if it is going to make him unpopular and misunderstood?

In *Hosea 6:1*, we are told that God first cuts us open and then binds us up to heal us. It is this balance that we need in every church - *cutting open* to remove the cancers and then *binding up* to bring healing. Such a ministry could be fulfilled by *two brothers working together in harmony* - one doing the cutting open and the other doing the binding up - or by one person alone. The Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to be a team (*Acts 13:2*), where Paul did most of the cutting-up and Barnabas did most of the binding-up.

Isaiah prophesied about Jesus that His words would be like a *sharp* sword (*Isa.49:2*) as well as bringing *comfort* to the weary (*Isa.50:4*). If the Lord speaks in the church today, it will once again be with both *sharp* and *comforting* words.

Those who heard Jesus' words in His day either repented and became His disciples, or got offended and left Him. Jesus spoke sharp words to Peter (*Matt.16:23*). But Peter did not get offended and leave (*John 6:68*). Judas Iscariot, on the other hand, was offended even by a small remark that Jesus made to him (*See John 12:4-8 with Matt.26:14*). The word of the Lord tests us even today to see whether we will get offended or not. A church where the Word of God is not proclaimed in this way cannot fulfil the purposes of God.

Fellowship And Unity

Love is the primary mark of Jesus' disciples. So fellowship between the disciples of Jesus is vital.

In Matthew 18:18-20, we read of the power that results from such fellowship among the disciples of Jesus. A paraphrase of those verses would read something like this:

The Lord Jesus said, "*If two or thee disciples of Mine are found in one place and have no disunity between them, but instead a unity like the symphony ("sumphoneo" (Greek) = agree) produced by a number of musical instruments playing together in harmony with each other, then I will be present in their midst. And then, if they ask My Father for anything, it will be granted to them. They will have authority to bind the workings of Satan in any place on earth; and whatever activities of Satan they bind here on earth, will be bound at their source in "the heavenlies" (from where these spirit-powers operate). Such believers will also have the power to deliver (loose) people who are bound by Satan on earth".*

The devil knows the amazing power there is in unity and fellowship among Jesus' disciples, but many believers do not know it. And so Satan's main aim has always been to bring disunity among believers so as to make them powerless against him.

What power there would be in a home, if the husband and wife were *one* in spirit! Satan would never be able to overcome such a home!

What power there would be in a church if even two of its elders were *one* in spirit! Satan would never be able to overcome such a church!

Satan triumphs over most Christian churches and homes, because such unity and fellowship is not found in them.

I am not talking now about casting out demons. Any believer who has faith for this, can cast out demons in the Name of Jesus, single-handedly, as Jesus said in *Mark 16:17*. In fact, we read in *Matthew 7:22,23* of even unbelievers who cast out demons in Jesus' Name.

But to bind *the activities of Satan*, so as to release people from the problems Satan has created for them is far more difficult. A believer cannot do that alone. That requires an expression of the Body of Christ - and the minimum number of disciples that can express Christ's Body is *two!* Only the authority exercised by such a "body" can keep the powers of darkness at bay.

There must be at least two people at the centre of every church who are totally united with each other. Satan will always target such a core seeking to split it up and divide it. If he succeeds, then that church will become powerless against him. But if that core keeps itself united, Satan will be powerless against that church. This applies to *a home* as well.

In every church there will be mature people as well as new converts - just as there are babes as well as grown-up children in a family. The babes may fight with each other, backbite, complain and gossip, because they have not understood the way of peace. Such babes will be found in every growing church. But they can never hinder God's work. A core of united elders at the centre of a church can make it an overcoming church. Babes may constitute the vast majority of every church. But God is always seeking to build up *the core* - both spiritually and numerically. It is this core that fights the battles against Satan and preserves a church in life and victory.

Fellowship in a church is more important than evangelism. In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus said that the 99 sheep in the fold were "*ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance*" (*Luke 15:7*). Who are the ones "*who need no repentance*"? Obviously those who are judging themselves constantly. Such people do not need any repentance, because they are *constantly* repenting of their sins. Such disciples have no problem becoming one with each other.

