

MANNA

ISSUE 67

The Bible

THE
HOLY
BIBLE

- Sacraments
and Salvation

- Searching for God

- Peniel: Seeing the Truth

“The goal of Manna is to inspire believers to live an active faith through mutual encouragement and the study of biblical truths.”

MANNA
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The Bible

Editorial

by Jonathan Chou

Throughout history, the Bible has transformed countless people's lives. Criminals stopped breaking the law, drug addicts overcame their addiction, and the sick, disabled and depressed received hope and strength to face challenges in their lives.

The Bible is unlike any other book. It was written by holy men through God's direct inspiration. They recorded the word of God as they had received it, and these writings were subsequently compiled into the sixty-six books in the Bible. Although these forty authors lived at different times and had diverse backgrounds, their messages blend into one perfect piece, without contradiction. For “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:20–21).

The Lord Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (Jn 5:39). Paul wrote, “... the Holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). Again he wrote, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4).

Helen Keller, a renowned blind and deaf person, seemed to be doomed to a life of sorrow. Yet she gained hope and strength through the words in the Bible. When the Bible Society gave her a twenty-volume Braille Bible, she shared with her benefactor that she touched the pages of this special Bible with a heart of extraordinary thanksgiving. The Bible was like a staff that had held her up when she was in the shadows of despair and depths of trials; it was the only path that could guide her out of darkness.

Indeed, the psalmist rightly says, “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:89,105).

The Bible sustains our spiritual life. This is why the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jer 15:16; cf. Ps 19:7–10). Only the word of God can truly fill and satisfy us. It fills us with strength and provides us with abundant life (Eph 6:17; Rev 12:11; Jn 1:1,4; 10:10).

Mary liked to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His word. The Lord Jesus praised her for having chosen “that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (Lk 10:42). In like manner, the people in Berea, “received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

May we desire the word of God, meditating upon it daily, keeping it in our hearts and lives. The saints of old read the Scriptures “before the dawning of the morning” and late at night (Ps 119:147–148). Let us pray constantly for God's wisdom, so that the Spirit of truth will guide us into all truths (Jn 16:13; cf. 1 Cor 2:11–13). Meanwhile, let us strive to be teachable, so that when God awakens us and opens our ears to hear as the learned, we may receive His word, meditate on it and apply it in our daily lives (Is 50:4–5; Jas 1:21–25).

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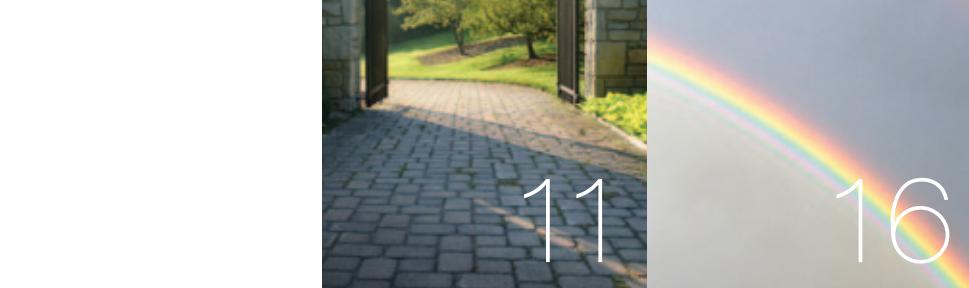
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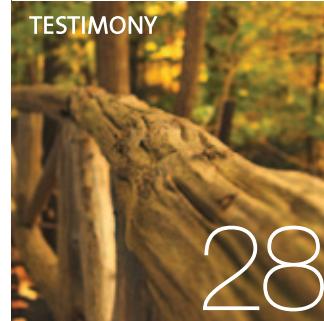


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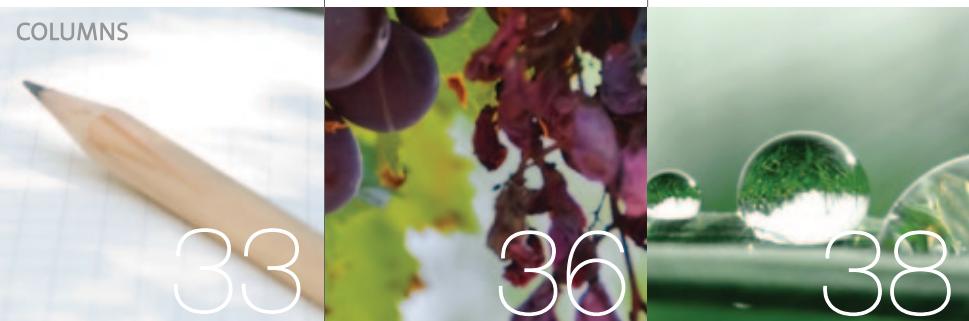
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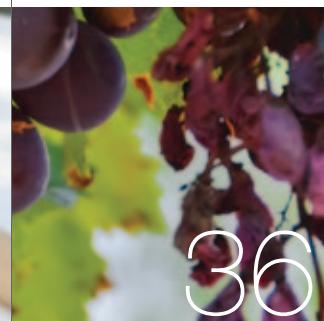


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The Bible



THEME SECTION

Be Equipped With God's Word

FF Chong—London, United Kingdom

A PERSONAL DUTY

The church invests tremendous effort to equip believers with God's word, with the hope that they will grow into spiritual maturity. Towards this end, the church organizes trainings for all ages, from religious education (RE) for school-aged children and youths to classes for the newly baptized, and Bible seminars for adults.

But the church faces a great challenge: despite these efforts, we continue to see believers drifting from the faith. Even those who have gone through the church's religious education system and training programs are not spared.

Sometimes it is not that the church has done insufficient work to help her flock mature spiritually. Rather, the individuals themselves lack the willingness to practice biblical teachings in their daily lives and the persistence to continue learning the word of God after seminars and RE classes.

The reasons vary but an essential point remains—how to maintain personal Bible study after communal learning. There is a need to reshape our mindset: although the church's instruction is important, we cannot totally rely on others for constant spiritual growth. Passive reception of God's word, owning a Bible but rarely or never reading it, is being irresponsible for our own spiritual health. Maintaining our spiritual vitality requires us to have a Berean motivation that comes from within to study the word (Acts 17:10-11). When we understand how important it is to study the Bible, we will make an effort to do so and in the process, realize that we can derive much joy from God's word. By abiding in His word, we are firmly anchored in Him and His church.

A PRACTICAL REALITY

Besides God's help, our conscientious effort is needed to make daily Bible study a reality. Having a daily Bible reading habit is a helpful start. Making time for personal Bible study is vital in the continual learning process. Wake up half an hour earlier or go to bed half an hour later to read God's word.

Start by reading small portions of Scriptures. It is important to understand what we are reading; otherwise, interest cannot be sustained. Reading the Scriptures is different from reading other books. It is an exercise of godliness that must be worked into our daily routine. We need to prayerfully get into a frame of mind that is open to God's voice and be determined to heed what we read (1 Tim 4:6; cf. 2 Tim 3:10). When we get into the habit of regular Bible reading, we will not do it on the spur of the moment, rushing through several chapters in one sitting and neglecting it altogether on another day.

Motivation to learn more results from daily contact with the Scriptures. So we should move on to gradually increase our Bible-reading time. Don't be content with inspirational reading only, but progress to studying the Bible in-depth, to be equipped with the word as spiritual weaponry.

This interest can be fostered by having a spiritual companion, such as our spouse, a friend, or a church co-worker, who either reads on the same schedule or shares the same keenness to search out common topics of interest. Knowing that someone is reading the Bible as we do is a huge boost to our persistence and confidence, and brings us closer together.

As the Bible states, "Two are better than one" (Eccl 4:9). When one becomes slack

- Make daily Bible reading a habit
- Start by reading small portions of Scriptures
- Gradually increase Bible reading time
- Progress to studying the Bible in-depth
- Study with a spiritual companion

the other can give him a lift. Studying the word together provides the opportunity to talk about our readings in greater depth, to build on each other's insights and develop our understanding of the Scriptures. This is much more rewarding than studying alone.

A RIGHT ATTITUDE

Determination to study the word of God must be founded on an understanding that this activity fortifies us against spiritual attacks and helps us to comprehend God's will better.

Determination to study the word of God must be founded on an understanding that this activity fortifies us against spiritual attacks and helps us to comprehend God's will better. Our diligent study must never be just an intellectual exercise; it should follow from our acceptance of the Bible as absolute truth. We seek to understand challenging passages not to fulfill our quest for knowledge but because we want to know God through His word. Thus we meditate on the word as much as we do the necessary research, and we measure ourselves against the standard of God as much as we expound the mysteries of God.

We know that it is never easy to admit our imperfections, but when we set the goal to understand ourselves better and figure out God's purpose for us (Ps 119:97-104), the word of God softens our heart to accept our shortcomings and motivates us to change. When we constantly come under the spotlight of God's word through study and reflection we cannot but come under its control and direction.

Throughout His earthly ministry, right up to the point of crucifixion, Jesus constantly did what He was taught by the Father (Jn 8:28). We must likewise have a teachable heart in our service to Him. (cf. Isa 50:4, 5). When we allow the Bible to teach us, it shapes our character as we serve God, benefiting others and ourselves (1 Tim 4:16).

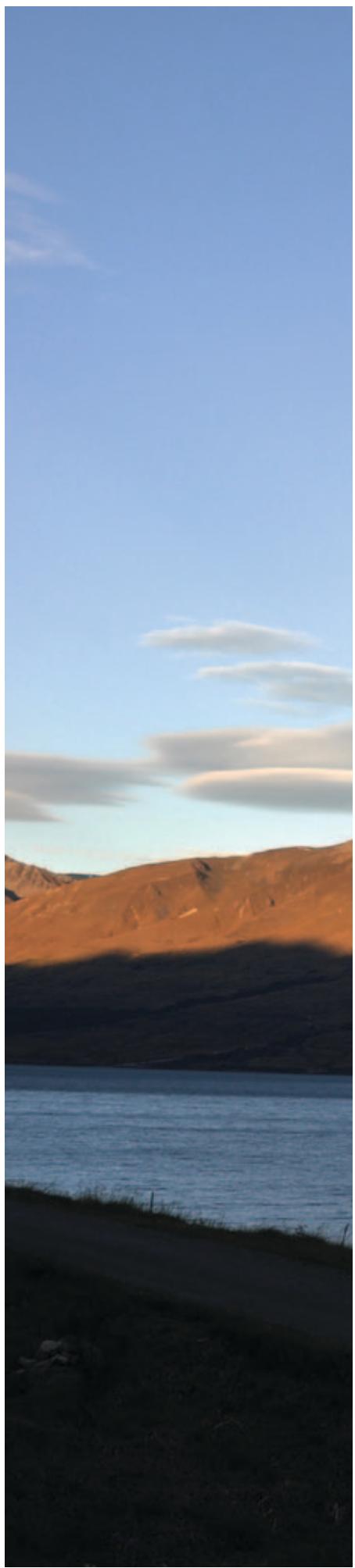
A DESIRABLE END—KEEP THE WORD BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

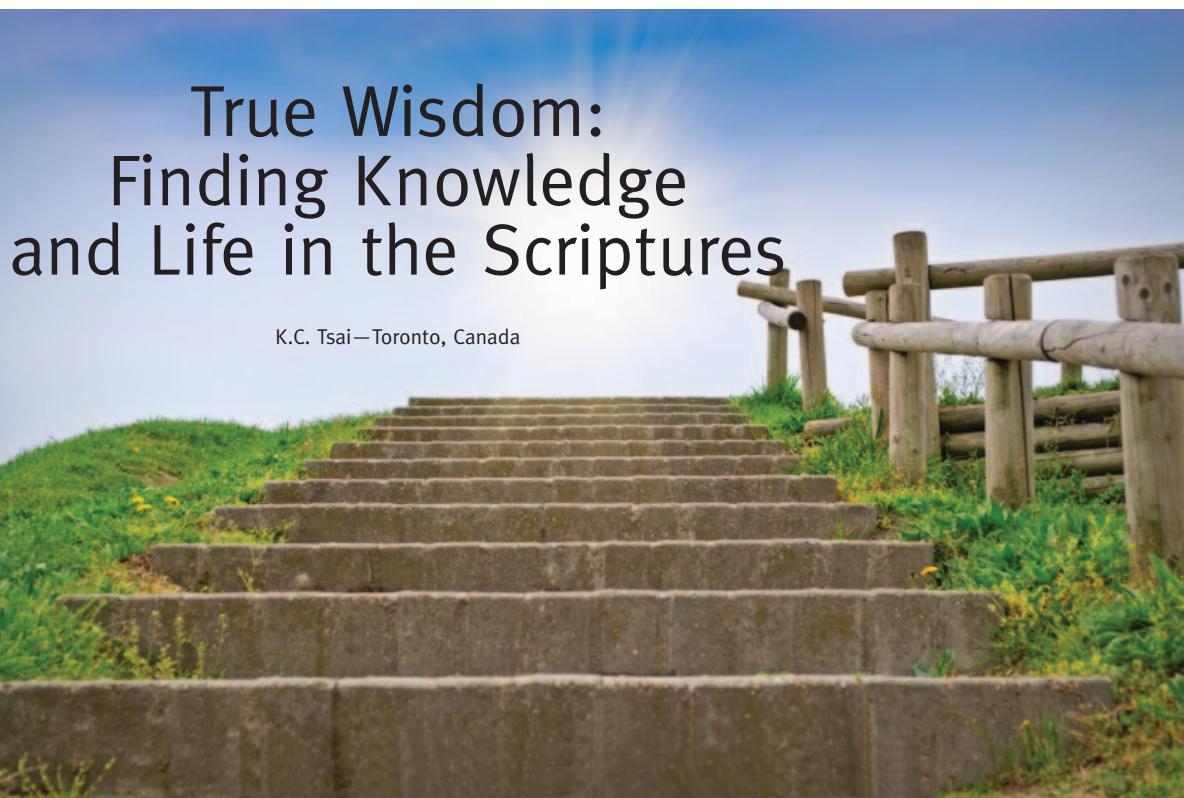
The word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17), and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (Jn 16:13). The Holy Spirit is thus both the revealer and executer of God's word. After receiving God's word and being saved by it, we have to honor it to the end. If we trample it down, it will be snatched away by the wicked one (Mt 13:4, 19; Lk 8:5, 12).

Sometimes believers and even church workers, though baptized in infancy, are ignorant of the basic truth, and they even argue over fundamental beliefs.

For this reason we must understand that the word is given in a pattern (Rom 2:20, 6:17, 18; 2 Tim 1:13), which is passed down from one generation to another. It is not given to change; hence "the deeps things of God" do not refer to new truths that will alter previously revealed truth (Gal 1:8-9). Instead, it means that the Holy Spirit deepens our understanding of the revealed truth. In fact, since the church is the pillar of the truth (1 Tim 3:15), and the fullness of the Spirit (Eph 1:23), all truth has been given to the church.

Finally, we rely on the Spirit to perform and preserve the word that we have received. The Bible is profitable in many ways to the man of God, equipping him for every form of good work (2 Tim 3:16-17) because it is living and active, a sharp effective sword by the working of the Spirit in the inner man (Heb 4:12). ★





True Wisdom: Finding Knowledge and Life in the Scriptures

K.C. Tsai—Toronto, Canada

Learning the Holy Scriptures is an essential part of Jewish life since the Jews believe that eternal life lies within them (Jn 5:39). Jewish children learn the Scriptures from young so that they will know the Law and the prophets by the age of thirteen. This is when they become a "Bar Mitzvah", or "Son of the Commandment", and start to be accountable for their own actions.

Despite such emphasis on learning the Scriptures, the Jews rejected Jesus when He came into the world. Jesus rebuked them:

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

(Jn 5:39–40)

On the other hand, there were many who did go to Jesus. They were there when He preached the gospel of the heavenly kingdom and performed miracles. They followed Him, amazed by His miracles, and they desired Him to feed them with physical bread. Jesus fed them but He also taught them the truth about the bread of life. He said He was "the bread which came down from heaven" (Jn 6:41), and "those who eat this bread will live forever" (Jn 6:58). After hearing this, many of His disciples left.

These were people who had come to Him. They had eaten and drunk their fill in His presence; they had heard His profound and precious teachings. Yet pitifully, they remained mere bystanders of His salvation.

Today, some of us may be guilty of the same mistakes. We devote our lives to the study of the Bible but fail to see the eternal life that is within it. We think we have come to Jesus because we regularly attend Sabbath services (and more) and read our Bibles on schedule. Yet in the Lord's eyes, we may have turned our metaphorical backs on Him.

So how do we avoid repeating history? How can we truly gain life from the Scriptures?

I. BAR MITZVAH: STRIVE TO BE A TRUE SON OF THE COMMANDMENT

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

(2 Tim 3:14–15)

Timothy had known the Holy Scriptures since childhood (2 Tim 3:15). Therefore

he qualified as a true Bar Mitzvah when he turned thirteen, although he was not circumcised at the time. However, giving young Timothy access to the Scriptures had not been an easy task for his mother, Eunice.

During Timothy's time, the Holy Scriptures—comprising just the Old Testament—had to be inscribed word by word onto parchment. To listen to God's word, the people had to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath (Acts 15:21). But was there a synagogue in Lystra where Eunice and her son lived? From the following, we can infer that there probably was not any synagogue.

Throughout his missionary journeys, Paul made it a principle to always preach in the Jewish synagogues first (Acts 13:5, 14–41; 14:1; 17:1–2, 10, 16–17; 18:1, 4; 19:1, 8–10). He did so because he thought, "it was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you {the Jews} first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

However when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Lystra during their first missionary trip, they immediately performed a miracle and preached the gospel on the street. Later, they were stoned and dragged out of Lystra by the Jews who came from Antioch of Pisidia,

This is thus the first step to receiving the true wisdom of salvation: We must strive to ensure that we and our children and grandchildren receive God's word of life.

and Iconium. Throughout all the events, there was no mention of a synagogue in Lystra. Had there been a synagogue, they would have gone there upon their arrival, as Paul's principle dictated.

In addition, the Bible says that Timothy was praised by the brethren, both in his hometown, Lystra, and in Iconium (Acts 16:2). This indicates that he must have been a regular there. Since Timothy's father was Greek, it was his mother who made the effort to bring him up in the faith. Most likely, she took Timothy to Iconium to listen to readings of the Scriptures and the rabbinic teachings. To do this, mother and son would have had to leave early on Friday in order to arrive in the neighboring village of Iconium by sunset. In this way, Timothy acquired his knowledge of the Scriptures and became just as well-versed in God's word as most of his Jewish peers.

