

Search The Scriptures

Volume 54-57



Name: _____

District: _____

Region/Group: _____

State: _____

A publication of Life Press Ltd.
Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Lagos, Nigeria

Reprinted by Deeper Christian Life Ministry
Northern European Headquarters
P.O. Box 737, 2501 CS The Hague, The Netherlands
Email: dclm@deeperlife.nl
© 2018



PASTOR W.F. KUMUYI

FOUNDER & GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT
DEEPER LIFE BIBLE CHURCH WORLDWIDE

ABOUT PASTOR W.F. KUMUYI

Pastor (Dr.) William Folorunso Kumuyi, previously a professor of mathematics at the University of Lagos, is the founding pastor of the Deeper Life Bible Church and General Superintendent of Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Worldwide. The Church with its headquarters in Lagos officially began on November 7, 1982 with a simple message: "Jesus transforms lives - bringing not only healing but a complete and fully formed Christian character." By 1988, the Conference of Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches worldwide recognized Deeper Life Bible Church as the single largest church in Africa, and the third largest single congregation in the world.

The phenomenal growth of the church tends to overshadow its small beginning. With 15 adult members in 1973, Kumuyi began an interdenominational weekly Bible study in Lagos. By 1975, this fledgling group quickly grew to 1500 people who assembled faithfully every Monday to hear the systematic, expository and rich teaching of the scriptures with practical application that is immediately helpful and relevant to listeners. Less than a decade later, the Bible Study group became what is now the Deeper Life Bible Church and grew to 350,000 members at the Lagos headquarters church with mission work in 42 countries of the world. The church has since sustained an unprecedented growth trajectory leading to worldwide membership strength in the millions.

Pastor Kumuyi, from the beginning of his ministry, has been blessed with divine success because of his commitment to teaching sound doctrine, a stellar and pristine character, unparalleled commitment to leadership development and divine giftedness.

A humble and outstanding teacher and preacher, Pastor Kumuyi exemplifies servant leadership. He commits himself tirelessly and selflessly to achieve divinely ordained goals. He has a colossal grasp of the scriptures coupled with uncanny ability to dissect

scriptural truths. Preaching between two worlds, bridging the context and the content of the biblical text to meet the realities and the needs of present day led many listeners to conclude that he “teaches the Bible as if he was there when it was written”.

The Bible serves as the proof text for his teaching and preaching. With a thematic approach, he gives a wide range of Bible passages supporting, clarifying and expanding his main point. A typical Kumuyi teaching is a beauty to behold. He brightens and deepens delivery with laborious scholarship and stylistic deployment of a vast range of figurative, alliterative devices. . Kumuyi’s message is music to the ears and balm to the spirit. It comes across with crystal clarity free from the din and distractions of fleeting hysterics and unnecessary drama. It is not uncommon to see on a typical Sunday service, princes, paupers, professors and priests sit side by side reaching for the cross and surrendering to the Lord in response to a heart-rending sermon. This emphasis on the primacy of preaching and the exaltation of the Word is one of Kumuyi’s great legacies to the body of Christ.

Much of the church’s cohesion and shared sense of community have been driven by the inspiring and exemplary leadership of Pastor Kumuyi. His infectious passion for evangelism is undiminished. He is passionate about leadership training and equipping pastors, teachers, evangelists and Christian workers. As his congregation blossomed throughout Africa, the Deeper Christian Life Ministry has also extended its missionary exploits to Western Europe, Russia, Asia, India and North America. Kumuyi credits God for the success recorded so far by the church: “The bottom line is that God in His own wisdom and power raised up the church and has given us divine support. The only reason Deeper Life has grown is because God Himself has given the growth.”

CONTENTS

LESSON		PAGE
---------------	--	-------------

OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

690	Boaz Marries Ruth	9
691	Hannah's Prayer and Vow	15
692	The Birth of Samuel	23
693	Hannah's Song of Praise	29
694	The Sins of Eli's Sons	35

NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

695	Paul Rehearses His Calling	41
696	The Universal Gospel	46
697	Justification and Righteousness by Faith	51
698	Rebuke for Reverting to Legalism	58
699	Adoption and Sonship Through Christ	66

SPECIAL STUDIES

700	Assurance of Salvation	73
701	The Service of Consecrated Saints	81
702	The Rapture	89

OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

703	Divine Judgment on Eli's Posterity	96
704	God Reveals Himself to Samue	103
705	God's Glory Departs from Israe	110
706	God Chastises the Philistines	119
707	The Ark Returned to Israel	125

NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

708	Symbols of Law and Grace	132
709	Maintaining Spiritual Liberty	139
710	The Fruit of The Spirit	146
711	Believers' Duty to The Fallen	153
712	The Law of Sowing and Reaping	159

SPECIAL STUDIES

713	Christian Attitude During Persecution	163
714	Victory Over Temptation	172
715	The Resurrection of The Dead	181

OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

716	Israel's Victory Over the Philistines	188
717	Israel Asks for A King	195
718	Saul Seeks the Lost Asses	202
719	Samuel Anoints Saul King	208
720	Victory of Jabesh Over Ammon	215

NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

721	Believers' Enrichment Through Christ	222
722	Intercession for Believers' Spiritual Growth	228
723	Salvation by Grace	233
724	Mystery of The Church Revealed	240
725	Believers' Unity and Ministry Gifts	247

SPECIAL STUDIES

726	Vision for Missions	255
727	Follow-up and Discipleship	261
728	The Great Tribulation and The Antichrist	268

OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

729	Samuel Reproves Israe	275
730	Saul Disobeys the Lord	282
731	Jonathan Triumphs over the Philistines	288
732	God Rejects Saul	295
733	David Anointed King	302

NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

734	The New Lifestyle of Believers	308
735	Believers' Walk and Wisdom	314
736	Precepts for Christian Marriage	320
737	Believers' Responsibilities at Home and Work	326
738	Complete Armor for Spiritual Warfare	333

SPECIAL STUDIES

739	Worldliness and Worldly Amusements	339
740	Consistent Christian Living	344
741	The Second Coming of Christ	351

Lesson 690

BOAZ MARRIES RUTH

MEMORY VERSE: “So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son” (Ruth 4:13).

TEXT: Ruth 4:1-22

Events that followed the decision of Ruth, the Moabitess to return with Naomi to Bethlehem Judah have proved that God esteems and rewards consecration, piety and industry. Ruth, as seen in previous lessons in this book, had been torn between going back to her people and gods and choosing to be a proselyte and worshipper of the God of Israel. She opted for the latter and God proved to her that she did not make a mistake. As soon as she returned to Israel, her experience proved that **“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way”** (Psalm 37:23). Upon a series of divinely ordered steps, Ruth met Boaz who turned out not only to be a near kinsman, but her future husband and one who would provide her the rest which she needed. The account of the life of Ruth shows that it pays to be chaste, righteous, diligent and resolute in serving the Lord.

This study focuses on the consummation of Ruth’s relationship with Boaz. The marriage can be said to be according to the will of God going by the events which surrounded it. People involved in the arrangement also followed due process and necessary guidelines for marriage at that time based on the Law of Moses. As the Scripture enjoins us, all things should be done **“decently and in order”** (1 Corinthians 4:40). Believers have a lot to learn from the virtue of patience exhibited by Ruth and pray earnestly for God’s will before going into marriage. They should also strive to follow scriptural procedures as taught by the church.

All along, Ruth was patient knowing that God would work things out in His own time. She was also consistent and faithful in service. Above all, she maintained purity and holiness while waiting for the

will of God to be done. These qualities are expected of brothers and sisters seeking God's will in marriage today.

Question 1: *What should be the attitude of single brothers and sisters waiting for God's will in marriage?*

BOAZ, A KINSMAN-REDEEMER (Ruth 4:1-12; Leviticus 25:25; Deuteronomy 25:5-10; 1 Corinthians 14:40; Matthew 22:24)

According to the Law of Moses, the nearest kinsman of the deceased was to redeem his inheritance, and if he had a wife, perform the duties of a husband (Deuteronomy 25:5; Mark 12:19; Luke 20:28). A nearer kinsman, whose name was not mentioned, had the first right to marry Ruth and inherit the family land (Leviticus 25:25). **"Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down"** (Ruth 4:1). In the presence of the city elders, Boaz put the proposal concerning the redemption of the inheritance of Naomi to him. He initially agreed, but when he was told that he would also marry Ruth to raise seed for the dead, he rejected the offer. **"...I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar my own inheritance"** (Ruth 4:6).

The nearest kinsman could not redeem her probably because he felt that would spoil his own inheritance. He thought that taking Ruth would be an additional burden to him and his family. In like manner, many refuse the thought to surrender their lives to Christ because they fear it may affect their earthly inheritance.