If however the 99 sheep in this fold were constantly fighting with each other and tearing each other to pieces, then the shepherd would not have brought that lost sheep there - for that sheep would be far safer on the mountains than within such a fold where it could be killed!

Our churches must consist of of "*righteous people who don't need any repentance*". Then only will our churches be places of healing and peace into which lost sheep can be safely brought in. The Lord leads His sheep into green pastures and beside still waters. The church Jesus builds is a place of peace. Lost sheep must be brought in only into such a church. Most churches are not like this, because their members are converts and not *disciples*.

I met a Buddhist convert once, who told me that when he first joined a Christian church, he was horrified to see the strife that went on inside it and had wondered at times, whether Buddhism wasn't better!! Then he found a church where true fellowship and love reigned. Then he was comforted.

Partiality

Another evil that we see in many churches is the showing of *partiality* (*Jas.2:1*). James warns us in that chapter of the danger of giving special seats to rich people in the meetings. Those who do so commit sin (*Jas.2:9*). This can apply to making language and caste distinctions as well.

In many churches, believers of one language-group cannot often get along with those of another. Those of one community cannot fellowship with those of another and those of different castes tend to fellowship only among themselves. But if they were disciples of Jesus, the cultured man and the barbarian would both fellowship with each other without any problem.

2 Corinthians 5:16 says that under the new covenant we do not recognise people according to what they are in the flesh. We do not look at skin-colour, community or caste, because everyone is a new creation in Christ (*v.17*). In the new creation there are no language, community or caste distinctions. If we don't lead believers into such a life, we will never be able to build the church of Jesus Christ.

A word of caution however, is necessary here. A disciple of Jesus is **not** called to marry someone from another caste *merely to prove* that he does not believe in caste-distinctions. Some have done that and ended up in incompatible marriages! Marriage requires a great deal of mutual adjustment and so the areas of difference between the two partners must be as few as possible. Being a disciple of Jesus does *not* mean that when considering marriage, one will **not** consider age, education, family background, economic status or caste etc., All of these may need to be considered before one can arrive at a mature decision.

Consider also a situation where, as an elder, you could be guilty of partiality. If you were prompted in your spirit, while preaching, to say something strong, and suddenly realised that your words would hurt some who were listening to you. Then, because you did not want to offend them, you did not say what the Spirit prompted you to say. You did not use the sword as God wanted you to, because you wanted to please men. This is favouritism and can make you lose the anointing of God in your ministry.

The Gifts Of The Holy Spirit

Let us now consider the matter of *spiritual gifts*. These too are essential for building up the Body of Christ.

There are three lists of spiritual gifts given us in the New Testament (*1 Corinthians 12:8-10, Romans 12:6-8* and *Ephesians 4:11*).

In *1 Corinthians 12:12-26*, the exercise of spiritual gifts is compared with the functioning of the members of our physical body. A man may have life and yet be blind, deaf, dumb and paralyzed. Many churches are like that. Their members are born again. But they have no gifts of the Holy Spirit with which to serve the Lord - and so they are powerless.

The gifts of the Spirit are what enable the Body of Christ to see, hear, talk and walk. Godliness is the life of the Body of Christ. But what can Christ's Body do for others, without the gifts of the Spirit. What would Jesus Himself have been like if He had no gifts of the Spirit? He would still have overcome sin and lived a holy life. But without the anointing of the Spirit, He would not have been able to preach the way He did, heal the sick, cast out demons or do any miracle.

Jesus' anointing with the Holy Spirit at the age of 30 did not make Him any holier than He was earlier. His 31st year was not any holier than His 29th year. But with the anointing of the Spirit, He received power to serve others. If Jesus had merely gone around showing people His holy life, He could not have accomplished His Father's purposes. Neither can the church today accomplish God's purposes by merely manifesting holy living to others. Jesus had both holiness and the gifts. His Body today must have both of these too.

The tragedy in Christendom today is that some groups emphasise holiness of life while others emphasise the gifts of the Spirit. But these are not "*either-or*" options. The Bible says, "*Let your clothes be white all the time* (live a holy life at all times) *and let not oil be lacking on your head* (live under the anointing constantly)" (*Eccl.10:8*). We need both.