In 2 Timothy 3:14–15, Paul said Timothy knew from whom he had learned the truth. There were clearly three sources. The first must have been the Holy Spirit. Without the revelation of the Holy Spirit no one can truly understand the things of God, for the Holy Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10).

Second, Timothy gained a profound understanding of the salvation grace from Paul, his spiritual father, who took him along on missionary journeys. These helped Timothy explore the depth and true meaning of life. But the most fundamental role belonged to his mother, Eunice. She did whatever was necessary to ensure that her son was educated in the word of God. Simply put, she had sparked and accompanied him in his spiritual journey towards maturity.

This is thus the first step to receiving the true wisdom of salvation: We must strive to ensure that we and our children and grandchildren receive God's word of life.

II. SHEMA (HEAR): STRIVE TO UNDERSTAND THE ORACLES OF GOD

Our heavenly Father is a God Who seems to hide Himself, for we often find it difficult to understand His plans and actions (Isa 45:15). Yet He puts in much effort to convey His oracles to His chosen people (Rom 3:2) and uses various ways to do so.

Once, He spoke directly to the Israelites from the top of Mount Sinai where He gave them the Ten Commandments. However, the people were terrified by the thunder and lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the smoking mountain. They trembled and stood afar, asking Moses to mediate instead.

God had spoken directly to Moses, both on Mount Sinai and from above the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant, so that Moses could pass God's oracles to the children of Israel. And earlier, God had spoken directly with the patriarchs and the prophets.



Sometimes, God's word was revealed through the response of various biblical figures. An example was David. After he had done his utmost to prepare the materials for temple building, he said, "Who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You" (1 Chr 29:14).

Moreover, God's messages may be communicated through events. For

instance, He allowed the Babylonians to invade the Holy City and destroy the temple because He wanted His people to realize how repugnant their sins were. On the Babylonian invasion, He sent the prophet Jeremiah to comfort the Israelites. The prophet's lament reassured the Israelites that they could still have hope in a dire situation; for God's unceasing mercy and compassion are new every morning (Lam 3:22–26).

Today, God continues to speak to us—through the Scriptures, events in our lives and other channels. We must not only strive to hear but also seek to understand. And the only way to understand His word is to have a reverent heart that is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

III. TRUE FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS: STRIVE TO BECOME WISE FOR SALVATION

Like many Jews in Paul's time, Timothy had a good knowledge of the Scriptures. However, this could not make him wise for salvation until he believed in Christ Jesus. Today, we have acquired knowledge of the Scriptures and a belief in Jesus but does our faith truly make us wise for salvation? What kind of faith do we require?

Jesus said,

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Mt 11:28)

If we want salvation (rest for our souls), we must "come to Him". But coming to Him means taking up His yoke and learning from Him to be gentle and lowly in heart. What does it mean to be gentle and lowly in heart?

The prophet Zechariah said that the King of Peace would make a lowly entry into the holy city (Zech 9:9). However, Jesus was hailed as a glorious king when He entered Jerusalem triumphantly. The multitudes ushered Him in with great honor and praises, saying, "Hosanna

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to the son of David... Hosanna!" (Mt 21:9). Once in the holy city, He drove out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. Why did the prophet describe Jesus as "lowly", despite these vivid scenes of a furious Jesus?

On the surface, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem appeared to be a splendid affair. But in fact, Jesus demonstrated true humility through His complete submission to the will of the Father. He was determined to endure the agony of crucifixion that awaited Him. He humbled Himself and courageously took up the bitter cup that the Father gave Him.

To find life in the Scriptures, we need to have true faith in Christ Jesus. This requires us to be true disciples who follow Him in word and deed.

As a sacrificial lamb waiting to be slaughtered, He bore His yoke alone in front of the cheering multitudes, and cleansed the temple for His Father. Only total humility and submission to the Father's will could accomplish such a thing (Jn 14:10).

Sometimes it may be difficult to be gentle and lowly in heart; but if we strive to imitate the Lord Jesus and focus on the will of God, we shall be victorious. Jesus says that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. If we give up ourselves to follow the will of God, we shall experience this lightness and ease. Like Paul, we shall be strengthened by Christ Jesus and be content in whatever circumstances (Phil 4:11–13). In addition, we shall be free from any complaint against God and men.

To find life in the Scriptures, we need to have true faith in Christ Jesus. This requires us to be true disciples who follow Him in word and deed, and be transformed from listeners to doers. As Jesus says, whoever hears His words and does them, He will liken him to a wise man who built his house upon the rock, able to withstand the rain, floods and winds (Mt 7:24–26).

CONCLUSION

The world trumpets the importance of knowledge. But as Christians, knowledge

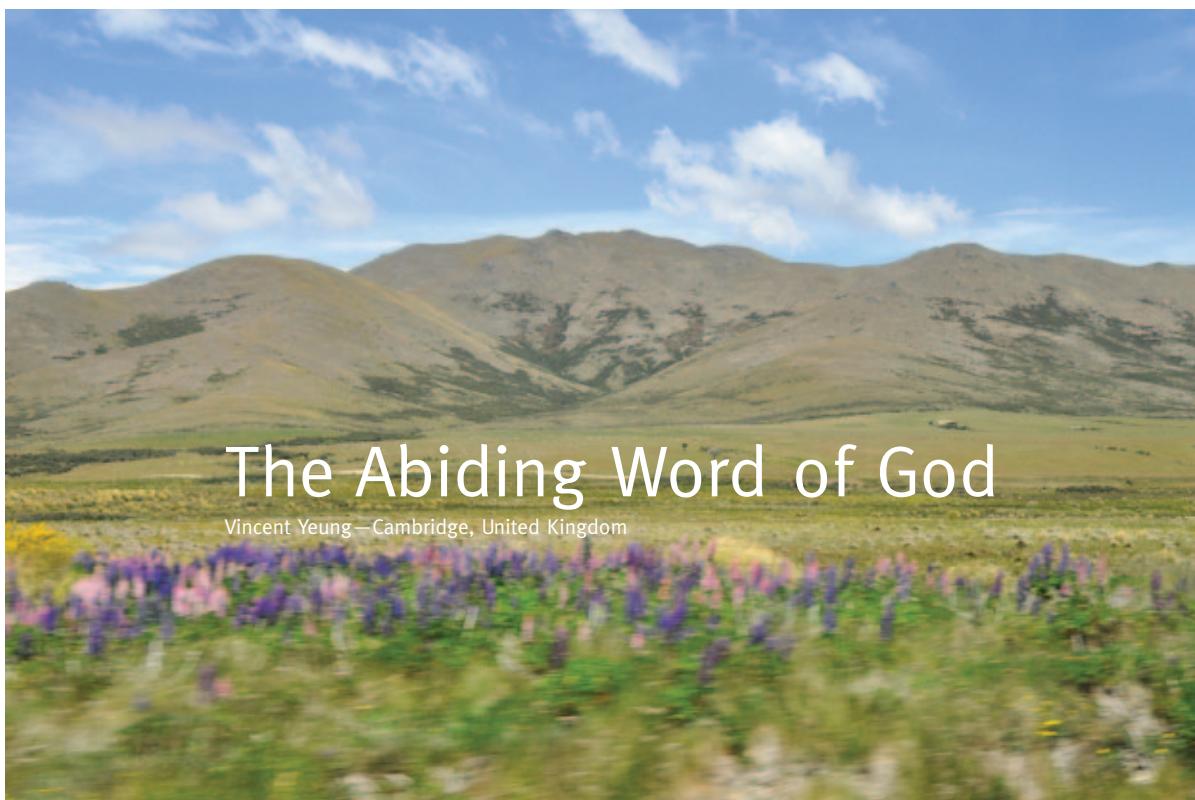
of the Scriptures is even more important. Without this, we cannot find the meaning and destination of life.

Eunice was an outstanding mother, and particularly so in the religious education of her son. Through exhausting and countless trips walking the rugged road to Iconium, she made sure that her son was well-versed in the Scriptures. This serves as a beautiful example for us—as parents and believers. No matter what circumstances we face, we must provide our children with access to biblical knowledge. At the same time, parents themselves cannot afford to cease learning and understanding the Scriptures because these are words of eternal life (Jn 6:63, 68).

But having said this, knowledge alone benefits us little. It is vital for us to use our biblical knowledge to nurture a true faith in Christ Jesus—following His footsteps, practicing His word in our daily lives.

In summary, true wisdom is not merely knowledge of the Scriptures. Gaining salvation from the Scriptures demands a genuine faith, discipleship, and an enduring determination to let God's will dictate our decisions and our life everyday. *





The Abiding Word of God

Vincent Yeung—Cambridge, United Kingdom

"The grass withers, the flower fades"—a reflection on the ephemeral existence of living creatures in the eyes of a seemingly unchanging observer.

What is said shows our own fragility; it is a projection of humanity's fleeting existence against the universe. Human minds are the product of changes too. Early perceptions and interpretations tend to shape later perceptions and interpretations. Our ideas and values are conditioned, augmented and shaped by the flux of history. In this changing world we are used to adapting ideas, skills and values as well as embracing new ones.

Science is often portrayed as a key driver of change and the development of human civilization. Science helps us to observe, explain and predict natural phenomena by experiment. We are brought up in the current world of scientific rationality. We do not take old wives' tales in trust anymore; we want to reserve our judgment, experience and try for ourselves. Such skepticism and experimenting also creep into our trust in authority, such as parents, political leaders and religion.

A third of Church of England clergy doubt or disbelieve in the physical resurrection and only half are convinced of the truth of the virgin birth, according to a new survey¹. The poll of nearly 2,000 of the church's 10,000 clergy also found

that only half believe that faith in Christ is the only route to salvation. Clergy, faced with intelligent and educated congregations, increasingly have to think "very carefully" about how to present complex doctrine credibly. Are we also subjected to the same influence? Do you believe in the word of God?

THE PERILS OF THE LAST DAY

Jesus warned that many false prophets will rise up and deceive many (Mt 24:11). Power, signs and lying wonders follow these false prophets and false Christs (Mt 24:23–24; 2 Thess 1:10). Those who do not receive the love of the truth will be deceived by their unrighteous deceptions (2 Thess 1:10). On a less dramatic level, secularization slowly poisons present day societies. Biblical teachings are irrelevant in how society conducts its business. It is even an embarrassment to talk about faith in public. The traditional Christian is marginalized, shunted and challenged by a generation deemed more intelligent, rational and educated.

Many of the teachings of the Bible become out of fashion and some denominations have become more tolerant to these aberrant trends: divorce and remarriage in the church, homosexuality etc. No wonder the Bible warns that people in the last days only

hold a form of godliness but deny its power (2 Tim 3:1–5). They call themselves Christians but they do not believe Christ is the only way to salvation. The basic tenets of Christianity, such as resurrection and Christ's second coming, are not taken seriously.

The advance in mass media and social networks allows quick communication and sharing of useful information. However, when misused, a few people can corrupt and destabilize the church by simply posting false, misleading and slanderous information anonymously. False doctrines are published on unofficial websites and nobody takes responsibility for what has been said; as a result, the uninstructed are easily led astray.

All these deceptions share a common thread—they are characterized by lying signs of false prophets (Mt 24:24), the deception of evil men (2 Tim 3:13), and the cheat of philosophy and empty deceit, which are not based on Christ (Col 2:8). People prone to deception are those who do not love the truth (2 Thess 2:10). Without a heart to search the truth and a strong foundation of faith, people are tossed and carried about by every wind of doctrine, dishonesty, deceit, and cunningness (Eph 4:14). If we believe in collective human values only, and do not have any anchor of faith to adhere to, we stand on shaky ground.

We are brought up in the current world of scientific rationality. We do not take old wives' tales in trust anymore; we want to reserve our judgment, experience and try for ourselves. Such skepticism and experimenting also creep into our trust in authority, such as parents, political leaders and religion.

GOD'S WORD SHALL STAND FOREVER

Contrary to the fleeting transition of human values and ideas, the word of God stands forever (Isa 40:8). It broke into human history through God's self-revelation, with the ultimate goal to save mankind. We never have been and never will be wise or intelligent enough to find God. God has to find us—all human interaction with God begins with His gracious move.

Abraham did not choose to go to the promised land; God showed him the way (Gen 12:1). The prophets did not imagine and theorize God's word; God came and showed them His word as well as visions (Isa 1:1; Amos 1:1). The Lord has spoken, who will not prophesy (Amos 3:8)?

The otherness of God's word contrasts with the best that man could offer. Man can say whatever he likes, but there is no guarantee that it will happen. God's ways are higher than our ways, and once spoken, His words will be accomplished (Isa 55:8–11). Man himself is like a flower and as grass (1 Pet 1:24); but for God, even His word is eternal (Isa 40:8). Therefore, Jesus declared, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Mk 13:31; Lk 21:33; Mt 24:35).

THE ETERNAL WORD AND THE IMMUTABLE GOD

The eternal nature of God's word rests upon an unchanging God. The LORD is the true God; He is living and everlasting (Jer 10:10). Unlike great philosophers and teachers in the past, God lives forever. The psalmist links God's eternity with

His immutability and contrasts it to the transience and changeability of men (Ps 102:26–27)—men shall become old like a garment, but God is always the same. He does not change in mind or interest (Ps 89:34; 2 Cor 1:17–20), an attribute that accords with His omniscience. As He continued to inspire the Bible penmen over thousands of years, the message is consistent, coherent and unfailing (2 Pet 1:21), for right from the start, He saw through the full length of time. For this reason, His word is absolute.

Even if men deny God, He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13). His love towards His chosen people endures forever (Ps 118:1–4; 136:16). Despite many twists and turns in the history of His chosen

and the way to salvation that was once for all delivered to the saints (cf. Jud 1:3). The word of God is complete; there is no need for addition or subtraction (Rev 22:18; cf. Gal 1:8). God may inspire individuals to have a better understanding of the Bible, but fresh insights must not give rise to new interpretations that contradict and move away from foundational truths.

God's word needs to be "delivered", "received" and "held fast to" (Tit 1:9). Indeed, God expects us to pass on the pattern of sound words from one generation to the other. Paul left us a good example: He delivered to the Corinthians what he had received (1 Cor 15:3)—the gospel that forms the foundation of faith and the means to salvation (1 Cor 15:1–2). As God's workers we need to deliver the word faithfully, without addition and adulteration to suit personal preference and interpretations or to satisfy our vanity.

If we are on the receiving end we should accept the word of God with faith, without any doubt and reservation. We should not change God's word or interpret it our own way to accommodate our weaknesses. Once received, we should treasure it. Paul exhorted Timothy to hold fast to the word of God in faith and love (2 Tim 1:13), and to guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 1:14).

Moreover, we need to share and deliver the word to faithful men (2 Tim 2:2).

CONCLUSION

Even in the best of all possible (human) worlds, individuals can be mistaken.



people, God never forsook them (1 Sam 12:22) because His love never changes (Mal 3:6). God prepared our salvation even before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:3–4)—a mystery concealed in ancient prophecies (1 Pet 10:12). Today, the mystery of Christ is revealed through the gospel (Eph 3:5,7 cf. Rom 16:25), which is "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). The omniscient God is able to fulfill His faithful word (Ps 119:86) uttered long ago.

HOLD ON TO THE PATTERN OF FAITH

The unchanging will of God is subsumed in the person and word of Jesus (1 Pet 1:25). He is the only way to God (Jn 14:6),

The otherness of God's word contrasts with the best that man could offer. Man can say whatever he likes, but there is no guarantee that it will happen. God's ways are higher than our ways, and once spoken, His words will be accomplished (Isa 55:8–11). Man himself is like a flower and as grass (1 Pet 1:24); but for God, even His word is eternal (Isa 40:8).

The psalmist links God's eternity with His immutability and contrasts it to the transience and changeability of men (Ps 102:26–27)—men shall become old like a garment, but God is always the same. He does not change in mind or interest (Ps 89:34; 2 Cor 1:17–20), an attribute that accords with His omniscience.

When a former gold standard cannot account for new observations, new theories replace the old one. Science is basically empirical. Theories are valid until they are no longer able to explain new observations.

If truth is relative, then absolute right and wrong become doubtful. If truth is relative, there would be only subjective and indefinite answers for the purpose and meaning of life. God has already provided the absolute answers to life's most fundamental questions. Therefore, true believers should not put their trust on the shaky ground of empirical sciences and philosophies.

Jesus emphatically pronounced that He is the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Him (Jn 14:6).

God has offered us His word, which is in Jesus (Eph 4:21)—the unchanging truth that abides forever.

In the last days, many false prophets and false teachers will rise up among us who secretly bring out destructive heresies (2 Pet 2:1). Their messages are very persuasive, logical sounding and enticing. However, as lovers of the truth we will be able to discern what is right or wrong. We should therefore reaffirm our

trust in the unchanging word of God. If we hold on to the sound pattern of faith, which has been once and for all delivered to us, we will be able to pass on and safeguard the precious truth of salvation for future generations. *

¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1403106/One-third-of-clergy-do-not-believe-in-the-Resurrection.html>

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Call for Devotionals

"I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways." (Ps 119:15)

Most of us regularly read the Bible and ponder upon God's word and His works. However, not many of us may take time to actually pen down our thoughts. But if you do, you may actually be writing a devotional.

A devotional is a pithy article (300 to 350 words) inspired by biblical teachings.

Has a verse recently caught your attention, giving you insight on God's love and a Christian's relationship with Him?