Boaz became a redeemer in two ways: he married Ruth and preserved the name of Elimelech. Secondly, he redeemed the family land that Naomi had sold and restored it to Elimelech's inheritance. These benevolent acts make him a type of Christ who redeems the believer: He purchased us by His own blood and thereby saved us from perishing in sin

(John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:18,19). Two, He includes us as the redeemed in His eternal inheritance in the new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1-7). Three, we are made joint-heirs with Him which gives us access to the heavenly inheritance (Roman 8:17). Four, as Boaz was a husband to Ruth, Christ is the Bridegroom to the Church.

Question 2: *Explain how Boaz became a type of Christ.*

BOAZ'S MARRIAGE WITH RUTH (Ruth 4:9-13; 1 Chronicles 2:12; Matthew 1:5; Deuteronomy 7:8-11; 23:3)

Consequent upon the nearest kinsman's inability to redeem Ruth, **"Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day"** (Ruth 4:9,10). The elders witnessed the transaction and blessed Boaz and Ruth. There are vital lessons from this event. One, although he was deeply interested in Ruth, Boaz patiently followed the laid down procedure of the law in handling the case.

Christians should follow due process either in marriage or in resolving issues within and outside the church. Two, he showed preference for others by giving the opportunity first to the other kinsman; **"... in honour preferring one another"** (Romans 12:10). From Boaz, Christians should emulate the qualities of patience, orderliness and selflessness in handling issues. Three, he did not attempt to do anything in secret. The elders of the city gave credence and witness to his proposed marriage. **"And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders said, we are witnesses"** (Ruth 4:11). Believers must watch against shady deals and every form of deceitful works.

Christian bachelors and spinsters should avoid every temptation of planning secret marriages because they often lead to many untold regrets, heartaches and irreparable losses.

Question 3: *What qualities of character can we emulate from Boaz in handling issues?*

“So, Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife...” (Ruth 4:13). The Law of Moses had prohibited the Moabites from entering the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation. **“An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD forever”** (Deuteronomy 23:3). However, Ruth became an exemption because of her decision to serve the Lord. She had been incorporated into the family of God by marriage having left her own country, people and gods to become a convert to the living God. Thus, Ruth was a witness for God to the gentiles, indicating that God had not utterly forsaken them but that in due time, they should become one with His chosen people and partake of His salvation. It follows therefore, that those who repent and decide to follow Christ will be saved no matter their background or pedigree (Ezekiel 18:4-9; John 6:37; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13).

Ruth left the land of her nativity (Moab) to follow her mother-in-law back to Bethlehem. Her consecration and devotion to serve the living God of Israel paid off in the end. We see in Ruth a striking example of godliness, patience and faithfulness. She was discreet, contented and free from covetousness; **“... in as much as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich”** (Ruth 3:10). Her virtuous life was well known to all the people around her: **“...for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman”**. She sought God and His righteousness before seeking the gift of a new husband. She sought virtue before thinking about the comfort of re- marriage.

Ruth's life and experience teaches us that we should put priority on seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Two, we must learn

to patiently wait for God's appointed time for our blessings, be it a marriage partner, employment, business or career. Three, we must put absolute trust in God and His promise because **"he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"** (Hebrews 11:6).

The obedience of Boaz and Ruth attracted blessings upon their union. **"The LORD makes the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman..."** (Ruth 4:11,12).

THE BIRTH OF OBED AND GENEALOGY OF DAVID
(Ruth 4:14-22; Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38; 1:58; Romans 12:15)

"So, Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son" (Ruth 4:13). The birth of baby Obed was a further testament to God's plan and program for Ruth, Israel and indeed the world. Aside of the comfort and rest which He promised those who trust Him, the Lord was also preparing the way for the future Messiah through Ruth. As a reward for her faithfulness, God made her to stand out as one of about four women, and the only gentile (besides Rahab) to have a place in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ. **"And Salmon begat Boaz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth..."** (Matthew 1:5).

As the birth of a child is a just cause of rejoicing, the women came around to felicitate with Naomi and Ruth. Believers are equally enjoined to **"rejoice with them that do rejoice..."** (Romans 12:15). The neighbors recommended a name suitable to the circumstances of the case; and the parents and grandmother adopted it. They called his name Obed which means 'serving' because he was to be the nourisher of Naomi in old age (Ruth 4:15).

Our text climaxes with this fascinating account of the genealogy of David, revealing how God rewarded the

consecration and devotion of Ruth, the Moabitess. **“And Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed. And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David”** (Ruth 4:21,22). Ruth had earlier declared: **“...thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God”** (Ruth 1:16); truly she walked her talk and demonstrated that her decision to follow the Lord was real. Declaration of intention alone never endears anyone to God until it is followed by purposeful action. **“Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also...”** (2 Corinthians 8:11).

Question 4: How can a sinner have a place in God’s Book of life?

Sinners can have their names in the Book of life and a place in God’s record if they acknowledge their sinfulness, confess and repent of all their evil deeds, and exercise faith in the vicarious sacrifice of Christ’s atonement (Romans 10:10-13; Revelation 20:11-15).

As we conclude the book of Ruth, there are some pertinent lessons for the heaven-bound believer. One, we should make our choices with God’s eternal values in mind. Two, avoid the temptation of moral shortcuts and living for short-term pleasure. Finally, we should live in faithfulness and obedience to God knowing that the significance of our lives will extend beyond our life time.

Question 5: What lessons do we learn from the book of Ruth?

Lesson 691

HANNAH'S PRAYER AND VOW

MEMORY VERSE: “**And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore**” (1 Samuel 1:10).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 1:1-18

This study introduces us to the historical book of First Samuel. The events recorded in the book began as Israel prepared to make the transition of leadership from the rule of the judges to the reign of kings in Israel. The last judge before this time was Samson, who died without achieving total victory over the Philistines. First Samuel opens with the account of the birth of Samuel who was both a prophet and the last judge in Israel before the setting up of the monarchy.

It would be recalled that the period of the judges was characterized with laxity, impunity and anarchy because there was no king in Israel and everyone did that which was right in their eyes (Judges 21:25). The nation was in a state of degeneracy and spiritual destitution (1 Samuel 3:1). That was the background against which the story in our text happened.

In this introduction to the story of Hannah, we observe how believers should respond to life's challenges, the proper attitude towards critical neighbors, and how to handle issues of unexpected delays in answer to prayer. One unchanging truth is this lesson is that prayer changes things; the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous avails much.

DEPARTURE FROM GOD'S PERFECT WILL AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (1 Samuel 1:1-8; Genesis 4:19,23; 29:23-35; 30:1-24; Judges 8:30,31; 9:1-5; 1 Kings 11:1-10; Matthew 19:8; Romans 7:1-3)

Our text opens with the marriage and family life of the parents of Samuel. It was a very religious but polygamous setting because Elkannah had two wives: Hannah and Peninnah. Hannah, though loved by her husband, was barren but Peninnah had sons

and daughters. In those days, having children was considered a sign of divine approval, while being childless was an evidence of God's disfavor. A childless woman was despised and this usually brought low self-esteem.

Every year, this family attended the annual feast in Shiloh to worship God. After the normal peace offerings at the festival, the family would gather to eat their portion of the sacrifice. Elkannah, being the head of the family, would divide portions for all the members. He gave Peninnah and her children their portions, but he gave a worthy or double portion to Hannah. Though that kind gesture was intended to assuage her pain of having no children, it made Peninnah jealous and she began to deride Hannah. Consequently, there was family trouble and the festival, which was meant to be a time of joyful celebration, was turned into a period of strife and sorrow.

Question 1: *Point out the consequences of polygamy.*

Deviation from God's perfect will in marriage has terrible consequences. Though polygamy was a common practice in the Old Testament period, it was not sanctioned by God. It was one of those things He allowed because of the hardness of hearts of the people. Christ affirmed that it was not so from the beginning (Matthew 19:8). God's original and perfect plan in marriage is lifelong monogamy; no divorce and remarriage while the other partner lives (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:2-4,10).

As in all polygamous marriages, Elkannah could not remain impartial towards his two wives. He loved Hannah more and he was not discreet in showing greater affection to her. In reaction, Peninnah became an adversary to Hannah and provoked her to the point she lost appetite and wept. Her grief robbed the family of the joy and excitement of being in God's presence in Shiloh: and this happened year after year. Like Elkannah, no one can escape the consequences of deviating from God's perfect plan in marriage. His attempt to help Hannah overcome her grief complicated matters and he was helpless over Peninnah's vicious

provocation. One can only imagine the fate of children in such home environment! Believers should avoid all forms of deviations in marriage. Polygamy, polyandry, levirate marriage, divorce, remarriage while the lawful spouse lives, swapping of partners, concubinage, homosexual marriage, etc. are contrary to God's will and should be avoided.