The gifts of the Spirit do not make anyone spiritual. The Corinthian Christians had all the gifts of the Spirit (*1 Cor.1:7*). They exercised "*the word of wisdom*" (one of the gifts of the Spirit) in their meetings. In spite of that, there was not one wise (spiritual) man among them (*1 Cor.6:5*). A word of wisdom can come through a carnal person. But *wisdom itself* is found only in a spiritual person. One can receive a word of wisdom from God in a moment. But wisdom itself can come only through many years of taking up the cross.

We cannot *choose* our spiritual gift ourselves, because it is God Who determines what gift will best fit us for our ministry in Christ's Body. But we are told to seek earnestly for those gifts that will build up the Body - and especially for the gift of *prophecy* (*1Cor 14:1,12*).

When Jesus taught His disciples to ask the Father for the Holy Spirit (*Lk.11:13*), He illustrated the way they were to ask with a parable of a man who went to his neighbour's house to ask for food. There are two important points to be noticed in this parable:

1. The man was asking for food ***not for himself but for someone else.***

2. ***He kept on asking*** until he received what he needed.

What do we learn from this parable?

First of all, that we are not to seek the gifts of the Spirit for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others. If only those who have sought for the baptism and the gifts of the Spirit had kept this one principle before them, they would have become far more spiritual. And there would have been far less exercise of counterfeit gifts in Christendom today. Unfortunately, most people are taught to seek for the power of the Holy Spirit only in order to get an experience for *themselves*, and not in order to be a blessing to others.

There are many around us who have needs that God wants to meet - and He wants to meet their needs through us. That's why He allows them to cross our path. He wants us to seek Him for the gifts of the Spirit that are needed to deliver these people and bless them.

A man came to Jesus' disciples once with his demon-possessed child. But the disciples could not help him. The man then went to Jesus and said, "*I went to your disciples for help but they could not help me.*" Are these the words that our neighbours and friends are saying to the Lord today about us?

If we seek the Lord's blessing only for ourselves, we will remain dry. God waters only those who water (help) others (*Prov.11:25*). Perhaps some brother near you needs a word of wisdom to solve his problem. Another may be in need of a word of encouragement for his depressing situation. Yet another may need deliverance from some bondage. We must seek God for the gifts needed to help such people.

Every gift of the Spirit is given that we might bless and edify *others*. *Luke 4:18,19* tells us the result of Jesus being anointed with the Holy Spirit. He was enabled thereby to preach good news to the poor, release the captives, give sight to the blind, bring freedom to the downtrodden and proclaim the favourable year of the Lord. Notice that everything mentioned here is for the benefit of *others*. The gifts of the Spirit did not bring any benefit to the Lord *Himself* in His life.

We must have a *concern* for others and a sense of our own *inability* to help them, if we are to seek for the gifts of the Spirit in the right way.

The *second* thing that we learn from this parable is that we must keep on asking God for the power of the Holy Spirit until we receive it. God tests us to see whether we are really *eager* to receive His power and whether we really *value* His gifts. He also waits to see

whether we *feel really helpless* and unable to serve Him, without His power. Many give up praying too soon because they are self-confident - and thus fail these tests.

The Meetings Of The Local Church

Among the gifts of the Spirit mentioned in *1 Corinthians 12*, we find that the *word-gifts* alone are exercised *in the meetings of the local church* - teaching, prophecy, tongues and interpretation (*See 1 Cor.14:26 ff*). We do not read there of any miraculous gifts being exercised *in the church-meetings*. There is a place in *evangelistic ministry*, even today, for the exercise of the gift of healing and for the casting out of demons, as a confirmation of the gospel message (*Mark 16:15-18*). And those who are called to be evangelists (especially to unreached areas) should expect God to give them these abilities. But these do not have to take place in the meetings of every local church.