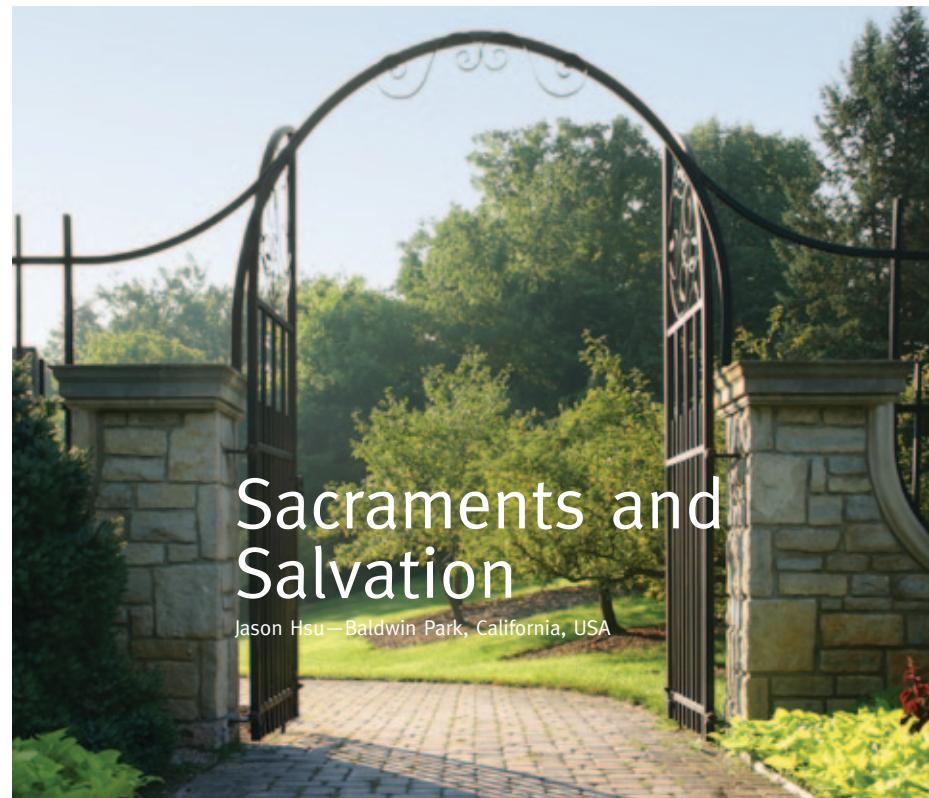
Write it down and share this spiritual nourishment!

If you wish to read recent and archived devotionals written by our church members, go to www.tjc.org and members.tjc.org.

To submit your devotional, please indicate "Devotional" in the subject line and send it to manna@tjc.org.



DOCTRINAL & BIBLE STUDIES



Sacraments and Salvation

Jason Hsu—Baldwin Park, California, USA

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

(Rom 1:16)

No topic is more relevant or important for Christians than the gospel of salvation. The gospel impacts our life of faith, our ministry, and ultimately, our salvation. So a clear understanding of the gospel is very important for True Jesus Church (TJC) believers.

When TJC believers share the gospel with Christian friends, the role of sacraments in salvation may become a point of divergence. In many areas in life, differences should be embraced. God's church is vibrant because of diversity. But gospel fundamentals cannot be compromised or else the gospel's entire foundation disappears.

A gospel that teaches the administration of new covenant sacraments¹ for salvation is not opposed to "justification by faith" or "salvation by grace". Instead, the sacraments that Christ commanded and instituted should and do play a vital role in our salvation. Rather than undermining a relationship with Christ, sacraments establish it. This is the very reason Christ instituted the sacraments under the new covenant in His blood.

For instance, when Jesus says, "Most

assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God,"² He is pointing out a fundamental means of salvation. The essence speaks of regeneration but historically, "born of water" in John 3:5 follows the pattern of Christ (baptized and then receiving the Spirit) and refers to water baptism³; this interpretation has been delivered from the time of the apostolic church and hundreds of years thereafter. Understood rightly, sacraments are not mere religious rites, but essential means of regeneration and salvation in Christ.

DEFINING THE SACRAMENTS

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me...For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."

(Jn 13: 8, 15)

Throughout history, "sacrament" has been defined in many different ways. The fact that "sacrament" is not exactly a biblical term makes it difficult to define. Tertullian, an early church father, first used the Latin *sacramentum*, meaning "mystery"⁴, to refer to baptism, the Lord's Supper, etc.

In the Bible, however, "mystery" is not used to refer to what we now call

The sacraments that Christ commanded and instituted should and do play a vital role in our salvation. Rather than undermining a relationship with Christ, sacraments establish it. This is the very reason Christ instituted the sacraments under the new covenant in His blood.

sacraments. Yet the fact that the church continues to use the word "sacrament" for various procedures to initiate and establish a person's relationship with Christ only confirms the deep sense of "mystery" in sacraments. Just as we cannot rationally explain how the blood of animals atoned for God's people under the old covenant except by faith in God's word, we are hard pressed to rationally explain how common physical elements, used in new covenant sacraments, affect our spiritual life in Christ.

But if we believe in the authority and effect of new covenant sacraments according to Christ's promises, we do it on the basis of faith—faith not only in Christ, but also in His word and the promised effect of the sacraments founded upon that word.

Traditionally, TJC uses a three-part definition to define sacrament:

1. Jesus instituted and commanded the practice.⁵
2. Jesus set an example for the institution by administering/undergoing the institution Himself.⁶
3. The institution is related to our salvation in Christ.⁷

Using these criteria, TJC administers three sacraments: water baptism, footwashing, and Holy Communion. Marriage, considered a sacrament by some, is not a sacrament under these criteria, for Christ neither commanded marriage nor entered into it. Moreover, marriage is not related to salvation.

WHY SOME CHRISTIANS DISCOUNT NEW COVENANT SACRAMENTS

"And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."
(Mt 15:9)

"[H]aving a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (2 Tim 3:5)

Some discount sacraments as part of the gospel because they take this as

preaching unnecessary "religion" (man-made forms, rituals, and formulae) in opposition to true "relationship" (a heart-felt, transformative connection with Christ).

Viewed as mutually exclusive, "religion" seems to inevitably lead to legalism, while "relationship" inevitably leads to a regenerated life in Christ. Sacraments, if seen as *human* religious institutions, are largely discounted since we are saved by faith, not religion. As a result, new covenant sacraments, although commanded by Christ, are largely viewed as optional symbolic rituals. These rituals merely confirm that God has already transformed us inwardly. Of necessity, sacraments become mere signposts of a prior redemption,

We do it on the basis of faith—faith not only in Christ, but also in His word and the promised effect of the sacraments founded upon that word.

essentially devoid of Christ's promise and spiritual effect, i.e., "ritual".

Truly God must transform our heart inwardly before we accept any sacrament by faith outwardly; yet this does not negate the fact that sacraments themselves are important historical means⁸ by which God effects His promise of salvation.⁹

Throughout history, terrible things have been done in the name of religion.¹⁰ But, for the Christian, religion and relationship are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, religion is just another way to say "belief" must be realized in "practice." If practiced in truth, religion establishes and even strengthens our relationship with God and others. When faith finds real form, it will truly function for our salvation. But to put all faith practices and relationship in conflict

suggests Christianity has no visible form, which is simply untrue.

True faith always manifests in some visible form, pattern, or behavior. In this sense, every faith has "religion." The most important question is not whether our faith has some practice attached to it; rather it is whether our forms and practices are approved by God or by man.

The old covenant had regulations and forms for atonement by blood, including the scapegoat as a picture of the transfer of sins.¹¹ Truly, God provided these forms of atonement; but the Israelites could only receive God's promise of atonement if they did so by faith¹².

Although animal sacrifices under the Mosaic covenant could not perfectly atone for sin¹³, this does not mean God's promise of atonement was without effect. In other words, God was not joking when He commanded His people to make certain sacrifices to atone for sin. In reality, the source of atonement is God Himself, and the animal sacrifices were just the means God used. In the new covenant, atonement finds its ultimate fulfillment in the sacrificial offer of Christ's body and blood on the cross, once for all.¹⁴

Sadly, some fear if we attach any faith practice, such as performing sacraments, to the foundational work of Jesus Christ, we diminish Christ's work and turn salvation into a works-righteousness salvation. As a popular evangelical catchphrase says: "Religion says, 'Do!' Christ says, 'Done!'" For this reason, even (human) faith itself is explained as a divine gift and work.

Dead religion is real. Faith easily becomes formulaic. For instance, some Christians may claim, "I confessed Jesus with my mouth, therefore, I am saved. I was baptized, therefore, I'm saved. I partook of Communion, so I'm saved. I obey all the commandments to the letter, so I'm saved." An overly legalistic





mindset is dangerous, and it sets the wrong foundation for our salvation and relationship with Christ.

Christians should never think that they are absolutely saved because they were baptized, had footwashing, or partook of the Holy Communion. Judas Iscariot's example proves that sacramental participation is *not* the absolute guarantee of salvation. Although not biblically explicit, Judas was obviously baptized, had footwashing, and partook of the last supper with Christ.¹⁵ If Judas' story tells us anything, it tells us *ritually* undergoing sacraments is not sufficient to ensure our salvation.

In response to dead religion, some Christians only allow for faith itself or "bare faith" to be the basis of salvation. Now many evangelicals understand "justification" as synonymous with "salvation", so "justification by

Most Christians accept that Christ's blood justifies us and that salvation does not automatically rain down on all humanity. So, if redemption is not universal but is historical, there must be some human action by which we accept and receive God's grace of salvation. This historical act may serve as a fundamental means (not a foundation) for receiving Christ's righteousness to our account.

faith" means "salvation by faith." The very act of asserting faith in Christ itself puts a person into a "saved" relationship with Christ. This is dangerously formulaic—an "instantaneous salvation event" saving a person once and for all. But faith apart from true practice is a dead faith. If a proclamation of faith in Christ itself, at one moment in time, is all that is required to be justified, anything on top of that moment is "extra" ritual or religion and has nothing to do with our salvation.

THE FOUNDATION OF OUR SALVATION

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

(Eph 2:8–9)

What is salvation by faith? Christians often forget that our salvation consists of two different, yet important aspects: (a) the point of acceptance by faith in Christ; and (b) the process of salvation in Christ. Both are necessary.

The Bible does indeed say, "...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9). But we must take the whole counsel of God's word.

James 2:24 speaks of being "justified by works, and not by faith alone." Just as faith without works is a dead faith, faith itself does not justify us. Just as the body has no vitality without the spirit, faith has no life apart from the works that manifest it.¹⁶

Yet neither our outward works nor our faith alone forms the foundation of our salvation, for salvation is not founded upon man.

The foundation of our salvation is God's grace—pure and simple. And the source of divine grace is God Himself. In John's gospel, God is called the Word; this Word became flesh and dwelt among us.²³ And we know that this Word that became flesh is Jesus Christ. He is God Himself, who came to save His people from their sins and take away the sin of the world.²⁴

"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (Jn 1:17)

Once we've established the foundation of our salvation: (a) God's grace, (b) God Himself, and (c) Jesus Christ and His work, we are ready to understand the means of our salvation.

SALVATION WITH OR WITHOUT HUMAN MEANS?

The foundation of our salvation is God's grace—pure and simple. And the source of divine grace is God Himself.

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

(Tit 3:4–6)

Christians understand that a divide separates humanity from God; this divide is called sin. By God's grace, however, Christ came to mediate our alienation and reconcile us back to God.

We speak of salvation as something God accomplishes through His mercy. This naturally leads us to the question: If salvation is totally God's doing, what role, if any, do I have in this? Practically speaking, Christians believe both in God's sovereignty (control) and human responsibility; both are biblical.

So we may ask another question: Is salvation accomplished with or without human means? For the Christian, the answer must be: "With human means."

The Bible speaks of salvation in all tenses, i.e., past,¹⁷ present,¹⁸ and future.¹⁹ We should not deny the assurance of our salvation.²⁰ But it's important to understand that redemption plays out in history. For this reason, the Bible often speaks of our spiritual growth and the process of continuing in what we believe.²¹ Apostle Paul preached "faith working through love," being a "new creation" in Christ, and "keeping the commandments of God" as what matters beyond physical circumcision.²²

Christ Himself, the Word that became flesh, must be acknowledged as a historical, fully human, means of our salvation.²⁵ This allows us to establish that there is not only a divine but also a human means of grace in our salvation.

If we want to understand justification and salvation correctly, we need to understand the concept of imputation or accounting of Christ's righteousness to our account. Just as a bankrupt person can never legally pay off his debts without someone either putting money into his account or forgiving him his debts, a sinner can only meet God's righteous requirements through Christ's intervention. As we begin to recognize the reality of sin and evil, we begin to understand humanity's desperate need for both a mediator and Savior.

The bridge to making peace between God and man is Christ's blood. Most Christians accept that Christ's blood justifies us²⁶ and that salvation does not automatically rain down on all humanity.

So, if redemption is not universal but is historical, there must be some human action by which we accept and receive God's grace of salvation. This historical act may serve as a fundamental *means* (not a foundation) for receiving Christ's righteousness to our account.

The basic human means to obtain salvation is faith in Christ, a commonly accepted concept among evangelicals. Therefore, sacraments are "of faith" in Christ not human works. The "human" or "historical" act of receiving salvation (i.e., sacrament) has no merit in itself; only God's grace, not human virtue, determines whether or not a person's heart can be opened to the gospel of salvation.²⁷

So Titus 3:4–6 tells us salvation is not of our own works of righteousness. At the same time, it tells us we are saved "through" the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. This speaks to both the divine grace and the historical means of salvation by which we may be saved.

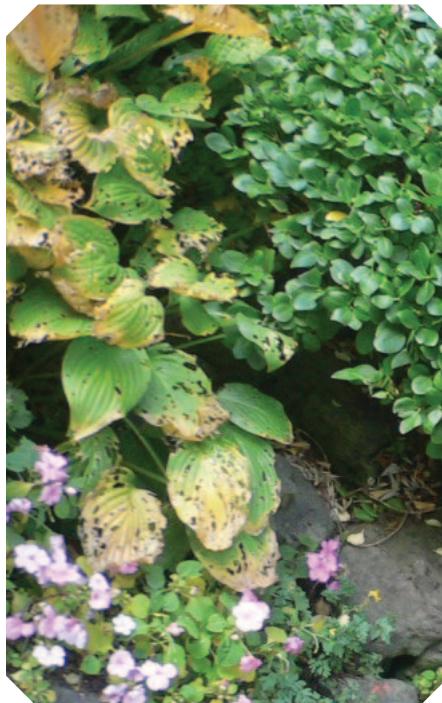
FAITH IS A MEANS OF GRACE IN SALVATION

*Now when [Jesus] was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many **believed** in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had*

*no need that anyone should testify of man, for **He knew what was in man.***

(Jn 2:23–25)

Faith, trust, or reliance is an important foundation for human action. But faith is not something we can easily quantify. If someone says, "I have 50% faith it will rain tomorrow," that statement itself may be harder to verify than "There is a 50% chance of rain." We can measure conditions for rain, but can we similarly measure conditions for faith? Like love, faith is generally intangible and immeasurable. We look at certain actions and say, "This person has great faith. That person has deep love." But even actions cannot tell the whole story.



People act for many reasons. A man courting a woman may give her a lavish diamond ring. The act alone cannot tell the whole story. We may assume the man is acting out of pure love and devotion. But maybe the man acted out of greed (the woman was wealthy). Maybe he acted out of pressure (his parents told him he had to marry this woman for status). Or maybe he did act out of pure love (the woman could offer him nothing, but he fully devoted himself to her).

Our actions cannot always fully reveal our motives, but they may be evidence of them. In the same way, acts of "faith" (or even religion) in themselves cannot tell the whole story. God alone knows the human heart, for He knows what is in man.

It is not enough to only understand that faith is the means of our salvation, we must take it a step further. What type of faith can save? Faith in a fairy godmother? Faith that says, "Jesus paid it. I believe it. That's the end of it." Or is there something deeper? Hopefully, there is something deeper.

Understanding the means of salvation (i.e., faith in Christ) is just as important as understanding salvation's foundation. At its core, faith in Christ must be grounded upon God's word—the bedrock of God's promises. If we cannot trust God's word, what good are His promises? So the absolute standard for the Christian faith is God's word, divinely revealed to those whom He loved throughout history; found in the sacred pages of the Bible. By that word, we are born again²⁸ and receive the gospel.²⁹

SACRAMENTS ARE NECESSARY MEANS OF THE GRACE OF SALVATION

*"But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that **form** of doctrine to which you were delivered."* (Rom 6:17)

The sacraments that the church administers today are founded upon God's promises.

According to the promise of the Scriptures:

1. Water baptism effects the forgiveness of sins and imparts newness of life.³⁰

2. Footwashing, by those sent by Christ, allows us to have a part with the Lord.³¹

3. Holy Communion allows us to have Christ's life and a share in the resurrection on the last day.³²

On the surface, when a person publicly accepts Christ by getting baptized or participates in any sacrament, we may think this is mere religious ritual. Can common water effect forgiveness of sins? How could footwashing allow us to have a part with Christ? How does partaking the body and blood of Jesus allow us to partake of Christ's life or receive the promise of resurrection on the last day?³³

But then we realize that sacraments rest on the authority, command, and promise of God. If God's word is not trustworthy, His promises have no effect or power. On the other hand, if God's

Yes, religion says “Do!” and Christ says, “Done!” Yet Christ’s “Done!” does not mean that we don’t do anything to receive His promise. Instead, what we do, we do by faith through Christ’s strength and for His glory.

word is trustworthy, His promises have tremendous effect and power.

So we return to a fundamental question: Are new covenant sacraments done on the basis of God’s or man’s promise? Put simply, “Are the new covenant sacraments from heaven or from men?”³⁴

If sacraments are merely man-made institutions of religion, let’s do away with them. But if God has commanded and authorized the church to administer and perform the sacraments in His name as necessary means of grace, let’s perform them for the sake of the gospel of salvation.

It’s easy to confuse the foundation of our salvation with its means. But whether it is hearing or preaching the gospel, confessing Christ, being baptized, accepting footwashing, receiving Holy Communion, or living a sanctified life, there is absolutely no conflict between these historical acts and salvation by grace through faith.

Following Christ’s commands and teachings do not undermine the gospel but establish it. Salvation “by grace through faith” doesn’t mean our faith exists in a vacuum that can only claim Christ but is devoid of His righteousness, boundaries (forms), moral law, or any means of salvation.

Yes, religion says “Do!” and Christ says, “Done!” Yet Christ’s “Done!” does not mean that we don’t do anything to receive His promise. Instead, what we do, we do by faith through Christ’s strength and for His glory.