Question 2: *What virtues can couples learn from the family life of Elkannah?*

Despite his shortcoming, Elkannah ensured he led the entire family in the religious pilgrimage to Shiloh year by year. This was in obedience to God's commandment to the Jews. Husbands should learn to assume responsibility for the spiritual development of their family. They must know the way, show the way, and walk the way to properly lead other family members aright. Besides giving Hannah a worthy portion, Elkannah spoke lovingly to her during her grief. Trying to pacify her, he made a comforting statement: **"am not I better to thee than ten sons?"** Couples should not compound their problems when there are challenges in the family. Suspicion, trading blames and accusing each other as the cause of problems will not help in any way; rather, they should unite in faith and pray for divine intervention. They should support each other while navigating the stormy seas of life.

Whereas Elkannah showed some virtues, Peninnah was a bad model. She provoked a godly woman and reproached her because of temporary adversity: and that, right in the place of worship. Believers must be agents of comfort and never an instrument of provocation to others. We should beware lest our words or actions provoke to tears some righteous people who are already laden with cares, either in the church or in the community.

DESPERATE PRAYER AND VOW TO GOD (1 Samuel 1:9- 13; 2 Chronicles 33:12,13; Psalm 18:3; 55:16; 116:1-14; 50:15; 86:7; Luke 1:5-13; 22:44; James 5:13)

Hannah was a woman of faith who did not allow her challenge to hinder her from going to Shiloh year after

year. She realized that being a devoted worshipper of God does not necessarily exempt one from earthly challenges. Our challenges should not hinder us from serving the Lord with gladness. We live for and do worship God not just for temporary blessings we expect of Him, but because it is our duty to do so. This is the purpose of our creation and redemption (Exodus 8:1; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11). We must not make our problems the central focus of our relationship with God. It is important to continue to serve the Lord for who He is, and determine to worship Him no matter how great the challenges we face.

Question 3: What steps should believers take when they are confronted with life's challenges?

Hannah continued in her devotion to God and took her burden to Him in prayer. She did not allow her physical problem to weaken her prayer life. In fact, it was the challenge that propelled her to pray. She withdrew from the crowd into a place of personal prayer. Whereas others could have turned to some prayer charlatans or occult alternatives, Hannah decided to go to God. Her action revealed she had faith in God as she did not give in to self-pity, discouragement or resentment. The delay in conception sparked holy desperation in prayer for divine intervention. Believers should learn to take their problems to God rather than give up or seek help from man. The Scripture affirms that it is vain to rely on men (Psalm 60:11; 121:1,2; 146:3; Jeremiah 3:23).

From Hannah's prayer, we see qualities of effective praying. Though voiceless, it was genuine, fervent and right on target. First, it was sincere, straight from the heart, not rote or offered with feigned words. Second, it was simple. Like Samson's prayer or the thief on the cross, Hannah prayed to God **"remember me"** (1 Samuel 1:11; Judges 16:28; Luke 23:42). Third, it was specific. Her request was not vague but definite. She asked for a male child for a definite purpose. Fourth, the prayer was selfless. She did not ask for a child just for the sake of it or merely to level up with her rival, but a child that would fill the gap in God's house. She was not contemplating a child she would keep in her

custody and brag over, or simply one that would bury her when she died (she knew Nazarites do not bury or go near the dead), but a Nazarite that would serve God all the days of his life. Fifth, Hannah's prayer was scriptural. What she asked agreed with the word of God. Sixth, her request was spiritual in focus. Seventh, the prayer was made with steadfast perseverance. She continued praying until she had assurance of answer (1 Samuel 1:12; Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18). If there is any reproductive, financial, domestic, spiritual or professional barrenness in our lives, we can look up to God and pray earnestly to Him. He will answer and bring fruitfulness.

God does not answer all prayers. Many people pray but they do not receive answers because their prayers are superficial, speculative, shallow, self-centered and self-conscious, sectarian, and sin-tainted. Prayers that are offered with no passion, earnestness, sense of dependency and importunity can rarely change difficult situations. No matter how vocal, prayers that are not rooted in the Scripture or backed up with faith, righteousness and sincerity before God cannot be effective. People who pray with doubt in their hearts should not expect to receive anything from God (James 1:6-8).

Question 4: What is the place of vows in New Testament dispensation?

Hannah manifested her desperation in prayer through her loss of appetite, weeping and the vow she made to God. When we are earnest in prayer, it manifests in several ways. Sometimes we may lose sleep and keep vigil all night in prayer. There may be groaning, loud crying, assuming unusual postures in prayer, fasting and abstinence from other legitimate pleasures (1 Kings 18:42-44; Hebrews 5:7; Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 7:5). This is often so because when there is a real burden in the heart, the physical needs of the body become secondary and are pushed to the background.

In the Old Testament dispensation, it was customary for people to make vows to God as part of their devotion in prayer. The first recorded vow in the Scripture

was that of Jacob (Genesis 28:20; 31:13). Such vows were usually in the form of promises to do something which they felt would please God in exchange for a benefit they desired from Him. It was not considered a bargain but a solemn promise to do something extra for God because of a feeling of desperation before Him.

In the case of Hannah, she requested for a male child and vowed that he would be a perpetual Nazarite unto God. Samson and John the Baptist were other Nazarites for life in the Bible. There are specific regulations concerning vows in the Old Testament (Leviticus 27:1-34; Numbers 6:1-27; 30:1-16; Psalm 76:11; Ecclesiastes 5:4,5; Malachi 1:14). For Hannah's vow to stand, her husband had to uphold it; otherwise, it would be invalid. Moreover, she would have to both bring up and convince her son to accept the vow she had made on his behalf before conception. Her vow revealed her true motive for asking for a son. She was not primarily in competition with Peninnah or seeking a son to soothe her ego, but she wanted to contribute her quota in fulfilling God's purpose in Israel.

In the New Testament dispensation, vows to God are rarely mentioned. Believers in Christ have better promises and a more definite filial relationship with God. Vows are not necessary where a father-child relationship prevails. Apart from this, a person cannot make vows on things which do not belong to him. If we are totally yielded to Him, how can we call it a vow that which is an obligation we owe our Lord and Savior? In the real sense, we own nothing, we have nothing and we can do nothing that may be properly counted a vow to God. The promises of God cover all our needs and we should simply pray in faith and receive what our Father gives us freely.

However, that does not mean vows are now prohibited. They can be beneficial, provided we do not turn them into a mere religious tradition or employ them as bargaining tools in seeking favor from God. We can use vows to remind ourselves the extra mile we promised to go in our devotion to God; for instance, in the way we use our time, money etc. We can also use vows to bind ourselves to our duties towards fellow men. The

marriage vow between a man and his wife is in this latter category. But then, it would be wrong to vow on duties that are obligatory or things upon which the Scripture is very specific. Similarly, it would not be proper to make a vow that will make us incapable of fulfilling our basic responsibilities, such as the care of our family, parents and the like (Mark 7:9-13).

It is better not to vow than to do so and not fulfil it. Making a vow is voluntary but once it is made, it becomes obligatory. God hates empty promises (Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Ecclesiastes 5:4,5; Acts 5:4) Also, we must pray and depend on God for grace to fulfil our vows.

GODLY CHARACTER IN TIMES OF PROVOCATION

(1Samuel 1:6,12-18; 17:26-29; Numbers 32:1-23; Joshua 22:11-34; 1 Peter 4:14-16)

It is not only in Hannah's prayer and selfless vow that we see a demonstration of true piety and beauty of the sanctified life. Her response to the provocation and reproach coming from Peninnah, as well as the sharp and hurtful remark from Eli, the high priest in the place of worship, proved she was truly a godly woman. To Peninnah's taunting, she prayed; to Eli's harsh comment, she exercised restraint and offered necessary explanation.

Question 5: What can believers learn from the wrong rebuke of Hannah by Eli?

As Hannah prayed in the temple, Eli the priest noticed she moved her lips but her voice was inaudible. Then he concluded she must have been drunk with wine and rebuked her sharply. Here was a case of wrong and hasty judgment from which we need to learn some key lessons (Ecclesiastes 10:5-7). First, we must always endeavor to get proof before reproof. Second, we should avoid judging people by mere outward appearances. The deep-seated condition of the heart cannot be measured by mere outward actions. Third, do not judge everyone by the standard of other people's actions whom we know. Even if others or Eli's sons were known to be drunk in God's house, Hannah was a lily in the mire. Fourth, we should not allow our

religious traditions blind us to the broad dimensions of Christian liberty, especially on points where the Scripture is not specific. Hannah's silent prayers must have been strange or contrary to the tradition Eli was used to. But there was no law prohibiting silent praying or compelling loud, audible prayers.