In the church-meeting the main gift to be exercised is the gift of *prophecy*. Old Testament prophecy foretold the future. But New Testament prophecy refers to speaking forth God's Word in such a way as "*to edify (build up), exhort (challenge), and comfort (encourage)*" the church (*See 1 Cor.14:3*). Every church must have brothers who can exercise this gift. A church does not need apostles, teachers and evangelists locally (these ministries can be itinerant), but it does need *prophets and shepherds*, if it is to grow to maturity.

The prophets of old spoke of "*the burden of the Lord*" that they carried in their hearts. Aaron carried 12 stones (representing the 12 tribes of Israel) on a breastplate over his heart. This was a picture of how those who preach God's Word (prophesy) today should carry God's people in their hearts - just as a mother carries a baby in her womb (*See Phil.1:7*).

Those gifted with the prophetic word should be the first to speak in the meetings of the church, bringing forth a word from God that is appropriate to the need of that church at that time. They must speak as the spokesmen of God (*1 Pet.4:11*). There is a vast difference between a religious sermon and a prophetic word. A sermon comes from a man's head as a result of intellectual labour and can impress his hearers. A prophecy however is a word from God that comes through a man's heart. It does not seek to impress the hearers, but to expose the secrets of their hearts and to *stir them to action*.

Those who respond to such a prophetic word will correct themselves. Those who are irritated by it however, will get angry with the prophet. Prophets are never popular, but hated, misunderstood and persecuted. When Jesus prophesied in the synagogue in Nazareth, the people stopped Him in the middle of His sermon, dragged Him outside and tried to kill Him!!

The Bible says that we must exhort each other *daily*, lest we be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (*Heb.3:13*). The aim of all prophecy (exhortation) in the church therefore must be to save people from being deceived by their sins. Prophecy exposes the secret sins in their hearts and they can then fall on their faces before God and repent (*1 Cor.14:25*).

If we judge ourselves and "*work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*" (*Phil.2:12*), the Lord will give us light and save ***us first*** from the deceitfulness of our own sin. Then we can preach that same word to others - and save them. We must preach to others only that which has convicted us first.

An important word of caution however is necessary here. Those who *listen* to the prophetic word are commanded to *pass judgment* on what they hear (*1 Cor.14:29*). They must judge first of all whether what they heard was in accordance with God's Word and secondly whether it was a word from God to their own hearts. This is because every message preached, every prophecy given and every tongue interpreted, carries with it something of the speaker's own thoughts as well. So we are commanded to "*examine everything carefully*" and to "*hold fast only to what is good*" (*1 Thess.5:21*).

If the anointing within us does not bear witness to some part of the "*prophecy*" we hear, then we must reject it. That is the only way to protect ourselves from being deceived (*1 Jn.2:28*). Many believers have suffered untold damage in their lives, because they blindly swallowed every "*prophecy*" they heard as if it were from God Himself and acted on what they heard.

Let me also add a word of caution about *imitating* other preachers whom you admire. If such imitation is *unconscious*, it is not serious. But if it is *conscious*, then you will be the loser, for such imitation will hinder the unique ministry that the Lord has given you, from coming forth through you.

Even though the entire New Testament is inspired by the Holy Spirit, we still see that Paul, Peter and John did not use the same language to express truth. Each of them wrote Scripture with the words that came to them naturally. Paul never once wrote about "*being born again*", but wrote much about "*being crucified with Christ*" and about "*putting off the old man*". When Peter wrote his letter later, he could have imitated Paul's phrases. But he didn't. He used the phrases that came naturally to *him* and wrote about "*suffering in the flesh*". John too was unique in the language he used, when he wrote many years later. He did not use either Paul's or Peter's language but wrote instead about being "*born of God*" - a phrase that was unique to him.

This shows clearly that God does not expect us to use the same words that others use. He does not eradicate our personalities when ministering His Word through us, and make us like secretaries who merely type out what their boss tells them to. God preserves our individuality, even when we are filled and anointed with the Holy Spirit.

In *Revelation 21:19,20*, we see the church pictured as a building built with precious stones of many colours. The light that shines through each of these stones is the same - *the life of Jesus*. But the *colours* that come through them are varied - red, blue and green etc., Each of us is called to express the life of Jesus - but through our own unique, individual personalities.