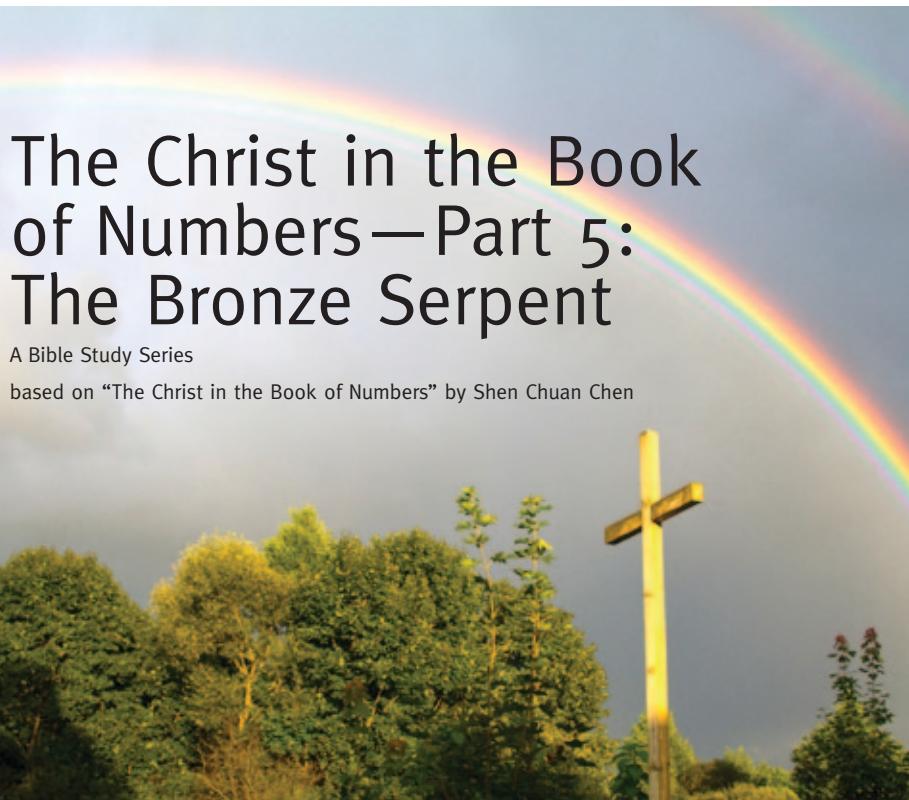
Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

(Phil 2:12–13) ★

Footnotes:

- 1 Christ Himself instituted these sacraments under His promise and His blood, as opposed to signs, seals, or rituals (like circumcision, unleavened bread, or redemption of the firstborn) under prior covenants (cf. Gen 9:12–17; 17:10–14; Ex 13:6–16; 31:13–17).
- 2 Jn 3:5
- 3 Cf. Jn 1:12–13; 31–34; 3:22–26; 4:1–2; Mt 3:13–17
- 4 Cf. Eph 5:32; 1 Tim 3:16; Rev 1:20
- 5 Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16; Jn 13:15, 17; 1 Cor 11:23–26
- 6 Mt 3:13–17; Mk 1:9–11; Lk 3:21–22; Jn 3:26; 4:1–2; 13:12, 15; Mt 26:26–28
- 7 Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom 6:5; Col 2:11–13; 1 Pet 3:21; Jn 13:8; Jn 6:53–54
- 8 An actual/recordable means of salvation, realized under time and space, as opposed to a mere spiritualized reality.
- 9 Acts 2:37–38; 10:44–48; 16:14–15
- 10 Religion can be broadly defined as a system of cultural, spiritual, and/or ethical beliefs that is publicly practiced.
- 11 Cf. Lev 16:1–34; 1 Chr 6:49
- 12 Cf. Lev 9:7; 16:34
- 13 Heb 10:1–4
- 14 Cf. Deut 32:43; Ps 65:3; Heb 10:10, 14, 18
- 15 Jn 4:1; 13:2, 5, 18
- 16 Jas 2:17, 26
- 17 Acts 2:40 (Greek text uses the verb save in aorist tense, which does not have an English equivalent but is often rendered as past simple in English because it refers to something as complete); cf. Rom 8:24, 28–30; Eph 2:5, 8
- 18 Acts 2:47; 1 Cor 15:1–2
- 19 Mk 16:16; Acts 11:14; 16:31; Rom 5:10; 10:9, 13
- 20 Isa 32:17; Acts 17:31; 1 Thess 1:5; Heb 6:11; 10:22; cf. Rom 9:11; 2 Pet 1:10
- 21 Acts 14:22; Rom 1:17; 11:22; 1 Cor 15:2; 2 Cor 5:7; 1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 3:14; Heb 3:6, 14; 10:35
- 22 Gal 5:6; 6:15, cf. 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Cor 7:19
- 23 Jn 1:1, 14
- 24 Mt 1:21; Jn 1:29
- 25 1 Jn 4:2–3
- 26 Rom 5:9
- 27 Acts 16:14; Mt 13:10–13; 16:17; Jn 6:44, 65
- 28 1 Pet 1:23 (“regeneration” by the “word”); cf. Eph 5:26 (“washing of water by the word”); cf. also 1 Pet 1:3 and 3:21, where Peter links “regeneration” to “water baptism” by the exact same phrase: “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”
- 29 1 Pet 1:25
- 30 Acts 2:38; 22:16; Tit 3:5; Col 2:11–12; Rom 6:1–6; 1 Pet 1:3; 3:21
- 31 Jn 13:8, 10, 20
- 32 1 Cor 10:16; Jn 6:53–56
- 33 Similar questions could equally apply to confessing faith in Christ with our mouth, which many evangelicals take to effect forgiveness, a part with Christ, new life, and salvation.
- 34 Cf. Mk 11:30





The Christ in the Book of Numbers—Part 5: The Bronze Serpent

A Bible Study Series

based on "The Christ in the Book of Numbers" by Shen Chuan Chen

Numbers 21:4–9 records an incident similar to a number of others during the wilderness years. In each case, discouragement and anxiety from an arduous journey led to rash words followed by punishment from God—this time involving fiery serpents.

The people had traveled north from Mount Hor towards Edom, by the Way of the Red Sea, a difficult and desolate route. Not only was the journey itself trying, so were the circumstances. The nation had been left bereft from the passing of Miriam in Kadesh (Num 20:1) and Aaron on Mount Hor (Num 20:22–29). At the same time, the king of Edom refused them passage through his land, meaning they had to change course (Num 20:14–21).

We can imagine that morale was at its lowest ebb, hence the harsh words directed at God and Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread" (Num 21:5). The murmuring incurred God's wrath, such that He sent fiery serpents to bite the people, causing many to die. While it is uncertain what the serpents were, we can speculate they were so-called because of their venom's effect.¹

Moses, on his part, bore patiently with his brethren's castigations and even

agreed to intercede on their behalf before God—the Lord of life and death—asking Him to forgive their sins and to remove the fiery serpents from their midst. Eventually, God instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent set on a pole, so that those who were bitten could look up at it and live (Num 21:8).

PREFIGURATION OF CHRIST

Viewed in isolation, God's method of deliverance seems strange and even somewhat arbitrary. However, with the benefit of hindsight, we understand that the bronze serpent prefigured the salvation of Jesus Christ.

In a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus about spiritual rebirth, Jesus referred him to this particular episode in history, saying: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:14–15). As a Pharisee, Nicodemus would have been familiar with this story. However, there was a gap in his knowledge, which was the significance of the bronze serpent—a thousand-year-old enigma. Jesus explained that the serpent, far from being an inconsequential detail, prefigured the Son of Man. It revealed the mystery of God's salvation plan and His transcendental wisdom.

For some of us, there may be an inherent difficulty in accepting that the bronze serpent represents Christ. We cannot help but recall that our first ancestors were tempted by the serpent in the garden of Eden. For this reason, we have the notion that the serpent is exclusively a symbol of Satan. However, in ancient Near Eastern culture, the serpent was a symbol of power. The Egyptians, for example, revered the serpent, along with the eagle, two regal animals of the desert. Both coalesced in the persona of the pharaoh, highlighting his political and religious supremacy.

God Himself utilized the serpent as a symbol of His divine power prior to the exodus (cf. Ex 7:8–12). When He sent Moses and Aaron to meet Pharaoh, He told Aaron to cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and let it become a serpent. However, Pharaoh's magicians were able to do the same. Pharaoh, possessing a powerful combination of political and religious clout, was determined to show that he was not to be defied by anyone, least of all Moses and Aaron who dared to ask for the freedom of his slaves. Yet Aaron's rod swallowed up Pharaoh's, demonstrating God's superior authority. Despite this, Pharaoh refused to give in, thereby incurring trouble for himself and the whole land of Egypt.

From the afore-mentioned story, we

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (Jn 3:14–15)

see that the serpent does not always represent Satan; it is also a symbol of authority. Unknown to Moses, the bronze serpent prefigured the Messiah: just as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, so Jesus Christ would be lifted up on the cross, so that sinners can look up at Him and be saved.

Unfortunately the bronze serpent later became an idol to which the Israelites offered sacrifices for seven hundred years. When Hezekiah ascended to the throne in Judah, "he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden images and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan" (2 Kgs 18:3–4). In short, Hezekiah put an end to the Israelites' deviation of faith, at least for a time.

THE BRONZE SERPENT SET ON A POLE

Hidden within the miracle of the bronze serpent are a number of teachings and insights for Christians.

One Bronze Serpent

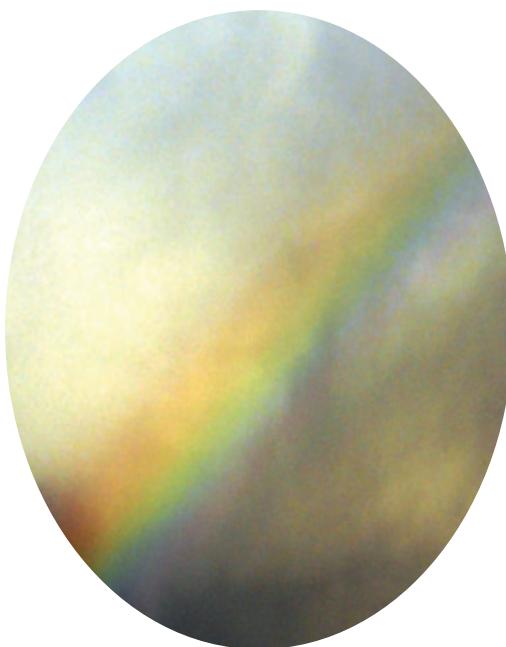
Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live."

(Num 21:7–8)

Aside from symbolizing the suffering Messiah, the bronze serpent also revealed His uniqueness. For this reason, God told Moses to make only one.

Satan can be likened to the fiery serpents in the wilderness, harming the elect during their journey. At the

beginning of time, he had also tempted Adam and Eve to sin (Gen 3). However, because Christ was lifted up, we are granted new life and forgiveness of sins if we believe in Him. Hence, Peter and John testify for the Savior, saying, "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under



heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:11–12).

In the 1400 years from the time of Moses until the birth of Christ, the Jews, as a nation, upheld the belief in the one true God through the Law of Moses. For this reason, they found it hard to accept that Jesus, the Son of Man, was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16), that He was one with God (Jn 10:30) and was God manifested in the

flesh (1 Tim 3:16). Due to their unbelief, the Jews were constantly trying to find fault with Him and were convinced that eliminating Him equated to zeal and piety towards God.

Even so, God, in His loving kindness, did not abandon them. Indeed, He went on to fulfill His salvation plan, first alluded to 1400 years earlier by the bronze serpent set on a pole.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

(Jn 3:14–16)

This extraordinary prefiguration revealed the will and plan of God, and reminds us of prophet Isaiah's words:

Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'.

(Isa 46:9–10)

Man's perspective is limited and partial. Hence, it is difficult for many to grasp the truth of the Godhead, particularly the fact that God is self-existent and eternal. Yet the Bible is clear that He was the one true God in the past; He is the one true God in the present time; and He will be the one true God in the future. When elder John wrote the Book of Revelation, he documented these words of Jesus: " 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,' says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty'" (Rev

Man's perspective is limited and partial. Hence, it is difficult for many to grasp the truth of the Godhead, particularly the fact that God is self-existent and eternal. Yet the Bible is clear that He was the one true God in the past; He is the one true God in the present time; and He will be the one true God in the future.

In truth, the instruction to look up at the bronze serpent was nothing short of a test of faith—of the people's willingness to believe and act upon Moses' words... The lesson for Christians is that we, too, can be renewed in our spiritual lives if we look up at the bronze serpent set on the pole.

the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.

(Acts 5:30–32)

As we have since received the salvation of Jesus through repentance and belief, we should hold on to it tightly by looking to Him each day of our faith journey. ★

1:8). Accepting that Jesus Christ is the one true God is a condition of grace for both Jews and Gentiles.

Set on a Pole

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live."

(Num 21:8)

Before the arrival of God's saving grace, the world was under the power of sin. Its effects could be likened to the venom of the fiery serpents, bringing about man's certain doom. However, Christ died on the cross to save us from the bondage of sin and to give us the chance of renewal: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). This is the key significance of the bronze serpent.

To Look and Live

As the poison of the fiery serpents acted on the Israelites, Moses worked swiftly to make a bronze serpent according to God's instruction (Num 21:9). This method of deliverance must have seemed improbable at the time, but it worked.

In truth, the instruction to look up at the bronze serpent was nothing short of a test of faith—of the people's willingness to believe and act upon Moses' words. We can imagine that perhaps there were some who, even under the dire circumstances, judged the situation on the basis of their own logic and concluded that it was impossible for the bronze serpent to save them. If this was the case, they would have forfeited their lives.

There is a vast difference between God's thinking and man's, and this is particularly apparent in the New Testament period. Despite the fact that Jesus ushered in a new era of grace, the scribes and Pharisees held on tightly to their Old Testament laws and traditions. In effect, their stance excluded them from the blessing of justification by faith

in Jesus Christ (Rom 4:1–16).

The situation is similar today. Many people still find it hard to accept that they can be saved by simply believing in Jesus. However, the story of the bronze serpent reveals that salvation is appointed by God; everyone can have easy access to this grace. All we need to do is believe: "Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy" (Ps 33:18). Such truths could neither be grasped by the Jews with their legalistic mindset, nor by those who later advocated complex and ascetic forms of religion. For them, God's salvation grace was a stumbling block.

We may wonder whether the bronze serpent had any inherent powers to heal those who had been bitten. The answer is no. Healing came simply from the people's belief in God's word. The lesson for Christians is that we, too, can be renewed in our spiritual lives if we look up at the bronze serpent set on the pole. We don't need to look towards Moses, who represented the Old Testament Law, nor Aaron, who represented the sacrificial system. Rather, we should look upon Jesus Christ who died on the cross, and we will be assured of victory over death.

*"O Death, where is your sting?
O Hades, where is your victory?"
The sting of death is sin, and the strength
of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who
gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus
Christ.*

(1 Cor 15:55–57)

Salvation was once shrouded in mystery, but God in His wisdom chose to reveal its path in different ways over the generations. One by one, His revelations pointed to the coming of Christ.

*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus
whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.
Him God has exalted to His right hand to
be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to
Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are
His witnesses to these things, and so also is*

¹ See "Serpent, Fiery" in Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, eds., Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, John Rea (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983).





Know Your Challenges (III): Lack of Vigilance

Aun Quek Chin—Singapore

Paul exhorts us to take up the whole armor of God (Eph 6:13–18). He gravely warns us that it is the only way to survive the onslaught of the wicked one. Sadly, despite such warnings, some have fallen, unable to “withstand in the evil day”. Why were they defeated?

It is important to note that such spiritual failure cannot be blamed on the **lack of access** to the complete armor. God gives every believer access to every part of the armor. Even those who have yet to receive the Holy Spirit cannot claim to be disadvantaged since they have the sword of the Spirit, the word of God.

In actual fact, the source of failure is the **lack of application**. Protection comes not from merely possessing but **putting on** the armor. Many Christians “take up” these armor parts, only to lay them aside! This is very poor soldiering. According to the Chinese adage: “The saddle must never leave the horse, and the armor must never leave the general.” Good soldiers know that the enemy may appear any moment, so they must always be prepared. Putting on armor and saddling horses only when the enemy turns up is a recipe for sure defeat, if not a massacre!

Being well-armed and ready to fight is even more critical for the battle of faith. We do not war against flesh and blood; instead we are engaged in a titanic and relentless spiritual battle. So we must

be constantly and highly vigilant. In particular, there are three antitheses of vigilance that we must guard against.

I. FIRST WARNING: SPIRITUAL SLUMBER

1. Awake!

The Lord Himself warns those who are asleep to awake (Eph 5:14); Jesus wants us to be watchful and not to continue in our slumber. Paul elaborates on what being awake means. We are to live “not as fools”, dazedly muddling along in life, oblivious to what is happening around us. Instead, we must understand and

remember that the Lord’s will is for us to save sinners today and to judge the world for their sins in the future. Hence, we must depart from darkness to love the light; repent and leave our sins. There is no time to waste because “the days are evil”, i.e., the judgment of the Lord is coming soon. So we have to “redeem the time” to do our work of salvation (Eph 5:15–16).

Today, man knows much more than his ancestors, but he also sins much more. Technology has advanced by leaps and bounds, but human morality has also degenerated just as sharply. All these signs should set alarm bells ringing. When the entire generation is so evil, it must mean we have moved deep into the night. Very soon, dawn will appear. The sun will rise. Darkness will pass. At that time, will we be in the light, or stuck in darkness?

Physical sleep is useful for us to recharge and refresh. But spiritual slumber is hazardous to health. So we must—quite literally—rise and shine!

2. Watch and Pray

When Jesus went into Gethsemane to pray, He asked the disciples to watch and pray—why? He did not need the disciples to intercede for Him. Jesus may have had moments of weakness and sorrow, but He never succumbed to temptation.

DEEP DOZING DANGERS

1. Sleepers are unaware of time. Sleeping Christians may miss the bridegroom’s arrival (cf. Mt 25:1–13).
2. Sleepers do not realize their sad state. Sleeping Christians may be in defiled garments when the Lord comes again (cf. Mt 22:11–14).
3. Sleepers are oblivious to whoever appears beside them—friend or foe. Sleeping Christians may fall prey to the prowling lion (cf. 1 Pet 5:8).

Watchful in prayer, He overcame all of it.

However, Jesus knew that His disciples were highly vulnerable to temptation and spiritual sleep. So, He urged them to watch and pray. Some believers—to justify their spiritual somnolence—like to say that the “spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”. This biblical phrase was never meant to be a license for carnal indulgence! Instead we ought to triumph over weakness by heeding the Lord’s reminder to watch and pray.

After two wake-up calls the disciples were “still sleeping” and had not realized that the enemy was approaching. When Jesus woke them up for the third time, the enemy was already before them (Mt 26:45–46).

See the stark contrast between the respective ways that Jesus and the disciples faced the enemy. Jesus was calm and brave. The disciples “forsook Him and fled” (Mt 26: 56). This was utter, ignominious failure. When Jesus needed them the most, they fled. It is clear why the three disciples had no courage to stand together with Jesus. It was a **lack of vigilance**—they had been asleep, they were caught unprepared, and so they fled in terror.