Question 6: How should believers respond to provocations, undeserved criticisms and misunderstandings?

Hannah's response to Eli was calm and humble. Being misunderstood, she offered full but only necessary explanation. There was no self-defense, only putting straight the facts. She called herself Eli's handmaid to prove she recognized and submitted to his spiritual authority despite the error in judgment. She not only claimed she was not drunk, she showed that she abhorred the sin of intoxication by saying **"count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial"**. Believers should emulate Hannah when they are wrongly rebuked or criticized. They should be calm and avoid a self-defensive posture. Inability to forbear the shortcomings and offences of our fellow brethren or leaders is an evidence of immaturity and poverty of grace. When we are misunderstood or find ourselves in situations that expose us to wrong interpretations, we should offer full explanations lest our good be evil spoken of.

After Hannah's explanation, Eli shifted ground and pronounced a benediction on her without even asking for the nature of her problem. She believed God and His prophet and her countenance brightened. True leaders are not obstinate in their mistakes but they take correction and guard against a recurrence. Hannah's godly response turned criticism into a benediction, barrenness into fruitfulness, and sorrow into joy. By the fruit of her lips she reaped life (Proverbs 18:21; Colossians 4:6).

Lesson 692

THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL

MEMORY VERSE: “Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD” (1 Samuel 1:20).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 1:19-28

The text opens with the family devotion of the Elkanahs. Over the years, Elkanah had been leading his entire family to Shiloh to worship God. It was on one of those instances that the preceding verses to the text detailed how Hannah was derided by Peninnah, her rival. Rather than fret, she sought the Lord and Source of all blessings in fervent prayer and received assurance of answers from Eli, the high priest. The God of Hannah is still alive and He answers the prayer of those who are destitute of blessings so they can live the abundant and joyful life promised to believers in Christ. Like Hannah, believers must demonstrate Christ-like virtues even in the face of provocation in addition to being prayerful, to always receive answers to their requests.

Following the successful hosting of the Shiloh retreat, the family was prepared to return to Ramah. **“And they rose in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD...”** (1 Samuel 1:19). The congregational worship did not replace their family devotion. This family deemed it necessary to observe their daily devotion to commune with God as well as commit their journey back home into His hand. Our security and safety in every journey is in God’s hands. So, **“Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass”** (Psalm 37:5). We must not yield to any pressure to live and travel without praying to God. Believers obtain grace for daily victory and success from unbroken communion with the Lord and whole-hearted devotion to Him. Moreover, successful pilgrimage to heaven requires unceasing prayers.

DIVINE RESPONSE TO HANNAH'S FERVENT PRAYER: (1 Samuel 1:19,20; Genesis 30:22,23; Judges 13:3; 2 Kings 4:17; 2 Chronicles 20:12-25; 32:20-23; Psalm 5:3; 34:6- 10,15-19; Luke 1:24,25; 1 John 5:14,15)

Hannah was barren for long after marriage. Perhaps, it was this challenge that constrained her loving husband to take another wife. Besides, Peninnah, her rival, constituted herself into a needless antagonist, thus making life more miserable for her. However, the Lord remembered Hannah. Following her intense supplication, she became pregnant and the Lord miraculously gave her a male child (verses 11,19). Thus, her barrenness turned to blessedness, and sorrow to joy. Hannah's story serves as a beacon of hope for contemporary believers.

Question 1: *What can today's Christians learn from Hannah's story?*

Though unpleasant experiences are common, and godly people including patriarchs, matriarchs, apostles and distinguished believers down the ages have been caught in various webs of affliction, trials, deprivations and sorrows, the good Lord had always shown interest in alleviating the condition of His people. Turnaround experiences of individuals and nations attest to His faithfulness in this regard. So, contemporary believers who are smarting from physical, emotional or spiritual trauma should rest in the consolation that God is always on hand to attend to their needs (Job 5:6-9; Psalm 118:6-17; Isaiah 41:14; Romans 8:31,32; 1 John 4:4).

God hears as well as acts according to the demands of His righteous people. **"The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles"** (Psalm 34:15,17). The Lord greatly delights in responding to the distress cry of His saints, regardless of gender, social status or disposition. The Scripture affirms that **"...the LORD remembered her"** (1 Samuel 1:19).

Question 2: How can believers receive answers to their prayers?

Divine response is normally swift if the request is made aright and according to God's will (Exodus 23:25,26; Deuteronomy 7:13-15; Joshua 10:12,13; Psalm 46:1,5; Isaiah 65:24; Acts 13:11). However, prayers underpinned by covetous tendencies are amiss and do not receive answers. People who reject the call of God to repent or His counsel, doubters and evildoers will not receive answers to their prayers (Job 35:12; Proverbs 1:23-31; Isaiah 1:15,16; 16:12; Jeremiah 11:10,11; Zechariah 7:9-13; James 1:6-8; 4:1-3). Believers should make their petitions with faith based on the promise of God and things that will glorify Him. Recourse to God should not be merely for the gift or benefit we desire, but primarily as proof of our association with and attachment to Him.

If the answer to prayer of the righteous seems long in coming or the Lord seems silent or withdrawn, then the seeker should patiently wait. **"I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD"** (Psalm 27:13,14). God's unfailing promises, ability, authority and sovereignty should inspire confidence in Christians that He will definitely intervene in any situation for their good at the right time (Psalm 62:5-8; Habakkuk 2:3; Romans 8:25; Hebrews 10:35,36; James 1:3,4). With God, delay is not denial. **"Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD"** (1 Samuel 1:20).

According to a Christian writer, the name "Samuel" perpetuated the memory of mercy. One could not call the boy without recalling the circumstances under which he came to be. Besides, it was to put the child in constant remembrance of his lifelong dedicated obligation to the Lord. It was not only a grateful remembrance of God's faithfulness and goodness in the past, but also an incentive to faith and service

in the future. How parents need to inculcate in their children the kind of God-consciousness the way Hannah did!

DEFERRED RETURN OF HANNAH TO SHILOH
(1 Samuel 1:21-28; Deuteronomy 16:16; 31:10-13; Numbers 30:3-16; Psalm 66:13-20; Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:24,25)

Following the birth of Samuel, Hannah determined to defer her attendance at Shiloh retreat for a period of time. **“But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide forever”** (1 Samuel 1:22).

Question 3: *Comment on Hannah’s decision in respect of the Shiloh feasts and the child.*

Like many others, Elkannah normally went to Shiloh with his entire family. But, except for the once in seven years solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, attendance at Shiloh was not as compulsory for women as it was for men. So, Hannah’s decision did not violate any commandment. She meant that as soon as the child was strong enough, she would not only lead him to Shiloh, but leave him there to grow in the courts of the Lord that he was to serve for the rest of his life. However, her action is not a license for parents to dodge holy convocations at will.

The consent of her husband to her decision is quite commendable, especially because he could have invalidated it (Numbers 30:10-12). He ratified it with a prayer for the accomplishment of God’s purpose in granting them the child. **“And Elkannah her husband said unto her, do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the LORD establishes his word. So, the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him”** (1 Samuel 1:23). This kind of support is worthy of emulation. It also attracts special attention, privileges and favors (Genesis 18:1-10; 1 Samuel 2:21; 2 kings 4:8-17; Acts 18:24-28; Hebrews 10:24).

The period of deferral finally ended as soon as the child was weaned. **“And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young”** (1 Samuel 1:24).

Question 4: Explain the change in Hannah’s disposition at her return to Shiloh.

There are lessons for believers here. Hannah made no allusion to Eli’s initial mistaken perception of her in verse 14, but only referred to her supplication, his ratification and God’s favorable response to it. Christians should always be careful to share their testimonies only to praise the Lord and not to demean other people.

The trip to Shiloh, her outlook and presentation there teach believers to be joyful when presenting our valuable gifts to God. Like Hannah, we should perform our vows against all odds. **“Therefore, also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there”** (1 Samuel 1:28).

The words **“give”** (verse 11) and **“lent”** (verse 28) were used to express her unconditional release of the child for divine use. Having accepted her gift, **“the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD”**. A Christian’s commitment and consecration to the Lord will always attract great divine blessings (1 Samuel 2:21; Matthew 19:29).

DEDICATION OF SAMUEL TO GOD (1 Samuel 1:24,28; 2:11; Proverbs 22:6; Ecclesiastes 12:1; Isaiah 28:9,10; Luke 18:15-17; 2 Timothy 3:15)

The story of Hannah challenges New Testament believers on child training. As she brought Samuel to Eli as soon as she had weaned him (verse 24), so must Christians bring their children and wards to know the Lord early in life.