If you try to imitate my ministry or the way I preach or write, you will end up frustrated. You must speak from your own life what comes naturally to you - in your own unique way - and then you will be a blessing to the Body of Christ. God wants only one "Zac Poonen" in His church. He doesn't want another. He wants you to be yourself.

In the meetings of the church, all who have a word from the Lord can prophesy, under the authority of the elders. That includes both men and women - for God clearly states that He pours the spirit of prophecy on both men and *women* (*Acts 2:17,18*). If a woman covers her head, God permits her to pray and prophesy in the church-meetings (*1 Cor.11:5*).

Many do not seek to prophesy in the church because of their spiritual laziness or their timidity. Timothy was such a timid man that Paul had to urge him to stir up the gift that God had given him (*1 Tim.4:14; 2 Tim.1:6,7*). We must bind the spirits of timidity and unbelief when we come to the church-meetings.

This freedom in the church-meetings can however be taken advantage of by carnal people who love to hear their own voice and who stand up and bore everybody. Such people must be silenced by the elders, because everything in the church must be done "*properly and in an orderly manner*" (*1 Cor.14:40*). It is unfortunate however, that in most churches today, the elders are either timid or seek the honour of being known as "*gentle*" brothers, that they do not silence a carnal, long-winded speaker!

Let us bear in mind then that the *most important* part of a church meeting is not the time of "praise and worship" - although that is essential - but the time when the prophetic word of God is proclaimed.

Spiritual Leadership

Let us now look at the subject of *leadership in the church of God*.

God appoints elders in every church to lead it in His way (*1 Cor.14:23; Titus 1:5*). An elder is not primarily a preacher but a leader. A "*leader*" is one who goes ahead of others. He is constantly moving forward. He says, "*Follow me as I follow Christ*".

Many preachers however say, "Don't follow me. Just look at Christ and follow Him". That sounds humble. But that is not what *any* of the early apostles said. They invited believers to follow them even as they followed Christ (*1 Cor.11:1; Phil.3:17*). They did not say this because they were *perfect*, but because they were *moving in the right direction*.

Eldership is a relative matter. An illustration will make this clear: When parents are going away from their home for a while, they may ask their eldest son to be the "elder" in their home and to take all decisions during their absence - even if he is only 10 years old. He is certainly not mature. But he is more mature than the 7-year old and the 4-year old! Once his parents return, he is no longer the elder.

That is how eldership functions in a church too. A young brother can be an elder in a church, if he happens to be the most mature brother in that church. As the others in the church grow, he too grows up along with them. But if he stops growing spiritually, then someone else will one day become the elder brother in that church - the one who has gone ahead of him. So eldership is not a title or an office in God's house, but being mature enough to lead others.

Such leaders are the ones that we must submit to and obey (*Hebrews 13:17*). In the parable of the man who rented out his farm to tenants, we notice that the owner did not come personally to collect the rent, but sent his servants. (*Matt.21:34*). Even so the Lord appoints His delegated authorities in the church to represent Him. Jesus told His apostles that when people received them, they were actually receiving the Lord Himself (*Matt.10:40*). I am not referring now to the vast majority of priests and preachers and pastors in Christendom today, but *only to those whom you yourself recognise as genuine servants of God*.

In the church of God, authority is not imposed from above but accepted from beneath.

That means that you need submit only to those elders whom you respect. If you cannot acknowledge an elder as a godly man, you do *not* have to submit to him. However, in such a case it is best for you to leave that church and find another where you can find a godly elder. Unfortunately, there are not many godly elders in the world today. But where you do find one, you must honour him and appreciate him (*1 Tim.5:17; 1 Thess.5:12*).

Once you do recognise someone as your elder, you must submit to him. The purpose of submission in the church is the same as in a home: Children are protected from innumerable dangers by submitting to their parents. A godly elder will keep watch over your soul, like a shepherd watches over his sheep.

A true elder should know the spiritual state of each one of his sheep (*Prov.27:23*). If an elder carries his flock on his heart, God will give him discernment, supernaturally if necessary, about the condition of each of his sheep. The messages that such an elder brings forth in the meetings of the church will be the very word that his sheep need - even though he may be unaware of their need.