But this failure was an important learning and turning point for them, sowing the seed for their future unflinching vigilance. We see a very different apostolic church—the apostles were constantly watchful in their prayers; they no longer fled but faced every challenge courageously.

They were undaunted by external persecution. Brought before officials who threatened them to stop them from preaching, Peter and John declared, “Is it right to obey you men rather than obey God? You decide” (Acts 4:19). How bold these apostles had become. When questioned, they in turn questioned and made the council reflect on its actions. They also said, “We cannot but speak of the things we have seen and heard.” It was a fearless proclamation that even if they were arrested, these believers of “the Way” would continue to preach on their release.

God wants a willing heart. Therefore, He only wakes two kinds of people—the contrite and the humble.

FOOTPRINTS:

WERE YOU THERE WHEN THEY CRUCIFIED THE LORD?

In a well-known inspirational poem, a man looks back on the sands of his life and sees two sets of footprints—the Lord’s and his. He notices, to his shock, that at his times of greatest sorrow, there is only one set of footprints. He is upset and demands to know why he was abandoned; until the Lord gently points out that these were the Lord’s footprints—the Lord had carried the man through these turbulent periods.

Similarly, many of us accuse the Lord of ignoring or even abandoning us when we need Him most. We question His faithfulness and audaciously grumble that He must have been sleeping on the job! Busy blaming the Lord, we do not realize that we ourselves have not been standing by the side of Jesus and hence cannot hear His voice. Even more critically, were we there when the Lord had need of us?

Internal problems were quickly confronted and effectively resolved. One instance was the distribution of food. Those involved in the squabble did not know how to handle the problem. However, the apostles did. Seven deacons were appointed to manage administrative issues so that the apostles were not distracted from prayer and the ministry of the word.

In short, regardless of whether the problems came from outside the church or within the church, the apostles watched and prayed. They were no longer spiritually asleep. Thus, we too must learn to watch and pray and not allow our spiritual minds to sleep.

3. Be Willing

There may be times when we—in a moment of weakness—doze off. Who can help us then?

Only the Lord can awake man from spiritual slumber. But we must not take this for granted because God does not wake everyone. In particular, He does not wake those in deep slumber because sound sleepers who are currently enjoying sweet dreams do not react well to being woken. These sleepers ignore or shut off the alarm clock; they tell the person who is trying to wake them up to give them more time. Further attempts to rouse such a person from sleep will only earn us

their anger, blame or rebuke.

God wants a willing heart. Therefore, He only wakes two kinds of people—the contrite and the humble. God dwells with him who is contrite and humble in spirit. He will revive, i.e., awaken, the spirit of the humble and the heart of the contrite (Isa 57:15).

God will not awaken the hard-hearted and proud; not because He does not love them, but because of their stubbornness. The hard-hearted will not repent. He will continue to sin. The proud will not listen to advice and will act as they wish. In contrast, the humble listen to advice, reflect and repent; the contrite are even more eager to repent. God delights in such people. Since they are willing to repent, the spirit of God will be even more willing and pleased to help and dwell in them, reviving their spirits.

In sum...

Rousing from our slumber requires God’s help, as well as our humble and contrite hearts. A good test of our readiness to awaken is our reaction when listening to the word of God. We need to ask the Lord for mercy, entreat His spirit to revive our hearts and prevent us from further slumber. One who is sleeping will not know when the Lord comes, or when the enemy will appear. And that will be downright dangerous!

II. SECOND WARNING: SPIRITUAL WEARINESS

Our journey of faith may comprise many periods of extreme zeal. But inevitably, there will be times of fatigue. In moments like these, we do not

Both of these—the truth and the Holy Spirit—nourish, move and sustain us spiritually. Hence, we ought to ask the Lord to grant us food and drink to re-energize us and help us emerge from our exhaustion.

particularly want to do anything or speak to anyone; we just want to lie down, hide away and have our own quiet time. Usually, after some rest, we feel better and are ready to proceed on our journey of faith and service.

Unfortunately, some are so weary that they do not just feel like giving up their service—they want to give up on their lives. One such example was Elijah. His was no mere physical exhaustion but a deep spiritual weariness. A great prophet of faith, Elijah was neither easily frightened nor easily exhausted. So how did he end up asking to die?

It was not an easy ministry that he had been called to—just one man confronting 850 false prophets, a faithless king and equally faithless people. However, by relying on God, Elijah performed two great miracles (1 Kgs 18). First, he successfully entreated God to send fire from on high to burn up the offerings, proving that the LORD is God and that the 850 prophets of Baal were worshipping false gods. Second, his prayer to God for rain ended a three-and-a-half-year drought. These two great miracles triggered the people's resolve to turn back to God. Together with Elijah, they executed the 850 false prophets.

At this point, Elijah thought that Israel's faith would be restored. But when king Ahab told queen Jezebel about the things Elijah had done, she issued the order to kill Elijah (1 Kgs 19:1–4). Ahab was unable to stop his wife and protect the prophet of the Lord. The people who had personally witnessed the miracles did not dare stand up for Elijah either. All the miracles had not changed the heart of Ahab or the people; it had done little to dent the power that Jezebel wielded.

Elijah cut a lonely

figure. No one stood up with or for him. From the lowest to the highest levels of society, there was no one who dared to help protect the prophet of God against the idolatrous queen. Although the power of God had been demonstrated so dramatically, the people still could not turn their minds back to God.

Elijah was devastated. He had thought the miracles would lead to a great revival of the nation's faith but the final outcome was completely different. What else could he do for God's kingdom? Left with no choice, Elijah fled. In fact, the situation appeared so bleak and his sense of helplessness so acute that he prayed to God: "Let me die."

We may have been in similar situations. Burning with great aspirations for God, we put in utmost effort into His service, only to reap somewhat disappointing outcome(s). However, our disappointment was more acute when we realized that no one was willing to stand by our side to speak for us. We might even feel a sense of betrayal when the very people whom we have tried to help treat us like feared lepers. In moments like these, we are truly weary. We give

up. Sometimes we even seek death. Just like Elijah.

1. Take a Short Break

In 1 Kings 19, we see that God did not reprimand Elijah. God understood that he was weary and knew what he needed most was rest. So God provided Elijah with food and drink and allowed him to sleep. Similarly for us, sometimes God wakes us when we have fallen asleep. But at other times, like the loving parent that He is, God allows us to continue to sleep so that we can rest and recuperate.

But we cannot continue to slumber.

We have to awake at some point in time. After gently waking Elijah (1 Kgs 19:7), God told him that a great journey was before him; he still had much to do. Difficulties in one area of work should not discourage us from taking up work in another area. There still is much to accomplish in many other areas.

2. Undertake Other Ministries

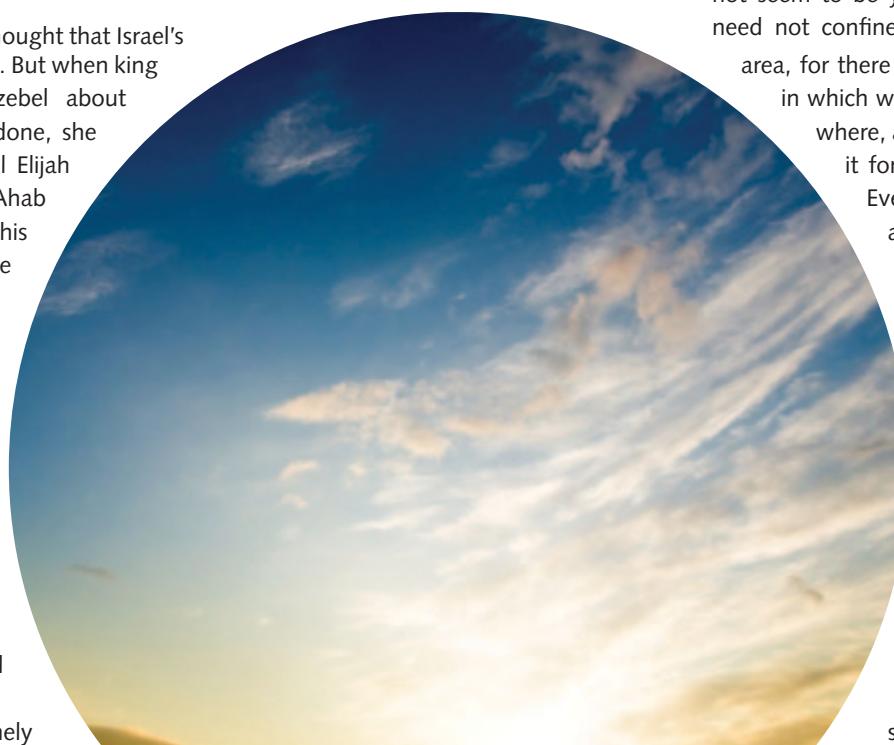
God instructed Elijah to pass judgment on Ahab's household; to pronounce judgment on Jezebel and the false prophets; and to restore the faith of the people of Israel. These were all future events. God was telling Elijah to prepare for the future. Invigorated by his rest, Elijah knew his direction and thus moved towards it.

There is an important lesson here for us when we find ourselves weary and disappointed because our ministry does not seem to be yielding any result. We need not confine ourselves to just one area, for there are many other things in which we can serve. No matter where, as long as we are doing it for God, God is pleased.

Even if it is the simplest action of bringing a cold drink to the little ones, **Jesus sees and remembers.**

All because we showed love and care for the little one in His name.

It is also through little things that God can see whether we have been faithful to His word. We have heard so many sermons but how many



have we applied in our daily lives? When we are discouraged, do we really turn our eyes upon Jesus? When we are suffering, can we draw strength and comfort from Him whose eye is on the sparrow? Can we strengthen the tired hands and feeble knees so that we can complete our journey of faith (Heb 12:12)?

In sum...

David said, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters" (Ps 23:1–2).

Our green pastures are the word of God. They give our hearts strength and comfort (Ps 119:49–50). The still waters are the Holy Spirit. He is the water of life, and will help us. Both of these—the truth and the Holy Spirit—nourish, move and sustain us spiritually. Hence, we ought to ask the Lord to grant us food and drink to re-energize us and help us emerge from our exhaustion.

III. THIRD WARNING: SPIRITUAL NUMBNESS

A lack of vigilance is also manifested as numbness towards the word of God. We simply refuse to listen to the word and have no reaction to whatever warning there is in the Bible. Underpinning this refusal is simple disbelief—first, disbelief that God will fulfill His warning of destruction; and second, disbelief that God has specified a way of salvation.

1. Dull Hearts, Heavy Ears, Closed Eyes (Isa 6:9–10)

Some people consider God's action of destroying all humanity except for a family of eight as excessively cruel. They question, "Could everyone in Noah's time have been so *completely evil* that all deserved death? There must have been varying shades of evilness amongst them, so why did God have to destroy every single one of them?"

A fact generally forgotten or glossed over is that God had provided a very long grace period. The ark that God instructed Noah to build was not meant for just the Noah family. The ark was meant to save everybody. Unfortunately, not a single person outside Noah's family believed.

Everyone could see the ark. Everyone had heard Noah warn of the impending flood. Everyone knew that entering the ark meant safety from death. They saw, they heard and they knew but... they

simply did not believe. God had provided decades of warning but the people's eyes were closed, their ears deaf and hearts dull. So should we still blame God for heartlessness or man for recalcitrance?

The wind blowing through the trees causes leaves to fall. Not every leaf falls, only those that are withered and withering. In fact, lifeless leaves will still fall off even if there were no wind. On the other hand, leaves with life may rustle in the wind but they will stay on the tree. Ought we to blame the "cruel" wind for "making" the leaves fall?

The second coming of the Son of Man will be similar to the great flood in the days of Noah. Whether we enter into the ark and be saved like Noah and his entire household depends on whether we have become numb to the message of the judgment day (cf. Mt 24:37–42).

We must be sober and vigilant for our adversary prowls around us. Awake from our spiritual slumber. Rely on God's word and Spirit to overcome our spiritual exhaustion. Re-examine our heart of belief and repent of our spiritual numbness.

The Lord Jesus tells us that we have to be ever-vigilant and never allow our spiritual senses to be numb (Mt 24:42,44). Heed the Bible's advice—be prepared; enter and stay in the ark of the last days, which is the true church.

2. A Vision of Their Own Heart (Jer 23:16–17)

Some people question, "Is the True Jesus Church (TJC) really the ark of the last days? Can you only be saved by entering the TJC? Is it logical that only your small number of members will be saved and everybody else will die? How can the loving God allow all the other people to die and save a meagre few?!" These questions then generally lead to the conclusion that the TJC is a "cult" because of our "exclusiveness".

When we ponder on these questions, they do not seem unreasonable. Due to this and the fact that TJC's rate of conversion appear lower than many

other denominations, we are somewhat reluctant to definitively proclaim that the TJC is THE ark of the last days. Some have even started to doubt this, especially those who were not very convinced in the first place. If we are battling such doubts, Jesus has given us a clear answer.

The coming of the Son of Man will be like the days of Noah. How many people were saved in those days? Only eight entered the ark; only eight out of an entire world and generation were saved (1 Pet 3:20). Even fewer than those who are in the TJC! All who did not enter the ark were completely wiped out.

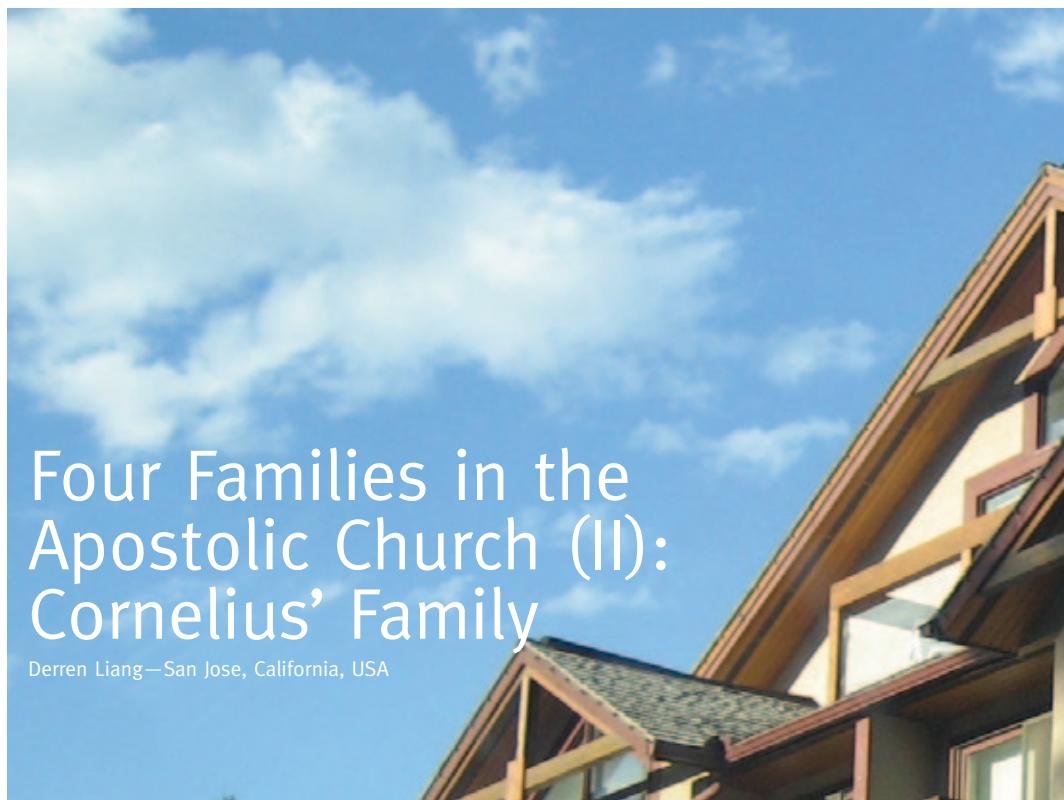
Therefore, we must heed God's warning to enter into the ark of the last days, lest we be rejected and left outside to perish.

CONCLUSION

To some, the phrase "God is love" means we can do anything we like and still lay a claim on eternal life. However, the Bible clearly teaches that the lack of vigilance can jeopardize our salvation. It is not because God is cruel and unloving, but because we continually and casually reject His word. It is not that we do not know His teaching and warnings, but because we are unwilling to believe. It is not that God does not want to save us, but because we have not done our work of salvation.

Before the throne of judgment, are we going to accuse God of heartlessness? God will say, "I do not know you." We will then be cast outside to weep and suffer. There will be people outside weeping and gnashing their teeth. They will cry out, "Lord, Lord, didn't we preach in your name? Didn't we heal the sick and cast out demons in your name?" Those who said these words were people who had preached the gospel and healed the sick in the name of Jesus. Yet they were rejected.

So we must be sober and vigilant for our adversary prowls around us. Awake from our spiritual slumber. Rely on God's word and Spirit to overcome our spiritual exhaustion. Re-examine our heart of belief and repent of our spiritual numbness. Enter and stay in the ark of the last days. ★



Four Families in the Apostolic Church (II): Cornelius' Family

Derren Liang—San Jose, California, USA

II. CORNELIUS' FAMILY—FEARED GOD

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

(Acts 10:1-2)

Here was a career soldier serving the great Roman Empire—the world's foremost empire in those times—in a key capital city inhabited by a colonized people who may rise in rebellion. Busy though he must have been, Cornelius was a devout man who feared God with his whole household and even had a servant who feared God.

How was Cornelius able to build and maintain such a God-fearing family? There were three salient factors: his priorities, his exemplary life, and his generosity in sharing.

THE RIGHT PRIORITIES

In the Roman Legion (the Roman army), the centurion was officer rank with excellent prospects for promotion and ultimately a wealthy retirement. But we can imagine that, with fifty nine to sixty centurions in each Roman legion, competition to make it into the top

military ranks would be stiff.

The normal professional military man would thus have filled his waking hours with battle plans and his thoughts on how to strategize his rise up the Legion ladder. Instead Cornelius took time to pray constantly. While his counterpart would have carefully "invested" his fund to network with and entertain political and military contacts who may help his career, Cornelius generously gave alms to the poor.

In short, God and faith were integral to Cornelius' life. Good or bad day, happy or frustrated... *he prayed to God always*. Religion was not just an accessory to ingratiate himself with the community or a crutch that he leaned on when troubles beset. He was so intent on building a relationship with God that he did not just pray but fasted as well!

Such a living sincere faith not only touched God, but was the inspirational benchmark for his family and friends. A necessary condition for a God-fearing family is a head of the family who, in daily word and deed, gives God priority.