Question 5: Outline any two reasons to support early encounter of a child with the Lord.

One reason is that depravity begins to manifest very early in life (Proverbs 22:15). Two, the early years set the tone for lifelong values. Habits are formed early in life and children can be very susceptible to demonic, human or Christian influences depending on who makes the most impact on them. Three, the Lord Jesus places a high premium on them. Christ used their innocence and sincerity to teach godly virtues (Matthew 18:3). Four, their natural strength can be channeled to best purposes if they know the Lord early in life. Therefore, parents, children workers and all stakeholders in the household of God must intensify efforts at leading the young ones to an acknowledgment of their sinfulness, God's graciousness and Christ's sacrificial love for their salvation with the aim of leading them to repentance and personal faith in the Lord. We must be earnest at this task in gratitude to the Lord for giving them to us, in hope of potential exploits they will be able to do for Him, and in fear of the eternal consequences if we fail.

Lesson 693

HANNAH'S SONG OF PRAISE

MEMORY VERSE: “And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation” (1 Samuel 2:1).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 2:1-11

After many years of barrenness and the attendant taunting from her adversary, Hannah was handsomely rewarded with a bouncing baby boy. It was a battle she fought with the weapons of prayer, patience and perseverance. She equally vowed to honour the Lord with the fruit of her womb if her prayer was answered. First, she redeemed her vow by presenting young Samuel to Eli as a gift to the Lord. Thereafter, she composed the song in the text under consideration.

The song was a spontaneous and unrehearsed prayer of thanksgiving, praise and honour to the Almighty God for His goodness and mercy. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Hannah extolled the omnipotence and omniscience of God, His sovereignty over the universe, and His unparalleled holiness. She paid glowing tributes to the One who possesses all power, strengthens the humble and weak, and undermines the proud and the powerful; He feeds the humble poor but impoverishes the proud rich. God has power to destroy His enemies but can equally sustain His children. He can do and undo. Therefore, His children should take solace in these facts and keep their faith and trust in Him even in the face of seeming discouraging situations. Hannah also ministered in the office of a poet and prophetess through her song.

Question 1: *What can we learn from Hannah's song of praise?*

When God answers our prayer, and gives us victory and success, we must pay our vow unto Him and offer thanksgiving and praise. In fact, we must praise Him at all times (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

GOD'S ATTRIBUTES EXTOLLED (1 Samuel 2:1-3; John 4:23,24; Psalms 139:7-9; 147:5; 99:4; Daniel 4:35; Deuteronomy 3:24)

“And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation” (1 Samuel 2:1). It is worthy of note that Hannah did not attribute her praise to the earnestness of her prayer; neither did she worship and praise Eli who pronounced the final blessing on her before she got Samuel. She ascribed all glory and praise to God alone. This is contrary to what we see in some Christian circles today where people who have received blessings from the Lord tend to worship and praise the minister or attribute such miracles to the volume of their prayers instead of giving glory to God who **“doeth great things and unsearchable; marvelous things without number”** (Job 5:9).

Some of the divine attributes Hannah extolled in her song include: God's holiness. **“There is none holy as the LORD....”** Holiness is one attribute of God that stands out from other attributes. He is the thrice-holy One. The Scripture harps on this unparalleled feature of God as an essential reason He ought to be the object of our worship. When Isaiah had a vision of heaven, he heard an angel crying, **“unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory”** (Isaiah 6:3). The fact that God is holy should greatly influence our approach to the subject of holiness. He commanded the children of Israel several times to be holy because He is holy (Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7,26; Ezekiel 39:7; 1 Peter 1:16). This underscores the place of holiness, **“without which no man shall see the Lord”** (Hebrews 12:14). God has given us His only begotten Son to die on the Cross so that we can be holy (Hebrews 13:12).

Hannah also talked about God as **“the God of knowledge”** who is omniscient – all-knowing. He has perfect knowledge of all that transpires in human existence. He knows all that has taken place, what is taking place and what will take place in future. There is no problem He cannot solve. It is precious to know

that He who can see the end from the beginning knows what is best for us in choice of career, marriage, business etc., and He has promised to guide us. “... **By him actions are weighed**”. God sees beyond the actions of men; He x-rays the motive behind every action – whether secular or spiritual. He weighs everything in the balances of His word. This calls for sober reflection on all we do so that we would not be found wanting on the last day.

Question 2: *Why is holiness an essential Christian experience? How can a Christian be made holy?*

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY EXHIBITED (1 Samuel 2:4-8; Daniel 4:34,35; Genesis 28:15; Psalm 139:7-10; Luke 1:46-55)

God’s sovereignty is one of the deepest truths in the universe. In her song, Hannah compares His sovereignty to do and undo. What a comfort to know that happenings in the world are not left to chance, but that there is a God in charge of the affairs of men and are closely following His program and decree. The Lord holds a position of absolute authority and exercises His sovereignty in perfect keeping with His nature. In His sovereignty, He gives strength to those who are weak and humble, but frustrates those who think they are strong and do not need Him. He provides food for the poor and hungry that put their trust in Him, but impoverishes the proud rich. God opens the womb of the barren to conceive children, but the proud who disregards His word He reduces to nothing. He is able to elevate the poor from the dust and the beggar from the dunghill to the highest position in society. Little wonder, proud Nebuchadnezzar was reduced to a beast and made to eat grass in the forest. At the end of his humiliation, he exclaimed: “**And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?**” (Daniel 4:35).

God detests pride in all its shades and forms. He condemns it as seen in the Scripture. **“These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look...”** (Proverbs 6:16,17). It is amazing what makes some people proud. Some people are proud because of their tribe and background, their personality, riches and wealth; others because of their position in the society, social status, or educational background. All those who are proud will be humiliated by God here and in eternity if they fail to repent and humble themselves before Him.

However, notice must be taken that the sovereignty of God does not cancel man’s free moral nature to decide for or against Him. Despite being in

control of the affairs of men and the universe, God still allows men to choose to either live for Him or for self, to do His will or theirs. The Scripture echoes: **“See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil”** (Deuteronomy 30:15). Man’s choice determines his destiny and where he will spend eternity. Those who hope to enjoy divine favor here and be with God through eternity are commanded to repent and make their ways right before Him. To do otherwise is to court divine displeasure (Isaiah 1:19). Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 10:13).

Question 3: *How does the teaching on the sovereignty of God relate to man’s destiny?*

GOD’S ABILITY PREDICTED (1 Samuel 2:9-11; Jude 20-24; Revelation 20:1-15)

The closing portion of Hannah’s song is prophetic in nature. **“He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail”** (1 Samuel 2:9). This assures the saints of God’s keeping power and grace. When they lean on Him, they are confident that the enemy cannot snatch them from His hand, storms cannot take them away and sin will not overcome

them. However, the overconfident ones are warned that by strength, human effort, intelligence, prowess and ability shall no man prevail. Those who make themselves enemies of God and of His people are also warned of impending judgment if they continue to toe the line of rebellion. **“The adversary of the LORD shall be broken into pieces.”** In New Testament language, they shall be grinded to powder if they do not repent (Luke 20:18).

“The LORD shall judge the ends of the earth.” Judgment awaits all who refuse to repent but continue in their sins till they leave this world. They will certainly face God at the Great White Throne Judgment where they will be rewarded according to their works.

“He shall give strength unto his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.” These are messianic prophecies concerning Christ’s millennial reign when He shall rule and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. It is wonderful that Hannah is among the saints like Moses and Mary (Exodus 15:1-27; Luke 1:46-55) who sang in spontaneous response to God’s intervention and deliverance and their songs inspired many generations. This is a challenge to contemporary Christian songwriters and singers to submit themselves to God for songs that will inspire and minister to the people. Besides, believers must be guided in the choice of the music they listen to. Our priority must be to exalt God and extol His virtues, power and providence. Gospel hymns or songs or music should edify believers, call them to sober reflection and remind them of heaven. Anything less than this is unacceptable.

Question 4: *What lessons do we learn from the songs we study in the Scriptures?*

“And Elkannah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest” (1 Samuel 2:11). It is worthy of note that Samuel’s parents spent time to prepare him spiritually. Likewise, all parents should take heed to the spiritual well-being of their children, teach and

bring them up in the way of the Lord before sending them out. Neglect of this responsibility is the cause of common waywardness among children and youths in our society.

Besides, Samuel was sent to the house of the Lord to minister under the leadership of Eli, the high priest. Many believers do not take heed to where they send their children, and who mentors them. We must not allow our children's future to be molded by unbelieving relations, idol worshippers and people of strange religions, where the seed of unrighteousness would be sown in them.