This then is the primary requirement in all shepherds - they must carry their flock on their hearts. There are many brothers who although not elders, nevertheless have a care and a concern for their fellow-believers. Such brothers are true shepherds in God's sight, and the sheep have confidence in them and come to them for help.

The Church, Money And Christian Workers

A church of disciples must have a clear testimony in the matter of money. We must have no desire to get money, or any favour, or anything else from anyone who comes to our meetings. And they must know that clearly. They must see clearly that we are only interested in blessing them - *freely*.

In our own churches, we never take an offering during our meetings. There are a number of reasons for this. *First of all*, we believe that all giving to God must be joyful and voluntary. This is difficult to do if an offering is taken publicly. *Secondly*, all giving to God must be done in secret. It is not possible to give secretly, when people are watching you. (Others may not know *how much* you are giving, but they will still know you are giving). *Thirdly*, unbelievers may be present in our meetings and they do not have the privilege to give their money to God. They have to give themselves to God first, before they can give Him their money (*2 Cor.8:4,5; 3 John 7*). They must also know that the gospel they hear in the church, is free. They don't have to pay anything to hear it. So we don't embarrass them by taking an offering.

At the same time, in order to give an opportunity to believers to give money to God as an expression of their gratitude, we place a box in the meeting hall, where those who want to give joyfully and secretly can do so.

Most Christian workers are supported by the gifts and offerings of other believers. There is nothing wrong with this, because the Lord has directed that "*those who preach the gospel can get their living from the gospel*" (*1 Cor.9:14*). It appears as though Peter and most of the other apostles were supported like this - by other believers (*1 Cor.9:5,6*).

But we see a different example in Paul, who *supported himself and served the Lord* (*See 1 Cor.9:15-18; 2 Cor.12:14; 2 Thess.3:7-9; Acts 20:33-35*). In the *present* circumstances in India, there is a great need for many who are willing to serve the Lord like Paul.

This is the reason why in our churches, almost all of us elders support ourselves like Paul did, and serve the churches. This method has the added advantage, in poor countries like India, of sifting out those who seek to join a church as workers, for financial profit.

Let me now give a few guidelines to those disciples of the Lord who are considering full-time Christian work.

1. *Only if you receive a clear call from God* should you go forth into full-time Christian work.
2. Jesus called *only those who were faithfully engaged in a secular job*, to be His apostles. This seems to be the general rule in Scripture, although God can make exceptions. There seems to be a number of reasons why God chooses those who are working in secular professions:

(i) God proves a man in his secular job first, to see whether he is *hardworking* and *faithful* in handling money. The ones whom Jesus called were faithful and hardworking as fishermen and accountants etc.,

(ii) The willingness to *sacrifice* is also tested thereby, because one who gives up his secular job to serve the Lord full-time has to pay a price, unlike one who had no job to give up. By this test, a person can also know whether his "*call*" is genuinely from God or

not. It is easy for those who have nothing to give up to imagine that they are "*called by God*"!! Many are doing Christian work in India today only because they did not get any other job. It is therefore a *profession* for them and not a *calling*.

(iii) Only those who have worked in a secular profession will have the necessary *experience* to teach practical truths to other Christians who are struggling to be faithful in their secular jobs.

3. When God calls someone to full-time work, He would already have *equipped him with some gift* of the Spirit for the task to which He is calling him. So, if God is really calling you, He would already have borne witness to your labours (with fruit that lasts), even while you are in secular employment.

4. Finally, you should consider leaving your secular job *only when the pressure of the Lord's work has become so much* that there is *not enough time* for you to do it along with your secular job. You should not become like the many "full-time workers" who do *not* actually work full time at all, but sit around doing nothing most of the time and then visit a few homes on some evenings and have a couple of meetings a week. Most of them did more for the Lord when they had a secular job! The devil finds such idle full-time workers to be a fertile field to work in. And they fall into all types of sin - gossiping, adultery etc., - just because they did not have enough work to be occupied with every day.

God is looking for disciples and churches today who will demonstrate the principles of His kingdom to the world around them. May we respond to His call wholeheartedly.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

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