In Deuteronomy 6, Moses speaks to a new generation of Israel preparing to enter the Promised Land. Their fathers and grandfathers had died in the wilderness because of unbelief. So Moses carefully and comprehensively sets out what they have to do in order for things to be well

with them, and that they may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey. His first instruction was directed at each Israelite and remains relevant for us as spiritual descendants of Abraham:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (Deut 6:4)

"*Hear O Israel*" was a call for the people to remember who they really were—God's chosen people. Today, we must always be mindful of the unmatched value of our special status as God's people. Through Jesus Christ and our faith, we have been made part of a royal priesthood and holy nation. Therefore, we must take our faith seriously.

"The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" was the reminder that the Lord is our God and our most important inheritance. As Paul tells us, because this inheritance is incorruptible and eternal, everything else pales in comparison. Today, if we truly regard God as our most precious possession, setting the right priorities and making godly decisions will follow naturally.

Let us measure our priorities against that of Cornelius the Centurion—where do we place God and faith in our daily lives? Right in the centre of our work

Centurion Facts

- The ordinary centurion earned about 5,000 denarii a year and if he made it to chief centurion, 20,000 denarii a year. The common soldier received 200–300 denarii a year.
- The ultimate advancement was to the position of camp prefect, third in command of a whole legion, which would result in a wealthy retirement.

Sources:

1. <http://www.bible-history.com/sketches/ancient/roman-centurion.html>
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_legion#Legionary_ranks

and family lives? Or do we tuck God neatly into the book case together with our Bible and hymn book—prominently displayed but only used once a week (or once a month)?

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Once we have set the right priorities for ourselves, the next step is to build up the faith of the next generation.

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

(Deut 6:6–9)

These were Moses' unequivocal instructions to every parent of the chosen nation. Education experts have developed many theories for enhanced learning. But when it comes to faith, the best way to teach our children is by walking the talk of faith and to set an example in loving God.

It was easy for Cornelius to gather his friends and family to listen to God's words because he worshipped God not just with his lips but in deed and conduct. Many people are on their best behavior in

public but when they are at home, it may be a completely different story.

Many people treat their superiors with great respect but are aloof to and dismissive of their subordinates. But Cornelius was not two-faced. His servants and subordinates attested to his uprightness among the whole community.¹ His friends saw how his love for God was complemented by his compassion for his fellow men. His children would have learned from him to generously share with others what God had provided for them.

Still, the history of Israel has many examples of parents who were the religious leaders of their time—people who ought to have known better—but had failed to pass the legacy of faith to their children.

Eli and his two sons² come immediately to mind. We cannot help but wonder: how had Eli's sons become so decadent without their father noticing? Had he been too caught up in his priestly duties to monitor their behavior? Or had he actually noticed but indulgently dismissed it as youthful exuberance? Finally, when their behavior had become so egregious that he had no choice but to speak up, Eli's "rebuke" was extremely mild compared to how he had once told Hannah off.³ Indeed, Eli has to take a fair share of the responsibility for his sons' downward spiral in faith.

A sister, an experienced school and Religious Education teacher, once commented that, "there are no problem students; there are only problem parents." Children unconsciously absorb their parents' values, and learn from their words and actions.

In the context of the church, if we are constantly late for service, children get the message that being punctual for church is not important. If we consistently take our children away for holidays when their peers attend Bible camps in church, children learn that these training opportunities are less critical than our leisure. If children see us behaving

very differently in and out of church, they too learn to put up a false front of piety for an hour every week.

Therefore, besides ensuring that God and faith are integral to our lives, we must also put in effort to nurture our children; and put in time to pray so that they can experience God for themselves and build a faith of their own. We need to rely on God to build up our children's faith, for "unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it."⁴

It was easy for Cornelius to gather his friends and family to listen to God's words because he worshipped God not just with his lips but in deed and conduct.

SHARING THE GOODNESS

Cornelius was a man with a big heart. He shared the good things in his life with others. He did not just give alms, he gave alms *generously*. His faith was a good and important thing to him. So when he had an exciting vision carrying the promise of God's reward⁵ for his faith, he quickly called together his relatives and close friends.

His consistently exemplary conduct moved his entire family, relatives and close friends to respond to his sharing. With God's marvelous work, an unprecedented miracle and blessing came upon them—as they just sat there listening to the invited preacher's message about Jesus, the Holy Spirit fell upon them!

When we make Jesus an integral part of our family lives, great blessings can come upon our family. For instance, on one occasion Jesus had gone to Peter's house only to be told Peter's mother-in-law was sick. The Lord healed Peter's mother-in-law, inspiring her in turn to rise and serve Him.⁶

Inevitably our children will find television, computer games, and

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Cornelius moved God by his sincere reverence as well as his ability to inspire his family to the same level of reverence.

increasingly, the social media, much more interesting than Bible study. They will much prefer the songs of the world to hymns in praise of God (unless these sound like secular and contemporary music). Yet we have to persist in teaching them God's word, instead of giving up at the first sign of disinterest from them.

Once again, we also have to re-examine our lives to see how we may have accidentally sent conflicting signals to our children regarding the importance of God, church and faith in our lives.

CAPTURING THE CORNELIUS JOY

Cornelius moved God by his sincere reverence as well as his ability to inspire his family to the same level of reverence.

In contrast to Cornelius, today we see many initially-fervent members who

grow less so once they have established families. We also see individually-fervent members whose families, though baptized, do not share the same level of zeal in worshipping or serving God. Sadly, we see an increasingly common scenario, where the first generation deeply loves God, the second generation knows Him and loves Him less, while the third generation only knows of God and does not even have a personal relationship with Him.

We might have met truth-seekers with parents or grandparents who used to belong to the True Jesus Church but have not come for a long time. These truth-seekers finally find their way to the true church by God's grace. But there are undoubtedly many families who have been lost.

Will your family be like that of Cornelius? Regularly gathering together to listen to the word of God and enjoying the gift of the Holy Spirit poured on them? Or will they become another sad statistic under the list entitled "Lost BUT Found... AND Lost Again"? *

-
- 1 Acts 10:22
 - 2 1 Sam 2:12
 - 3 1 Sam 2:23–25; 1 Sam 1:14
 - 4 Ps 127:1
 - 5 Acts 10:4
 - 6 Mt 8:14–15

3 LESSONS FROM CORNELIUS

- **DO SET THE RIGHT PRIORITIES**
Your heart is where your treasure is. Set your heart and mind on the imperishable things above. Pray for the next generation to be able to keep their faith.
- **DO WALK THE TALK**
Children see, children do. Set an example in loving God and His word. Persistently teach our children God's word.
- **DO SHARE THE GOODNESS**
Make Jesus central to our family lives.



We Reap What We Sow

Joshua Phoong—Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days [that] the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

(Isa 2:2–3)

All of us in the True Jesus Church long to see the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy—that the church of the last days will be a glorious church. We want to see monumental growth of our church with the gospel spreading far and wide, touching the hearts of men from all nations. We desire that many more can come to the true church to seek the Lord, accept the truth that leads to salvation and eventually be among the chosen ones of the Lord who will receive eternal life. Yes, this is indeed what we long for and hope to see in our lifetime. But rather than just waiting for this prophecy to be fulfilled, we can play a part in making it a reality.

We are reminded in Romans 10:14 that the people of the world cannot call or reach out to our Lord Jesus Christ

unless they hear about Him and believe in Him. Yet how can they believe in Jesus if nobody preaches the glad tidings to them?

Hence, we must start to preach the gospel to all nations in a serious and committed manner. This is a commission, which Jesus has personally entrusted to us. For this reason, every one of us in the True Jesus Church must play our part well, so that the church in the last days will truly be glorious.

SOW TODAY FOR TOMORROW

"Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal 6:7)—what we are today is a result of what we have done in the past, for we reap what we have sown previously. More importantly, what we will harvest tomorrow will be determined by the efforts that we invest today.

We thank the grace of God that many of those who walked the path of faith before us have sowed abundantly. They have followed the Lord's instruction and have traveled far and wide to preach the gospel. Jesus' great love inspired them to live their lives no longer for themselves, but for Christ (2 Cor 5:13–15). Today, our church reaps the rewards of their past sacrifices; we in this generation of the True Jesus Church have benefited from the seeds that they have sown.

Those who live for the world are

chained to this world; as their pursuits are that of the physical world, they find it impossible to comprehend how we can exchange everything that the world offers for a life with Christ and for Christ. Yet for those of us who have tasted His grace and love, serving Him humbly and dedicating our lives to Him is only a reasonable service to repay His love.

It is this love that moves us to share the word of God with our relatives, friends, neighbors, and even with strangers. It is this love that has allowed the true gospel to be spread, from where it first started in China, farther and farther to various towns and cities, provinces and countries. Today, the true gospel has reached about sixty countries, covering almost all continents.

Yet if we examine the spread of the gospel, we will see that we are only beginning to establish the truth in most of those countries where the word of God has been preached. There are still many more places that the word has not reached; there are countless people to whom we have not preached. Do they not deserve to hear the truth? Are we contented with what we have already done? What about the many other countries of the world, more than one hundred, where the truth has yet to be preached?

How will our church fare in the future?

What will become of the True Jesus Church? The answer depends on how and what we sow today. We will reap what we have sown.

SOWING IN TEARS, REAPING IN JOY

Sowing is difficult, for it requires much effort and demands great sacrifices. But Ps 126:5–6 tells us that those who sow in tears will reap in joy. If we continually go forth in tears, carrying seed to sow, we shall undoubtedly return with rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us.

It all boils down to the choices we make in our lives: are we willing to sacrifice for the Lord and spread the good tidings? Are we prepared to sow in tears? If we are unwilling, then we shall have no part in reaping the harvest.

What then of Isaiah's prophecy? Will it still come to realization? We know that God's word will never fail. Consequently, this prophecy will definitely be fulfilled; if not through us, then through others who are willing to take up the great commission.

Esther too was entrusted with a great commission—the commission to save her people. When she was unwilling, Mordecai reminded her:

"If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise ... from another place but you and your father's house will perish." (Est 4:14)

Similarly, if we are not serious about the commission that has been entrusted to us, woe will come upon us. God's promise for those who sow in tears stands firm (Ps 126:5–6). However, it is our choice whether we want to be among those who reap in joy.

If we are already sowing the seeds of the gospel, let us be patient. Just as physical seeds need time to grow into a harvest, the seed of the gospel takes time to sprout and grow. During this period of growth, we may grow restless and become weary. Yet consider the farmer: just as he waits patiently for his fruits to ripen for the harvest, we too must wait for the appointed time of our Lord. Therefore, as Paul encourages, "let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Gal 6:9).

It all boils down to the choices we make in our lives: are we willing to sacrifice for the Lord and spread the good tidings? Are we prepared to sow in tears?

As long as we continue to plant and water, God will give the increase (1 Cor 3:6). Then the church of the last days will indeed be a glorious church, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. ★

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August 2012



Building Our Family Altar

"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." (Deut 6:7)

This advice given by Moses to the Israelites serves as a scriptural command to build up family worship. Worshipping God begins in the home and includes all family members. For the Israelites, family life and faith were closely intertwined. In the evenings, parents taught their children the laws of God. They were encouraged to memorize and recite God's words and to inquire about their faith and history (Ex 13:14).

[Read more...](#)



Christian Living

Rejoicing in Our Labor



In times of economic uncertainty, many people experience hardship in their jobs. Some may lose their jobs; others may have increased work pressure. These situations often create much stress in us; as a result, we may complain or worry unceasingly about our job. In light of this, how can we find joy in our work? [Read more...](#)

Our Stories

Impressions of Zambia: An Apostolic Journey



In June 2011, I was blessed with the opportunity to participate in a missionary trip to the nation of Zambia. I accompanied Preacher FF Chang of London church (UK) and Preacher Tae-Hoon "TJ" Jung of El Monte church (USA). The purpose of the trip was two-fold—ministering to the Zambian members and evangelizing in remote regions and to members of other Christian denominations. [Read more...](#)

Q & A



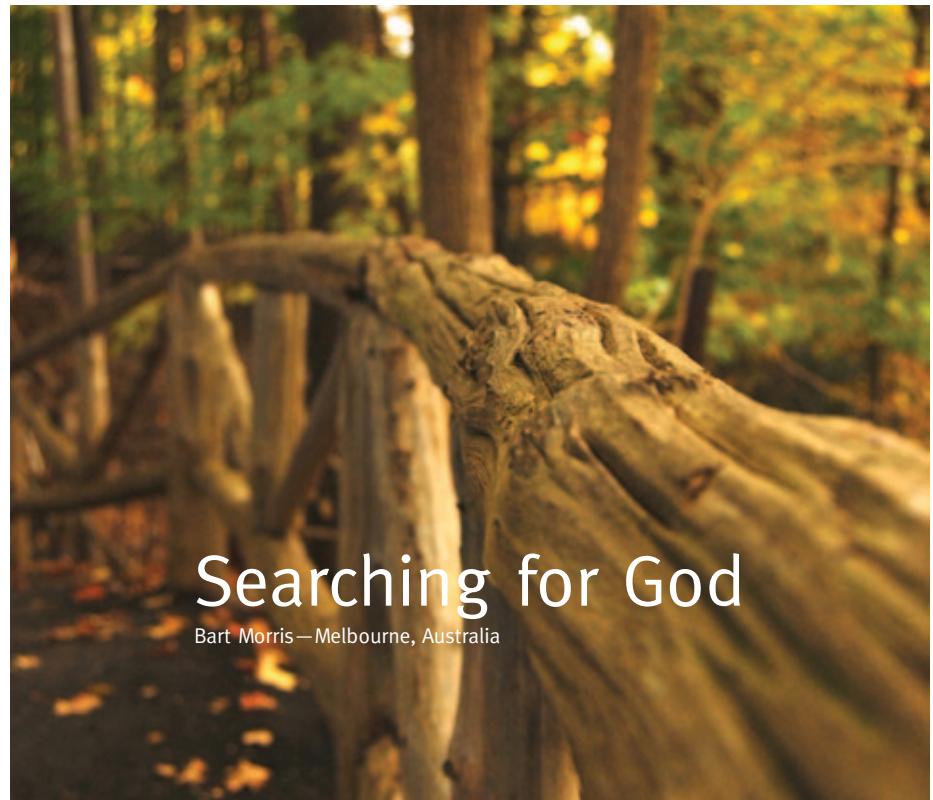
What Is the Fullness of the Holy Spirit?

Understanding what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
[Read more...](#)

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TESTIMONIES



Searching for God

Bart Morris—Melbourne, Australia

Searching for God. Now that's an interesting idea! To a committed Christian, that's a rather extraordinary statement. All you need to do is kneel down (if you are able) and start praying and HE is there to listen to you. So to have to search for Him seems to be unusual. But is it?

TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN FOR SIXTY YEARS

I was born in 1925 in Sydney, the capital of the State of New South Wales, Australia. I am in my late eighties now. Christened and raised up in a traditional Christian denomination, I spent more than sixty years going to church every Sunday. I started singing in the choir at nine years of age and did so for nearly sixty years. When I was old enough, I became active in church affairs; joined the vestry (administrative board), ultimately became a warden (senior position) and even represented my church at regional conferences (synod).

I also learned to assist in the regular Sunday services as a "server", which required me to do readings from the Bible, assist in the dispensation of bread and wine at communion and other activities connected with the services. After that, my participation in the church activities was complete.

However, never once was it suggested to me that I should read the Bible and

study and think about what it said. In fact when I once suggested that maybe I should read the Bible from beginning to end, I was actively discouraged from doing so, "as it wasn't really necessary since I got all that was needed from the usual Sunday readings." These consisted of short readings of ten to twenty verses each Sunday. Virtually the same set of verses was repeated each year, so my biblical knowledge was very limited.

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

However, one day in the 1990s, someone quoted something from the Bible, which prompted me to open my Bible and check the quotation. I read on from the quotation and what I read, started me thinking and reading further on. I cannot at this moment remember what the quotation was, but whatever it was, it had far-reaching consequences: the verse prompted me to ask my then vicar (clergyman) about its meaning. His reply startled me. He told me to stop wasting my time and his time with silly questions and to just believe what I was told. Since he hadn't told me anything, his reply annoyed me, so I decided to study the Bible more in detail, and find out for myself what it meant.

Being a researcher by nature and training, I decided that the best way to study the Bible was to start at the

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beginning, and read through the entire Bible, so that I could get each idea in context and in correct relationship with other parts of the Bible. I became methodical in my reading. I divided the number of pages by 365 and found that if I read three pages each day, every day, I would read the Bible from start to finish by mid-December.

The effect on me was startling, to say the least. I discovered that the Bible is not just a collection of unrelated and disjointed quotations, but a fount of great knowledge—a history book of the world and everything in it; a book of morality which contains everything that we need to live a better and more moral life; and finally and most importantly, a guide book that could lead me to God.

I must add here that reading three pages a day takes about fifteen minutes. Since there are 1440 minutes in a day, fifteen minutes is approximately one percent of a day. I decided that if I could not give God at least one percent of my time, I must be a very busy person! I am not that busy! I now find I am spending much more than one percent of my time reading God's word!

All this led me to realize what my problem was—I had been searching for God without really knowing it.

In my sixty years of going to church on Sundays, I never realized that I had fallen in love with the rituals of the church. There was no belief in God or Jesus Christ in the ceremonies in which I was participating; I had become a ceremonialist and not a Christian—similar to most churchgoers today. The ceremonies in most churches today are or appear to be purely military in origin and style. Minor clergy and other participants in the ceremonies act more like military guard of honor or escorts.

Ceremonialists look at the pomp and

elaborate movements by the clergy and those assisting them in church services performed for the benefit of the viewers (congregation). To an analytical mind, the church ceremonies are very similar to military parade ground movements, where soldiers put on a performance for a head of state and his public. Religion is absent in these ceremonies.

By the time I had read through the Bible the third time (the third year), I began to



The curved sign outside the former church building in Melbourne.



Sign with the basic beliefs in front of the old church building in Melbourne.

seriously search for God. I tried a number of churches and sects, and while they supplied some answers to my questions, they didn't supply all the answers. So I kept on searching for my answers.

ANSWERS FOUND

Sometimes, God works in mysterious ways. One day I was driving along a street when I came to a traffic blockage; I turned left into a side street, intending to then by-pass the blockage by driving down a parallel street and back onto the original street at the next side street. As I was waiting to turn right into the parallel street I noticed a curved sign outside a building on the corner, which read, "TRUE JESUS CHURCH."