Because of his childhood exposure to the truth, Samuel grew up to become a prophet and a mighty instrument in God's hand to proclaim His word and establish righteousness. Hannah's joy would have known no bounds by this outcome and her song of praise would be everlasting. Let those who hope to praise God all their lives dedicate themselves and their families to the service of God.

Lesson 694

THE SINS OF ELI'S SONS

MEMORY VERSE: “Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD” (1 Samuel 2:17).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 2:12-26

In contrast to the good report of Samuel who was brought up by godly parents in the preceding verses, the sons of Eli, the high priest, were described in the text as sons of Belial. This is an indictment on Eli and all present-day leaders who have children that are sinful. Position of leadership should not blind us to this key responsibility of raising godly children who will be beacons of light in their own generation.

Eli was a high priest and judge in Israel for a space of forty years. A descendant of Ithamar, Aaron's youngest son, his ministry signaled the beginning of a new type of leadership in God's chosen nation (1 Samuel 4:18). As a priest, Eli pleased God. He was responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of God's people and the daily administration of worship. The very first mention of Eli was in his encounter with Hannah, and was perceived as a hasty and no-nonsense leader. Unfortunately, he did not rule his children by the same measure; he was rather indulgent and halfhearted in his reproof of sin.

The Scripture demands that a bishop must be “**One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house how shall he take care of the church of God?)**” (1 Timothy 3:4,5). Eli did not live up to his duty and responsibility. His children, in contrast to Samuel, were described “**as sons of Belial**” who “**knew not the LORD**” (1 Samuel 2:12).

Question 1: *In what areas did Eli fail in his responsibility?*

INEXCUSABLE SINS OF ELI'S SONS (1 Samuel 2:12- 17,22; Romans 2:1-3; 1 John 3:6-10; Titus 1:16)

Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas who were also priests – supposed ministers of God. But the Scripture says, **“the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD”** (1 Samuel 2:12). Belial is used in a moral sense in Scripture to mean worthlessness, recklessness, lawlessness and wickedness, and personifies foolishness, evil and Satan (Deuteronomy 13:13; Judges 19:22; 1 Samuel 2:12; 10:27; 25:17,25; 1 Kings 21:10,13; 2 Corinthians 6:15). It is thought-provoking to have sons of Belial officiating as priests in the house of a holy God.

Though they claimed to serve God, **“they knew not the LORD”**. They had awareness and knowledge that God exists but they did not know Him experientially. The Scripture clearly identifies people who know God and those who do not know Him. **“Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him... He that committeth sin is of the devil... Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin... he cannot sin, because he is born of God... whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God...”** (1 John 3:6-10).

These priests **“profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate”** (Titus 1:16). There are many people who claim to be ministers of God today but their conduct in and outside their places of worship show they are sons of Belial. It is by their fruits we shall know them. Believers must be vigilant lest such people infiltrate a holy church and spread their corruption.

Eli's children were described as sons of Belial because of their evil deeds. As priests, they used their position to mislead the people into corruption by engaging in brazen acts of sexual immorality with the women who came to worship God. Sexual immorality is a despicable sin in the sight of God. When such sin is found among the leadership (the custodians of God's

word and standard), it becomes a leading sin that will destroy the entire congregation.

Besides, Hophni and Phinehas exhibited greed by forcefully extorting meat offering brought by the people. The rightful due of the priest was the right shoulder and the breast. The entire offering would be consecrated to the Lord by the burning of the fats upon the altar; thereafter, the priest took his portion (Leviticus 3:5; 7:31,34). But Eli's children held back what belonged to God for their personal use and took away what belonged to the people as their share in the offering. This amounted to robbery.

The growing evil and wicked conduct of these priests had great implication on the spiritual lives of the people. They made men to **“abhor the offering of the LORD”** (1 Samuel 2:17). The consequence of this wicked act was that the people despised the house of God and shunned His worship; even those who came were hindered from fulfilling their religious obligations. Theirs was an infectious sin; for they were not only candidates of hell but made others twice children of hell and made the Lord's people to transgress. They reduced the worship of God to heathen worship by bringing gross sensuality of idol feasts to the tabernacle of the Lord. In them, righteousness, self-control, purity and the fear of God were thrown overboard.

Worse of all, they were recalcitrant when their father queried their corrupt lifestyles. If their evil tendencies were nipped in the bud, it would have been well with them, their father and the entire nation. But it grew to an uncontrollable proportion and became difficult to stop.

Question 2: *What sins did Hophni and Phinehas commit?*

EXEMPLARY DEVOTION OF ELKANAH'S FAMILY
(1 Samuel 2:18-21,26; Romans 11:35,36; Psalm 92:12,13,15; Luke 2:52)

The piety of Samuel, a child lent to the Lord contrast sharply with the godless practices of Hophni and

Phinehas. They all had the privilege of good and godly parentage but lived different lifestyles. The story of Samuel interweaves or punctuates the account of the evil deeds of Eli's sons to impress on believers that lilies can still grow out of the mud. In spite of the filthy lives of the sons of belial, **"Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod"**. The power of God's grace can preserve a child from copying bad examples of siblings in the same family or friends in the same school, community and church. Though he was not a Levite but consecrated or lent to the Lord, he lived up to his calling as a child. Following Elkannah and Hannah's example, Christian parents should bring up their children to fear and serve God.

Question 3: *What qualities differentiate Elkanah's family from that of Eli?*

To encourage Samuel to abide in his calling and service to God, his parents provided and met his needs. It was not just that they provided to meet his needs for many years, their continual attendance to the things of God also served as good example to Samuel. Elkannah and Hannah his wife made it a habit to bring their offerings to worship God at Shiloh every year. They offered Samuel to the Lord; but they continued to offer yearly sacrifice required by the Lord. They were devoted and encouraged their child, Samuel, to remain devoted to God. This is what the Lord wants from all believers today.

God always blesses those who trust in His goodness and mercy. No one can offer his only child to the Lord like Elkannah and Hannah without faith in the faithfulness and power of God. It was by faith that Abraham also offered his only son, Isaac, to God. And such acts of absolute faith in God attract divine blessings. **"And Eli blessed Elkannah and his wife, and said, The LORD gives thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home. And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD"** (1 Samuel 2:20,21).

Hannah who was barren later had five other children beside Samuel. The barren believer should understand that God is faithful; that He answers prayer and blesses His children who are patient, abiding and devoted to Him. Like Hannah, give of your best to the Master; throw your fresh glowing ardor into the battle for truth. Soon, He will visit you too. Note that God blesses those who give their best to Him.

With godly example, encouragement and provision, Samuel continued to grow before the Lord. The growth of Samuel was mentioned twice in the text in verses 21 and 26: **“And the child Samuel grew before the LORD... And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with the LORD, and with men”**. His growth was healthy: his spiritual life was balanced with his physical and social life. Our Lord also had a balanced growth experience. **“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man”** (Luke 2:52). The sons of Eli, though born into the priesthood, had defects in their growth especially as regards their spiritual and moral character.

INEFFECTIVE REPROOF OF ELI (1 Samuel 2:22-25; Proverbs 19:13,18,23; 22:6; 2 Timothy 3:15)

“And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings and this people. Nay, my sons; for it is not good report that I hear: ye make the LORD’s people to transgress” (1 Samuel 2:23,24). The sin of Hophni and Phinehas had become common knowledge in Israel and it was so openly discussed or reported that Eli heard about it. Aged Eli called the attention of his children to the report and pointed out the danger they were exposed to at the hand of the invisible Judge. **“If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD, would slay them”** (verse 25). At last, Eli tried to do a father’s duty – remonstrate his children. It was however too little, too late. It was time for God Himself to exact unsparing discipline in line with the standard of His

word (Leviticus 18:6,20,29; 20:10; 21:6,7,17,23). The glory and worship of God had been tampered with. God's people had been led into lewdness and turned away from true worship. As a judge and high priest, Eli had both civil and spiritual power to redress the situation by stopping them from continuing in their evil deed but he did not. God therefore moved to set things in order in His house. When ministers keep their sinful or backslidden blood relatives in the ministry or rob God and men through the privileges they have in the church, they court His displeasure. God is holy and just; He hates and punishes sin wherever it is found, whether among the priesthood or the people.

Question 4: *Why was Eli's reproof ineffective?*

The displeasure of God with Eli's sons and his entire family reveals His unchanging disposition to all indulgent parents and pastors who keep their children or favorites in the Lord's service despite receiving reports of their sins and wickedness. God calls everyone in this kind of situation to repentance, restitution and righteous living. Leaders must be courageous to discipline erring and wayward people and uphold holiness in the house and service of God to escape His judgment.