Now I hadn't heard of this church before so I pulled over and went to look further at the sign. I then noticed the smaller sign listing the beliefs of this church. This list interested me so I decided to investigate further.

The following Saturday (one of my questions), I turned up and started enquiring about the beliefs of this "new" church.

Sabbath keeping was the particular item which first attracted me, since

God included it as the forth commandment after the first three which require us to worship Him. It is the first commandment, which instructs us to actively do something. Eight of the other commandments commence with the words "You shall not" (cf. Ex 20:1-17). Also throughout the Bible we are constantly and continually told to "keep My Sabbaths." So God obviously

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considers it to be important.

I started with the simple questions first; and they were answered. For example: does the True Jesus Church observe the Saturday Sabbath? Does the True Jesus Church believe that the Bible is the immutable word of God? Do they believe in full immersion at baptism? Every time the answer was "Yes." Then I tried the difficult questions, which usually sent priests into hysterics, e.g. Do you believe that God created the universe in six ordinary days? Do you believe the description of the second coming of Jesus Christ as depicted in the Bible? Again, back came not only positive but also sensible answers! Hallelujah! I had found what I was looking for.

I became a regular at training lessons and soon was participating in full services. As I continued to study and learn the biblical truth and attend services in the True Jesus Church, I gradually felt increasingly convinced that I had found what I had been searching for and that I had to be baptized in this church. Ultimately, I was blessed with receiving baptism by full immersion as well as the Holy Spirit. Hallelujah!

GOD'S WORD IS KEY

Since then I have participated in as many services as I can and have been blessed with coming to know many brothers and sisters who firmly believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and His word.

Studying God's word has strengthened my belief in the presence of God in my

life. I now constantly feel His presence, and am frequently turning to Him for help and advice. Whenever I struggle with a problem, be it great or small, He is always there at my side: His Spirit comforts and reassures me.

In addition, I have been encouraged to preach the gospel to other people

and bring them to church, which is very different from my previous church, where I was even made fun of when I tried to bring new people.

I have also been encouraged by the growth of the church, which has made it necessary to purchase new premises at Croydon South, a suburb of Melbourne, the capital city of the State of Victoria, Australia. These new premises allow us to double our numbers who attend the main services on Saturday, and also provide more rooms for separate classes that allow our members, particularly our youths, to be trained in the word of God.

Just like the previous church building, the new building has no distracting crosses, statues, or other images. Its simplicity reminds me of the fact that finding God is not very difficult as long as we truly believe in and follow His word as given to us in the Bible. Just get down on your knees and pray, and you will find that He is there with you.

May God bless each and every one of you as you study His word, and pray ceaselessly to our Lord Jesus Christ. Hallelujah, praise the Lord! *



Bro. Bart Morris after his baptism in 2005.

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Editor's note: Bro Loh's testimony shows how the Lord has been waiting patiently for him to accept Christ, just as the Bible says: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide." (Jn 15:16)

Hallelujah, in the name of Jesus I bear testimony. By God's grace, I was baptized in May 2012, at the age of eighty-two. Amazingly, the Lord waited for me for forty years, before I became His child.

FIRST ENCOUNTER

In 1972 I worked in the printing operations section of a local newspaper. During that time, I was one of the players in my company's table tennis team, and we frequently traveled to East Malaysia for matches.

My manager at that time, Elijah Yeh Guan Wei, was a member of the True Jesus Church. As he was also the leader of the table tennis team, we would travel abroad together for table tennis competitions. When we were overseas, I would often hear Elijah Yeh asking the local people if there were any True Jesus Church nearby. This left an impression on me, but I never asked him about his faith because I was not interested in religion at that time.

WITNESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS

OF PRAYER

On one occasion, while traveling across the South China Sea to the island of Labuan in East Malaysia, we encountered a thunderstorm. We became extremely anxious. I thought that we would surely perish at sea—especially when the waves hit the ship violently, and we had to close the windows to prevent waters from flooding our cabins. Then, I noticed that our team leader had knelt down and had started praying in tongues. Soon afterwards, I saw someone walking over to take control of the ship's helm. Miraculously, the storm soon subsided and the ship continued its journey.

I vividly remember that the person who took control was a passenger on board. Out of curiosity, we asked him what had happened. The man replied, "The captain was inexperienced and had we not avoided the waves, the ship would have capsized." In fact, the person who took control of the ship's helm was an experienced sailor who just happened to be on board.

I wondered whether we would all

have perished, if our team leader had not prayed.

MORE THAN THREE DECADES LATER...

Before believing in Christ, I adhered to traditional Chinese religion; my late mother used to worship the Chinese deities. I followed her, praying to these deities and participating in the rituals.

In 2009, I discovered that my son and his family were attending church services. So I asked them which church they attended. To my surprise, it was the True Jesus Church! This jolted my memory and I recalled that incident nearly forty years earlier. My son then invited me to a family evangelistic luncheon organized by the True Jesus Church. I agreed and thereafter, I started to accompany them for Sabbath services. My first observation of the True Jesus Church was that many people kneel down and pray in tongues. Yet I was not surprised, as I had seen my manager praying in this manner before.

For the next three years, I attended services at the True Jesus Church and

I suddenly realized how fragile life is. What if something more serious happened and I wasn't baptized? Would I lose the chance of salvation?

sought to understand the truth of salvation. The sermons opened my eyes to things that I formerly did not believe in; I learned of many new things as I listened to the sermons, which helped to build my faith. Also, as I grew older, I began to think more about life after death. I even went to the public library to search for information on the difference between True Jesus Church and other Christian denominations.

Studying the truth in the True Jesus Church motivated me to follow my children and grandchildren in their belief and to be of the same faith with them. However, I did not accept baptism until my mother passed away at the age of

102.

When I was hospitalized for three days due to an accident shortly after the Chinese New Year 2012, I suddenly realized how fragile life is. What if something more serious happened and I wasn't baptized? Would I lose the chance of salvation? This realization jolted me to get baptized as soon as possible.

MY RESOLUTION

After baptism, I resolved to go to church and worship God every Sabbath. My thoughts about coming to church are that we ought to listen to sermons attentively and pray to God earnestly. Seeing my son

and his family actively attending church services also inspires me to do likewise.

Looking back, I am thankful for becoming a Christian while I am still mobile and my mind is still alert. I encourage everyone to respond to Jesus' calling while we are still active and able, instead of waiting until the last moment of our lives.

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor 6:2)

May all glory and honor be given to God. Amen. ★



1977: Elijah Yeh (middle), Bro. Heng Chew Loh (right) with other table tennis team members.



Writing for God

T. Chen

What comes to your mind when you think of "writing"? For many of us today, writing a letter, let alone an article, seems like a very demanding task. Yet in this age of mobile phones, e-mail and the Internet, we do a lot of writing everyday! We write text messages, e-mails, blogs, comments... the list goes on. Why, then, do we find difficulty, or even dread, writing articles?

We may think of writing a proper article as a very serious matter. We feel we cannot write an article because it is not as "casual" as an e-mail or blog writing. We are afraid that we may not be able to write beautifully or coherently and may end up making a fool of ourselves or not benefiting anyone.

WRITING TO SERVE GOD

However, have you ever thought of writing as a way to serve God? The ancient saints wrote down God's word according to His commandment and inspiration so that countless people after them could get to know God through the Bible. Many have come to believe in the true gospel of salvation through the written word in the form of flyers, leaflets, magazines or books.

A closer look into the Bible reveals that God Himself wrote: He wrote the Ten Commandments on stone tablets (Ex 34:1, Deut 10:2). God also commanded

His chosen people to write His words on the doorposts of their own houses (Deut 6:6, 9), on large stones after entering the land of Canaan (Deut 27:1-4, 8), and on the tablet of their hearts (Prov 3:3, 7:3). He wanted Israel to remember His words so that they would guide them in their faith journey. God even told Israel how they should write:

"And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law."
(Deut 27:8)

God wanted His people to write down the commandments "very plainly", i.e., in a clear and simple manner, so that everyone could understand them.

These examples show that God places great emphasis on writing about His word because through writing more people can learn about the path of salvation, believe in Him and be encouraged in their faith.

CAN I WRITE FOR GOD?

What does it take to write about God and His word? Do we have to be deacons or preachers with profound theological knowledge? Do we need to be particularly good with words? You may laugh, but the answer is: no, not really!

Why not?

When we write for God, we are simply putting our reflections, experiences or

teachings that we have gathered from the Bible onto paper. Our aim is to encourage the readers in their faith—not to entertain. Our tool is the word of God itself—not our eloquence. This is the greatest difference between secular writing and writing for the church.

For this reason, anyone can write for God as long as we have the heart to serve Him. We don't have to worry about language, style or grammar—our work can still be edited afterwards. However, our content must be based on and firmly rooted in the word of God. In fact, the Bible connects all believers because it is the basis of our common faith. Sometimes, our personal experiences alone cannot edify others if they have not had similar experiences. But if we base our writing on the Bible, readers will be able to identify with our message much more easily, since it is God's word that we all believe in and that binds us together. Moreover, what can edify more than the word of God?

GETTING STARTED

So, how do you get started? A first step might be to write down reflections during personal Bible study time. Putting thoughts on paper is a good way to train us to organize our thoughts. In addition, whatever touches us concerning God's word has the potential to touch others



God places great emphasis on writing about His word because through writing more people can learn about the path of salvation, believe in Him and be encouraged in their faith.

too, so don't let it slip into oblivion!

Another way to start writing for God is to attend the International Assembly's annual English Writers Retreat (EWR).

WHAT IS THE ENGLISH WRITERS RETREAT (EWR)?

Simply put, the EWR aims to train up new writers for the church, as well as to produce new devotionals and articles for publication on the IA website and in Manna (magazine). Attendance is open to all—the International Assembly welcomes all brothers and sisters who are interested in serving God in the English Literary Ministry.

Although it is a writers' retreat, and we do aim at producing articles during the one-week event, participants will not be taught how to "write". Instead, they will learn how to study the Bible in greater depth and focus on spiritual cultivation through daily Bible study and prayer. These two factors are key to producing edifying articles. This is because good articles are based on good content, and good content must be based on the Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

COURSE CONTENT

The retreat usually starts off with an introduction to the English Literary Ministry and a collective brainstorming session on possible writing topics. This is meant to give the participants a clearer understanding of the EWR's purpose and to get them ready to do some writing.

During the retreat, participants work on two types of articles: a devotional and a full-length article.

Devotionals

The first two days are usually centered on devotional writing. Devotionals are succinct articles with one main point. They aim to inspire readers and prompt them to reflect on their relationship with God. Since devotionals are short, they tend to be easier to manage. Apart from introducing different types of devotionals and their contents and purposes, the instructors usually share some tips and tricks on devotional writing. Participants

also get to read and discuss various sample devotionals before they start writing.

Instructors lend a hand whenever participants need help with the writing, and participants have the opportunity to read and provide feedback on one another's draft articles.



Full-length Articles

On the third day, the instructors normally move on to full-length articles. These are longer articles that we typically find in Manna.

After introducing the different article genres (e.g., testimonies, Christian living articles, exhortations, etc.), participants learn how to conduct in-depth studies of biblical passages and how to use different kinds of study tools. Together with the instructors, they learn how to analyze a passage in the Bible, pay attention to detail, research historical background and

the original meanings of keywords. This can be a mechanical task at times, but the results are usually very rewarding. We are often inspired as we can gather many teachings and new insights through this process.

Now, some may ask, "What do I do with all my research results?" We usually organize our findings in a content outline that serves as the "skeleton" of our article. A content outline is a structured way of organizing our ideas and findings, as it requires us to define our article's main message and decide on the content of its introduction, body and conclusion. Finally, once we have organized our ideas, we can start writing.

As with the devotionals, participants have one or two "peer editing sessions" each day where they form small groups to read and discuss one another's draft articles. The instructors facilitate these group discussions but in most cases peer editing sessions quickly develop by themselves. Group members interact well with one another and everyone usually receives plenty of useful feedback.

After each peer editing session, participants can use the input they have received to rework and expand their articles. By the end of the retreat, most participants are able to submit at least a complete first draft.

WHAT DO PARTICIPANTS SAY ABOUT EWR?

After every EWR, participants generally leave feeling spiritually edified, having learned and shared God's word, whether through writing, discussions during peer editing sessions, or daily Bible study before prayers.

Let's see what past EWR participants have said:

When we write for God, we are simply putting our reflections, experiences or teachings that we've gathered from the Bible onto paper. Our aim is to encourage the readers in their faith—not to entertain. Our tool is the word of God itself—not our eloquence. This is the greatest difference between secular writing and writing for the church. For this reason, anyone can write for God as long as we have the heart to serve Him.



Devotionals

“Great tips on ideas, structure and writing style for devotionals. 1 point, 300 words! Good that we were given sufficient time to write an actual devotional. The peer-editing sessions were extremely useful too. It takes someone else to look at our devotional in a different light to get better writing. Peer-editing also allows for our fellow writers to play the role of a reader and it was useful to see which parts of our writing helped/did not help our readers understand a certain biblical principle/passage better.”

Research and Passage Development

“Tedious, time-consuming but needed. It helped me learn a lot about the passage, which created more thoughts and ideas.”

“I learned a lot from the research and passage development sessions. So much more can be extracted from a passage and related verses; this makes our writing more biblically sound. TJC articles are different from other churches’ articles because we are led by the Holy Spirit and have the knowledge of the truth. Thank God that we focused more on the content rather than style. Found the peer editing sessions useful

as well, as we see biblical teachings from others’ perspective.”

What Was Most Challenging?

“Trying to make sure that my writing was relevant to the reader by providing specific examples and my own personal experiences. The structuring of the articles and trying to decide what information to include and what to leave out was also challenging.”

“Most challenging? Consolidating the ideas in my head and writing them out coherently on paper. I feel like I have got a whole mind map of information/ideas but how to bring across my one MAIN point? And with impact?”

In General

“Excellent platform for developing critical thinking and writing, especially for learning how to put spiritual experiences/insight into articles.”

“Overall, I think EWR has been a great experience. I really enjoyed everything that I learned this time and I am really hoping and looking forward to going to next year’s EWR!”

START SHARING THROUGH WRITING

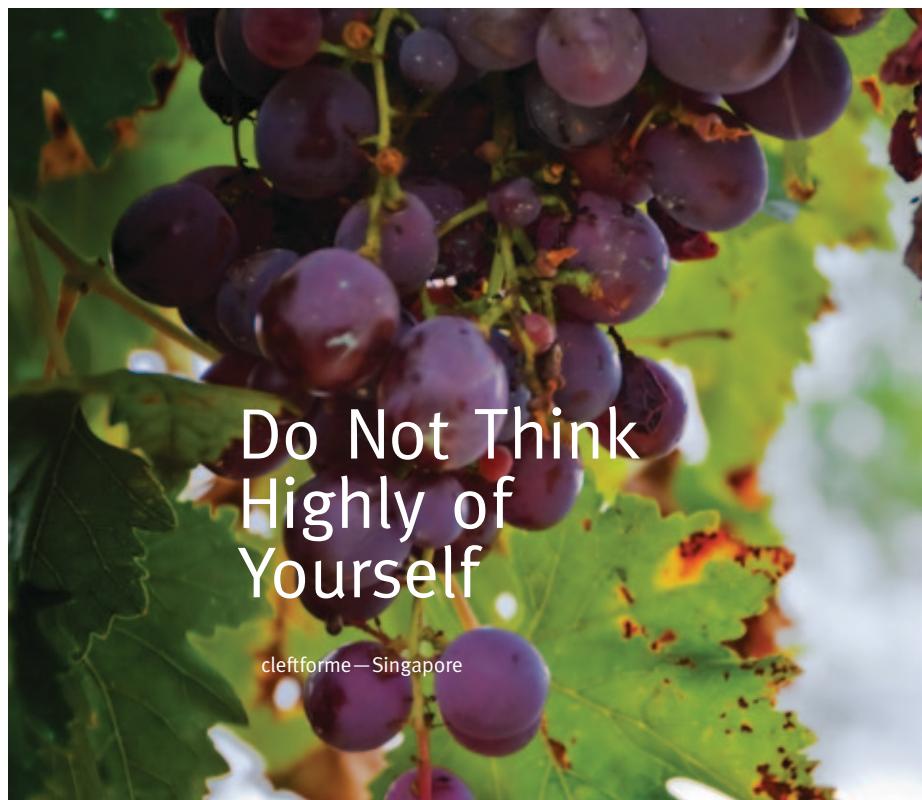
Writing for church is very different from writing for secular purposes. We are not writing to entertain or to transmit information; we are writing to share God’s word of salvation and to encourage each other in our journey of faith. These are tasks that God has entrusted to all of us, so why not give it a try and start sharing through writing? *

Editor's note:

If you would like to know more about the English Writers Retreat, please contact us at manna@tjc.org.

Good articles are based on good content, and good content must be based on the Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.





Do Not Think Highly of Yourself

cleftforme—Singapore

There are times in life when we meet with arrogant people whom, we feel, think too highly of themselves. It could be that bossy employee at work, or that "wise guy" in class. Perhaps they do deserve our respect for what they have accomplished and we are just envious of them. Or perhaps they really are self-deluded in assuming that, just because they hold themselves with high regard, others around them should do the same. Apparently, this was also a common sight two millennia ago, because Jesus warned of such people in one of His parables (Lk 14:7–11).

CHOOSING THE BEST PLACES

So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place."

(Lk 14:7–9)

According to Jewish custom, whenever there is a feast, the host would sit at the head of the table. The seats next to him were reserved for those guests he held

with the highest honor or respect. This is evident even in the Old Testament, when Samuel first met young Saul and invited him to a feast. Samuel had him seated in the "place of honor among those who were invited" (1 Sam 9:22) after God revealed to Samuel that Saul would be Israel's first king.

The above parable relates how an individual chose the best seat for himself, without waiting to be invited by the host. He made this decision, not because all other seats were taken, but because he assumed that he was the most respected among the guests. Naturally, he deserved the seat beside the host, as custom permits.

Although Jesus did not mention who the invitees to the feast were, interestingly, the "best place" in the parable draws reference to the "best places" (Mt 23:6, Mk 12:39, Lk 20:46) that the Pharisees and scribes would usually take when they attended these feasts. Being teachers of the law and for some, rulers of the synagogues, they commanded high standing in Jewish society. Thus, it was reasonable for them to assume that these seats of honor would be reserved for them whenever they were present, just as the parking space in the foyer of a building is reserved only for VIPs.