Lesson 695

PAUL REHEARSES HIS CALLING

MEMORY VERSE: “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11,12).

TEXT: Galatians 1:11-24

Paul’s epistle to the Galatian churches was aimed at arresting their general slide from the true gospel into a false system. He had been used of God to establish the churches but soon after he left, some Jewish believers in Christ had come from Jerusalem and invaded the church with their doctrine of salvation by observance of the Mosaic Law. Pressure and influence of these false preachers made some of the Galatian believers to slip into this error and many were in danger of being lost altogether.

Question 1: *What should be the gospel minister’s response when saving truth is trampled upon?*

When eternal truths are being corrupted, a true minister of Christ would hasten to set facts straight. If the Judaizers’ attack was allowed to stand, the pure gospel which Paul preached would have suffered irreparable damage. As such, Paul commenced a passionate defense of his apostolic calling and credentials from the very first words of the epistle. The Judaizers had been touting their claims of superior authority supposedly derived from the ministry of the apostles in Jerusalem. They maintained that Paul was a lesser minister, having never been to the headquarters in Jerusalem. This claim was vehemently refuted by Paul throughout the epistle even as he outlined the essentials of a true gospel ministry. His defense teaches us that we can only validate a gospel ministry after utilizing the measure of Christ to check out its source, confirm its content and screen its steward.

Question 2: *What are the basic yardsticks we should apply in confirming the genuineness or otherwise of a gospel ministry?*

THE SOURCE OF AN AUTHORITATIVE MESSAGE:
(Galatians 1:11,12; 1Corinthians 1:1; 11:23; 15:3; Ephesians 3:3-8; 1John 1:1-3; Luke 1:1,2)

An authentic message from heaven, a corresponding anointing, and a true gospel ministry are very often the product of a minister's waiting before the Lord in prayer, obedience and consecration. That was the case with Moses, Joshua, Elijah and all the prophets, Peter and all the apostles. It was certainly the case with Paul. Rather than wait on the Lord to receive the badge of divine approval, some preachers employ the carnal strategy of depreciating other ministers in order to boost their own worth. Gaining cheap popularity by trampling upon another people's reputation is despicable. That was the method of Absalom (2 Samuel 15:2-6). The same dark motivation was behind the Pharisees' perpetual antagonism and hatred for Christ (John 11:45-48).

Like Absalom did to David, the Judaizers of Galatia sought to cast a cloud upon the ministry of Paul in the minds of the Christians. Their goal was to substitute his true gospel message with their false doctrine of salvation by works (Acts 15:1). The church must be careful not to commit anything to the hands of false ministers who through subtle means seek to pervert the gospel and overthrow the faith of many. Doing otherwise will amount to a waste of time, money or resources committed to such ministry.

As he was earlier compelled to do with the Corinthian church, Apostle Paul reiterates his calling and the authority behind his commission to the Galatian church. **"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."** God's transforming truth is not generated from the mind of a minister; neither does it originate from a mentor or moneybag. Saving grace is not a product of

human ideology or mental exertion; it originates from God. Unfortunately, today, some preachers are not convinced of the message they preach as they merely parrot popular preachers to please their financiers. They give time and attention to the highest bidder. It is therefore, no wonder that such mercenary preachers cry up one 'truth' today, and another conflicting 'truth' tomorrow. There is no life in their message, no burning passion in their declarations. Conviction does not ring from the pulpit because the preacher himself has not imbibed the truth. No life is transformed, no persuasion formed and no lasting impact is secured under such a ministry. The calling or commission, the message, and even the ministry will eventually fizzle out. The damage such 'ministers-for-hire' do to the spiritual life of young believers are great.

Question 3: Mention the essential features of a true gospel message.

Christ alone must be the source, theme, and end of a gospel declaration. He is the only Sacrifice, Substitute, and Savior. No minister can justly demand the ear of the church if his message and commission do not bear the stamp of authority from Christ, the Head of the Church. A true gospel message is sound, pure, authoritative, convicting and converting. It is saving truth because it comes from the Savior; redeeming truth because it points the sinner to the Redeemer; sanctifying truth because it proclaims the Sanctifier; anointed truth because it flows from the anointed One; and, it is eternal because it originates from the eternal Christ. Only such a message is worth preaching, worth living and dying for.

THE WONDER OF REDEEMING GRACE (Galatians 1:13-15; 1 Timothy 1:12-15; 1 Corinthians 15:9,10; Titus 3:3-7)

While narrating the divine source of his calling, Paul naturally drifted into one of the sublime doctrines of the Scripture. Repeatedly in his epistles, the Apostle extolled the wonder of redeeming grace. **"For ye have heard of my conversation in time past**

in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it... But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace" (Galatians 1:13,15). It is impossible to read Paul's descriptions of the workings of grace in his life and not see his utter humility, deep gratitude, and his corresponding consecration to God.

Therefore, Christian disciples and workers who are quick to boast of their worth, privileges, goodness, talents and usefulness in God's kingdom have probably not tasted the marvelous grace of Jesus. Some Christians act towards God as if He owes them something. But the opposite is the truth. If anyone of us **"were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God"** (Romans 4:2). We must not forget that we were **"children of wrath, even as others."** Grace therefore, makes us humble. It makes us look at our sordid past with gratitude, at our present transformation with humble submission to God and at our glorious future with adoration. Whenever a believer is tempted to indulge in pride or foolish vainglory, let him remember his sinful past and meditate on the grace of God.

Question 4: What lessons do we learn on grace from the life and writings of Paul the apostle?

Paul's life traces the path into an authentic ministry. Before he became a worthy ambassador for Christ, he was converted from being a persecutor of the church to a saint. A sinner cannot simply will himself into a God-approved ministry. To offer acceptable sacrifice unto God, the sinner must be saved and cleansed from outward and inward sins. To be effective and fruitful in the ministry which the Lord has entrusted in our care, we must constantly renew our commitment and consecration to Him. Besides, the need for the Spirit's infilling and power cannot be overstated.

Question 5: Using Paul as an example, explain how a sinner translates from an enemy to an emissary of God?

THE SUBMISSION OF AN APPROVED MINISTER:

(Galatians 1:18-24; 2:1,2; 2Timothy 2:15; Acts 8:14,15; 15:1,2; 1 Corinthians 14:32,33)

To qualify as an apostle, Paul had to receive a direct commission from Christ Himself. Apostles are direct emissaries of Jesus. So, he went ahead to fulfil the heavenly vision he received without prior consultation with Peter or any other apostle. He however, practiced what he preached. He sought fellowship with senior apostles to, so to say, cross-check notes with them.

Pride and an independent spirit disqualify anyone from the ministry of Christ. Great gifts or talents notwithstanding, every servant of Christ still needs to set up an accountability system in his life. Absolute independence has ruined many promising ministers. If Samson had been accountable to someone, for example, he might have been pulled back from the precipice before his irreversible ruin. Make yourself accountable to a faithful spouse, a worthy mentor, a Spirit-controlled friend, or anyone empowered to ask you questions. It is a safeguard from earthly and eternal ruin.

Lesson 696

THE UNIVERSAL GOSPEL

MEMORY VERSE: “And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain” (Galatians 2:2).

TEXT: Galatians 2:1-10

This chapter showcases Paul the apostle as a faithful minister of the gospel. Like a true stalwart of the faith, he stood firmly against those who were bent on imposing the demands of their corrupted gospel on the believers in Galatia. His was a passionate defender of Christ’s gospel. Though quietness, gentleness and meekness are essential virtues of the Christian life, no true believer remains comfortable and quiet in the face of corruption of the pure gospel. Doing this amounts to unfaithfulness and cowardice.

When “**Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because... he had married an Ethiopian woman**” (Numbers 12:1-3), Moses was meek and quiet. But when Korah and his company revolted against the divine order, he rose to the occasion. Also, Samuel might have claimed “meekness” when Saul spared Agag, the king of Amalek but that would have been terribly unacceptable to God (1 Samuel 15:32,33). Christian workers should therefore beware of misplaced meekness that amounts to sinful compromise.

DETAILS OF THE UNIVERSAL GOSPEL (Galatians 2:1,2; 1Corinthians 15:1-4; Acts 13:32,33,38,39; Romans 10:15)

Paul’s major concern was that the gospel should remain pure and simple, full and free. The gospel of Christ is universal enough in appeal; it is complete, needing neither adornment nor improvement. Though simple in its content, the gospel is powerful enough to save any sinner that believes, irrespective of his crime or crime (Romans 1:16).