However, to Jesus, these notable men in society who loved "greetings

in the marketplaces and to be called by men, Rabbi, Rabbi" (Mt 23:7) were contemptible, as they merely "[appeared] righteous to men, but inside... [were] full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Mt 23:28). Though the Pharisees thought highly of themselves, given the respect awarded to them by the people, in the eyes of Jesus, these "serpents, brood of vipers" deserved the "condemnation of hell" (Mt 23:33). In the eyes of men they may have been great, but in the eyes of Jesus they were the least of all. I would imagine that if Jesus ever hosted a feast, he would have followed the example of the host in the parable to usher them away from the best places because He did not think highly of them at all.

HOW WE MIGHT THINK

Similar to the character in the parable, the Pharisee's main flaw was their pre-conceived notion that the host would honor them, just because they were deemed honorable by the society. Today, this wrong thinking may also be present in some of us. When we congregate in church, do we consider ourselves as better than our brethren, and hence more deserving of honor in God's eyes?

We are aware that we should treat each other equally as children of God. However, the danger comes when contrasting principles of the world



When we serve God, we have to remember that our talents and abilities are God-given, according to His purpose. Also, we should never have the misconception that certain aspects of divine work are more honorable than others, for God does not view them the same way as the world does.

infiltrate our minds. Secular organizations esteem high-performing, result-oriented employees, and high profile assignments are more sought after than “behind the scenes” tasks, much like the singer who performs on stage and the songwriter who remains hidden.

Similarly, the church has a variety of duties, which we have to fulfill. However, if we are not careful, we may bring worldly concepts into the church. For instance, we may feel we are better than our brother, and when a church duty is assigned to him and not to us, we become upset. We may think that we can undertake and accomplish a task better than others. We may believe that God will favor us more if we carry out the more prominent work in church, for example delivering sermons, in contrast with duties, deemed less honorable in societal standards, such as cleaning and maintenance. It is not wrong to aspire to be honored by God, but it is wrong when we assume that God honors man the same way as the world does.

HOW WE OUGHT TO THINK

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(Rom 12:2)

When we come to the house of God, we have to understand that God perceives things differently from the people of the world. Quite often, we fall into the trap of thinking highly of ourselves because our focus is always on what we think, shaped by our interactions with society, and not on what God thinks. How should we renew our minds so we can conform to God's will instead?

With Humility

But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.

(Lk 14:10)

Jesus introduces the attitude that we ought to have when invited to the feast. Instead of presuming our honorable status and taking the best seats at the table, we should go to the lowest places. Our own perspective or even that of other guests towards ourselves as having the least honor should not influence us. Deciding on who is more honorable is the prerogative of the master. We must leave this decision to God and remain humble, no matter how much we have done for Him.

With Sobriety

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

(Rom 12:3)

It is not wrong to aspire to be honored by God, but it is wrong when we assume that God honors man the same way as the world does.

When we serve God, we have to remember that our talents and abilities are God-given, according to His purpose. Also, we should never have the misconception that certain aspects of divine work are more honorable than others, for God does not view them the same way as the world does. In our service to God, all duties are to be treated with equal importance and discharged with humility.

Without Expecting a Reward

So likewise, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say “We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.”

(Lk 17:10)

Once our work is done, we must not think highly of ourselves and expect a reward in return. As we serve Him, we should not focus on the reward of being esteemed and honored by Him. If we do so, we may unknowingly become boastful. Instead, apply the teaching of our Lord Jesus and remind ourselves: “We are unprofitable servants. We have only done our duty. Let our reward be to give all glory and honor to Him alone.”

FROM HUMBLED TO EXALTED

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant...He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.

(Phil 2:5-9)

Jesus came as God in the flesh and, this alone, according to worldly standards warranted the right to be exalted by man. Yet Jesus did not choose to be tainted by these principles and consider Himself more honorable than any other man. Rather, He remained humble in His ministry until He breathed His last. Jesus knew clearly that the will of the Father went contrary to the ways of the world. As a result of His humility and submissiveness, the Father exalted Him to the most honorable place—the right hand of God.

Jesus has set the standard for us; He has shown us the need to remain humble. We must take heed that we don't confuse the principles of the world with how God wants us to view ourselves. Let us renew our minds and “humble (ourselves) under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt us in due time” (1 Pet 5:5-6).

For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

(Lk 14:11) *



Peniel: Seeing the Truth

Peter Shee—Singapore



*"I am the way, the truth...
If you have known Me, you would have
known My Father also;
And from now on you know Him and have
seen Him."*

(Jn 14:6-7)

No one has seen God at any time (Jn 1:18). Even Moses who saw God's *form* (Num 12:8) did not really see God as *He is* (1 Jn 3:2). Interestingly, apostle Paul used Moses, whom God knew face to face (Deut 34:10), to demonstrate the blindness of the unbelieving Jews—the veil that Moses placed over his shining face¹ shielded the Israelites from the glory of God then, and also the truth of the Scriptures thereafter.

The Fourth Gospel introduces Jesus as the true light that helps us truly see God, and equates knowing God with eternal life (Jn 1:9;18; 17:3). John wraps this up beautifully in his first epistle: "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 Jn 5:20).

A personal encounter with Jesus is essential for everyone who wants to know God. This is the experience of the Samaritan woman in John 4.

Here, Jesus takes a decidedly different

approach from the way He deals with the blinded Jewish leaders of His time. Instead of speaking in parables, obscuring the message from already hardened hearts, Jesus now lifts the veil, albeit gradually, and reveals Himself, giving knowledge of God to an unknown Samaritan woman:

FIRST STEP TO SEEING GOD— SEEING YOUR REAL NEED

One of the reasons why people cannot see God is because they do not see a need to. Jesus' words to the Pharisees are instructive: "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains" (Jn 9:41).

The Samaritan woman knows she has a need, just that she doesn't know what that need is. Though she has earlier refused Jesus a drink, she is not embarrassed to request: "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw" (Jn 4:15). She expects a physical quencher, for her spiritual thirst is yet unknown to her. Jesus then leads her to discover her real problem by asking for her husband.

TRUE SATISFACTION—"IF YOU KNEW THE GIFT OF GOD" (Jn 4:10)

*"Till grace my sightless eyes received, Thy
loveliness to see"²*

A true recognition of one's needs opens up the mind to see the real solution to that need—what God is prepared to give which we are not yet prepared to receive.

With five husbands behind her and currently living with a man not married to her, the Samaritan woman has a void in her life that only God could fill and Jesus helps her to realize it. Upon seeing that Jesus is not just a prophet greater than her ancestor Jacob, but the very gift of God, the answer to all her needs, she leaves behind her waterpot—a telling sign of her satisfaction—and takes a different course from her daily routine, going into the city to tell of her encounter with the Savior (Jn 4:28–29).

TRUE WORSHIP—"YOU WORSHIP WHAT YOU DO NOT KNOW; WE KNOW WHAT WE WORSHIP..." (Jn 4:22)

"Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart"³

When the Samaritan woman is made to see her spiritual condition, her focus immediately switches from the mundane to the spiritual, from water to worship.

Worship is a matter of the heart; it involves an earnest desire to be in the presence of God, comparable to a deer panting for the water brooks (Ps 42:1–2). We may have attended church for



God seeks true worshippers (Jn 4:23) just as they seek God. He will be found in worship, which need not be on a sacred mountain or in a holy city; we only need purity and truth in the heart to see (Mt 5:8; Heb 10:22) the God who is true (Jn 7:28).

decades and even participated in running special services, but if we cannot enjoy the simplicity of private prayer and meditation on God's word, most likely our public worship is superficial, involving more of the body than the spirit and mind.

Though the worship experience can be enhanced with physical ambience, uplifting music and good sermons, nothing is more important than the worshipper himself. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that the key to true worship is to know the One you worship, for only then can worship be of the spirit, out of sincerity and truth (Jn 4:24).

God seeks true worshippers (Jn 4:23) just as they seek God. He will be found in worship, which need not be on a sacred mountain or in a holy city; we only need purity and truth in the heart to see (Mt 5:8; Heb 10:22) the God who is true (Jn 7:28).

SEE JESUS FOR WHO HE IS

The unnamed woman's testimony captures the interest of some people in the city to go and see Jesus for themselves. There are many who can tell us the way to God, but there is only One who is the way and the truth (Jn 14:6).

The men of Samaria act on the woman's word (Jn 4:39), but only to see the truth for themselves. After two days of face-to-face teaching from Jesus (Jn 4:41), they can truly say they know who Jesus is by first-hand experience and not through third party witness. They tell the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him" (Jn 4:42).

TRUE FAITH—"WE KNOW THAT THIS IS INDEED THE CHRIST, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD" (Jn 4:42)

"With eyes of faith we look to Thee as God's beloved only Son"⁴

The Samaritans of the city are rewarded in their quest with an insight that exceeds the thinking of their Jewish

contemporaries—that the Messiah is not a political liberator of the Jewish nation and that He is more than a prophet to Israel; He is in fact the Savior of the whole world.

The woman's earlier remark, "I know that Messiah is coming. When He comes, He will tell us all things" (Jn 4:25), is now perfected by the enlightened proclamation: "We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (Jn 4:42). Seeing this truth means genuine faith that leads to salvation (1 Pet 1:9), for indeed "the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 Jn 5:20).

TRUE FOOD—"I HAVE FOOD TO EAT OF WHICH YOU DO NOT KNOW." (Jn 4:32)

"Open our eyes Lord, We want to see Jesus"⁵

At about the same moment, when the woman of Samaria leaves her waterpot by Jacob's well and turns towards the city, the disciples of Jesus return from the city with food. When they urge Jesus to eat, He gives them a discourse on true food in order to open their eyes (Jn 4:35) to the true harvest, the gathering of fruit for eternal life (Jn 4:36). To the Samaritans, He is the Savior of the world. To His disciples, He impresses on them that He is the harvester of souls and bids them to join Him until the work is accomplished (Jn 4:34).

Urging the disciples who offer Him food to reap from the harvest of eternal value is later mirrored in His advice to seekers of bread: "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which

the Son of Man will give you" (Jn 6:27). While our work is to believe in Him (Jn 6:29) and gather others into this faith, His work includes the giving of Himself as our bread of life (Jn 6:35,51).

Jesus sows His life (Jn 12:24) that he might harvest our souls into eternal life. This is the will of God (Jn 6:38–39), His work and His food (Jn 4:34). This is the story He tells when certain Gentiles make the request, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (Jn 12:21).

CONCLUSION

"To know Christ and to make Him known"⁶

Seeing the truth is to come to an accurate knowledge of Jesus Christ, a compelling truth that inevitably transforms our lives (Phil 3:10). It sees us abandon our waterpot, counting as worthless the things we used to value and trust (Phil 3:7–8); it redirects our paths and orders our steps as one yoked to Christ for His work (Mt 11:28–29), making Him known to others. ★

1 When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the stone tablets, his face shone with God's glory; he wore a veil over his face because the people were afraid (Ex 34:29–33).

2 From the hymn 'None But Christ Can Satisfy' (author unknown)

3 From the hymn 'Be Thou My Vision' (commonly attributed to Dallan Forgaill)

4 From the hymn "Tis not with Eyes of Flesh We See" by Ora W. Garber

5 From the gospel song 'Open Our Eyes, Lord' by Robert Cull

6 A well-known Christian motto

Seeing the truth is to come to an accurate knowledge of Jesus Christ, a compelling truth that inevitably transforms our lives (Phil 3:10).

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Author Guidelines

Manna is looking for certain types of articles, or article genres. Each genre constitutes a different subject matter and writing approach. If you are planning to write an article (regardless of topic), please try to adhere to one of the genres below.

Christian Living

A Christian Living article gives practical biblical guidance on real-life issues and how to use Jesus' teachings in our daily lives.

Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Bible Study

A Bible Study explores a passage or character from the Bible and draws out the teachings for readers to apply to their lives.

Article length: 2000 words.

Doctrinal Study

A Doctrinal Study examines an aspect of True Jesus Church beliefs and may present it in comparison to other beliefs.

Article length: 2000 words.

Exhortation

An Exhortation encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith. Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Testimony

A Testimony recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader. Article length: 1000-1500 words.

Creative Writing

Creative Writing pieces include poems, parables, or short stories that illustrate a biblical teaching or idea. Keep in mind as you're writing: how will this edify the reader?

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

- Content should be biblically sound and adhere to biblical principles.
- Article should be organized and have a logical flow of thought.
- The main point or teaching of the article should be clear to the reader.
- Readers should be able to apply what they have read to their daily lives.

GRAMMAR/STYLE

- Use active instead of passive voice.
- Write concisely.
- Use concrete words and ideas instead of abstract concepts.
- Use "plain old English" instead of obscure, academic language.
- Use the NKJV version when quoting Bible verses.
- Use American spelling, if possible.
- Adhere to the IA Style Guide in its latest edition.

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please email electronic files of articles (Microsoft Word) to manna@tjc.org.

Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or Fax: +1-562-402-3190

In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number even if you wish to remain anonymous.

TrueJesusChurch

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh, died on the cross for the redemption of sinners, resurrected on the third day and ascended to heaven. He is the only Savior of mankind, the Creator of the heavens and earth, and the only true God.

Holy Bible

The Holy Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is inspired by God, the only scriptural truth, and the standard for Christian living .

Church

The True Jesus Church, established by our Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit during the time of the "latter rain," is the restored true church of the apostolic time.

Baptism

Water baptism is the sacrament for the remission of sins for regeneration. The baptism must take place in natural living water, such as the river, sea, or spring. The Baptist, who already has had received baptism of water and the Holy Spirit, conducts the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the person receiving the baptism must be completely immersed in water with head bowed and face downward.

Holy Spirit

Receiving the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues, is the guarantee of our inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

Footwashing

The Washing of Feet is a sacrament which enables one to have a part in the Lord and teaches mutual love, holiness, humility, service, and forgiveness. The sacrament of the washing of feet must be performed in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ to all newly baptized members. Mutual washing of feet may be practiced when necessary.

Holy Communion

The Holy Communion is the sacrament to commemorate the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It enables us to partake of the flesh and blood of our Lord and to be in communion with Him so that we can have eternal life and be raised on the Last Day. This sacrament shall be held as often as possible. Only one unleavened bread and grape juice shall be used.

Sabbath Day

The Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week (Saturday), is a holy day, blessed and sanctified by God. It is to be observed under the Lord's grace for the commemoration of God's creation and salvation and with the hope of eternal rest in the life to come.

Salvation

Salvation is given by the grace of God through faith. Believers must rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness, to honor God, and to love humanity.

Last Day

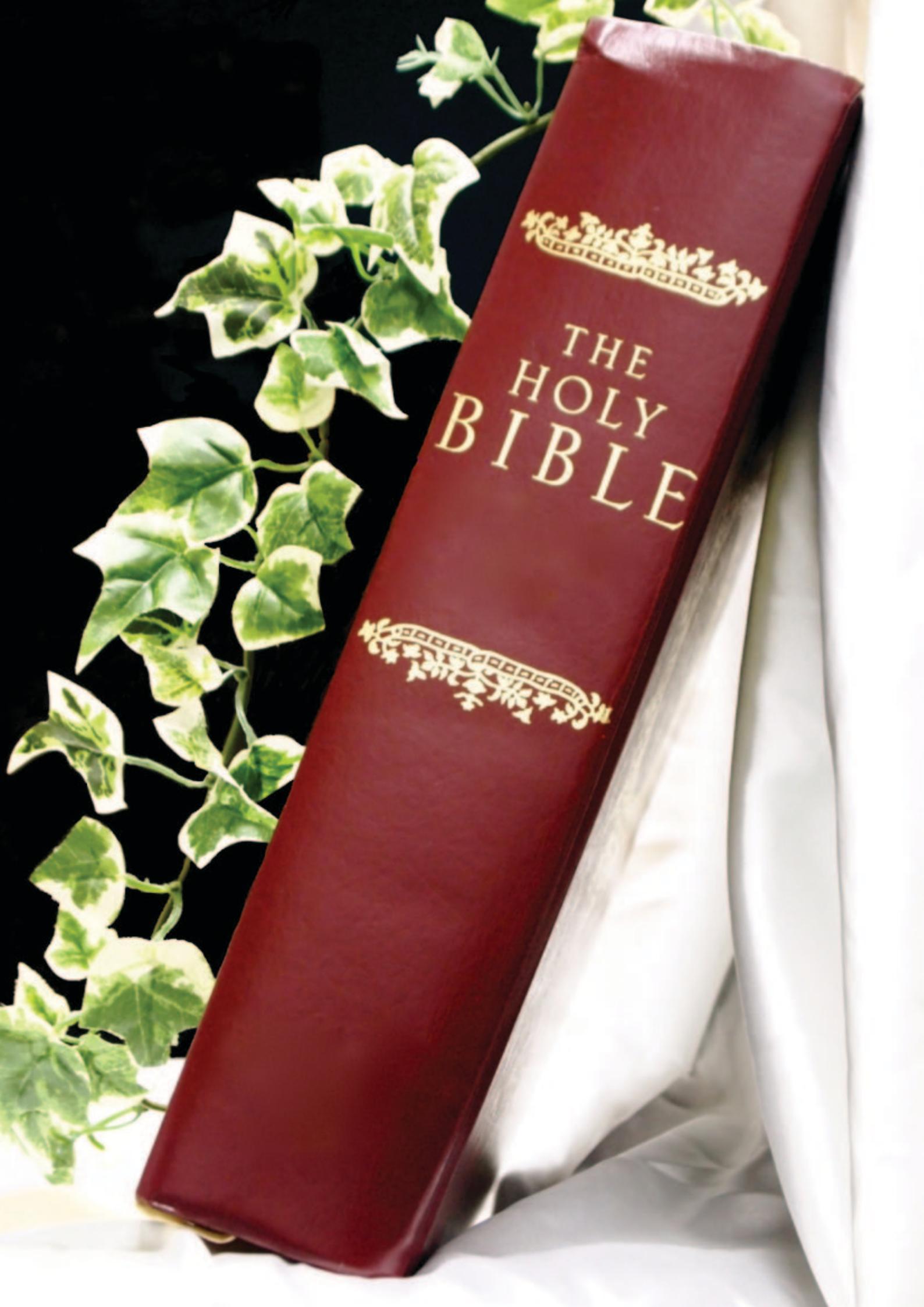
The Lord's Second Coming will take place on the last day when He descends from heaven to judge the world: the righteous will receive eternal life, while the wicked will be eternally condemned.

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information on the True Jesus Church, contact us or visit us on our website. We look forward to hearing from you!

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