Question 1: *Mention some unnecessary additions people have made to the gospel today.*

The Judaizers of Galatia had been running down the ministry of Apostle Paul. Their antagonism portended a grave danger to the church because he preached the pure gospel – Jesus alone crucified, risen and coming again. Paul’s truth contrasted and refuted their error. While he preached Jesus as the only Sacrifice, Substitute, Savior and Lord, they exalted Moses and the Law. Paul emphasized salvation by grace through faith, but they preached salvation through observance of laws and ordinances.

Like the Judaizers, modern corrupters of the gospel now preach Jesus plus other means of salvation such as observance of religious ordinances, holy pilgrimages, deeds of charity, observance of dress codes, infant baptism, tithes and offerings and even strict abstinence and extreme vows. None of these is necessary for salvation. When added to the gospel message, they are superfluous and corrupting. Just as a corrupted medicine offers no cure, a corrupted gospel cannot offer anyone genuine salvation.

Question 2: *Explain the gospel in your own words.*

The gospel is good news; it is **“glad tidings of good things!”** (Romans 10:15). The gospel teaches that although **“all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23) and **“the wages of sin is death”**, yet the gift of God in Christ is eternal life to all who believe (Romans 6:23). The gospel reveals to us that **“Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures”** (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). The question is, of what relevance is Christ’s death and resurrection to a sinner? The vilest sinner who believes this truth and repents of his sins is **“justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses”** (Acts 13:39).

Question 3: *What means of salvation are prescribed in the gospel?*

OLD TESTAMENT PICTURES OF THE GOSPEL: (Genesis 22:9-13; Numbers 21:5-9; Joshua 2:8-21)

The simplicity and universality of the gospel is aptly illustrated and foreshadowed in some Old Testament narratives. It is seen in the events of Abraham's sacrifice, Moses' brazen serpent and Rahab's scarlet line. First, Isaac was just about to die when God stopped Abraham and provided a substitute, **"a ram caught in a thicket by his horns"**. The ram pointed to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God – our Sacrifice and Substitute. Secondly, in Numbers 21:5-9, sin brought punishment, but grace brought the remedy. The dying sinner needed to look at the brazen serpent to live. Nothing more was needed; only a look of faith cancelled the poison of sin and brought life. This is the gospel. Although a very simple prescription, all who refused to look at the uplifted serpent of brass perished in their self-will.

Thirdly, Rahab was one of the most repulsive characters in her city. Yet, her simple act of faith in the prescribed remedy saved her and her household from Jericho's destruction. She professed faith in the living God (Joshua 2:11) and then followed her profession with a corresponding action of simple obedience. Mere profession of faith cannot save any sinner if not backed up by obedience.

Question 4: *Explain how some Old Testament events foreshadowed the gospel.*

DEFENCE OF THE UNIVERSAL GOSPEL (Galatians 2:3-6; Acts 15:1,2,24; Jude 3)

It took the courage and conviction of Paul to reveal the truth about the Judaizers. Although they had hinged their authenticity and relevance in the Galatian churches on the backing and approval of the apostles at Jerusalem, their claims were false. Thus, the apostles wrote to the gentile churches saying, **"... we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment"** (Acts 15:24). Members of the body of Christ must not

lend attention or support to self-appointed preachers whose aim is to impose themselves on the saints.

There is another key lesson from the stand of Paul here. The decisions of gospel ministers should be ruled by the word and Spirit of God and not the pressures of men. Paul took Titus to the Jerusalem church and refused to circumcise him because that would have amounted to caving in under the pressure of the marauding Judaizers. Instructively, the same Paul took and circumcised Timothy, when the demands of missionary activity kicked in, so he could reach the unsaved Jews of Lystra and beyond (Acts 16:1,3). To be successful in ministry, gospel ministers need courage fed by sound scriptural convictions, tact, wisdom and godly flexibility.

In the course of preaching the gospel, we shall have to confront various shades and characters of falsehood such as: (i) false prophets (Matthew 7:15,16), (ii) false witnesses (Acts 6:13), (iii) false Christ's (Mark 13:22), (iv) false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13), (v) false brethren (Galatians 2:4), (vi) false accusers (Titus 2:3), and, (vii) false teachers (2 Peter 2:1). We must not yield an inch of ground lest they and many others be lost forever. Paul said, **"To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."**

SPREADING THE UNIVERSAL GOSPEL (Galatians 2:7-10; Philipians 1:27; 1 Corinthians 12:14-22)

A delightful harmony was produced between Paul and the apostles at Jerusalem. Paul had sought an opportunity of a full statement of his views to them in private (Galatians 2:2) and they had been entirely satisfied that God had called him and Barnabas to the work of making known the gospel among the Gentiles. Instead of being jealous at their success, the Jerusalem leadership had rejoiced in it; and instead of throwing any obstacle in their way, they cordially gave them the right hand of fellowship. Giving the right hand of fellowship to another was the mark of confidence, friendship, and fellowship. It was proof that the church leadership at Jerusalem accepted

Paul as an associate in the task of world evangelization. Therefore, there were no harsh contentions, strife or jealousy.

However, the apostles' statement "**that we should remember the poor**" reveals the need for believers to care for the needy. As we preach the gospel and win souls for the Lord, we should also be interested in their spiritual and physical wellbeing.

The conduct of those pillars of the church confirmed the divine answer to the prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17:21, "**That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe...**" Sanctified and made holy in heart and mind, the ministers had no ulterior motive in preaching the gospel; they retained their sanctification experience while laboring for Christ; they possessed the mind of Christ, free from carnal competition or comparisons (Philippians 2:3-5); they harbored no vested interest, vaulting ambition or territorial pursuits in serving the Lord; they retained a servant attitude before the Lord and before one another; they all labored with an eye on the glory of God; and, they remained submissive to the dispensation of the Holy Spirit as to how the task of world evangelization should be accomplished. What a great lesson for contemporary believers!

Question 5: *How does the sanctification experience aid the spread of the gospel?*

This singular cooperation between these ministers resulted in a rapid and even distribution of the gospel among the Jews and Gentiles. It underscores the value of cooperation and the virtue of humility and mutual submission. It also highlights the vanity of an independent spirit and insubordinate attitude in a minister.

Lesson 697

JUSTIFICATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH

MEMORY VERSE: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16).

TEXT: Galatians 2:11-21

The clash between religious traditions and saving truth is legendary. Among believers in Galatia, it assumed the dimension of ceremonial law versus grace and justification/righteousness by the works of the law versus righteousness by faith as seen in previous lessons in this book. And the fact that this age-long conflict can infiltrate the laity and leadership of a true church, hinder and destroy the work of God make this lesson all-time relevant.

Adherents of religious tradition among the Jews were strong and violent. They were as valiant for error like their counterpart present-day peddlers of false doctrine. They would not mind crushing anyone who crosses their path. The apostles of Christ knew that the Jews were religious bigots who were ready to defend their positions by whatever means possible. From our text, Peter, a respected apostle and pillar in the early Church felt intimidated by these adherents who uphold circumcision and other ceremonial rites as evidence of salvation in Christ. He then succumbed to the fear of man and became hypocritical in relating with the Gentile Christians.

Paul, who watched the whole scenario that unfolded, did not hesitate to reprove him. The battle for truth in these last days demands no less conviction, courage, zeal, forthrightness and an eye for the glory of God. If instant reproof was meted to an apostle who slipped in an unguarded moment, how much more should

believers resist propagators of false doctrines who pervert the gospel of Christ with barefaced boldness.

Love for God and His truth should transcend any other love in the believer's heart. Defending the glory of God should weigh more than filial, friendly, or even marital considerations in the heart of a true servant of Christ. It is all right to **"honour all men. Love the brotherhood... Honour the king"** (1 Peter 2:17) but not at the expense of more important injunction to **"fear God"**.

Question 1: *What is the right way to resolve the conflict that often arises between human tradition and the truth in the Scripture?*

CONVENTION VERSUS CONVICTION (Galatians 2:11,12; Jude 3; 1 Kings 22:13,14; John 9:17,24-33)

"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision." There is an age-long clash of truth with tradition. Scriptural revelation is often at variance with societal expectations. The Christian certainly must demonstrate where his true loyalty lies when biblical convictions are at loggerheads with established convention. Consequent upon his encounter with the Lord in the matter of Cornelius (Acts 10:9-48), it was impossible to question Peter's conviction that Gentiles should be partakers of the benefits of the gospel. He knew that Christ had broken down the middle of partition between the Jews and Gentiles. Armed with this truth, he freely mixed with the Gentile brethren in the church at Antioch. Yet, when occasion arose for Peter to stand by his conviction, he allowed convention to supplant conviction because of the fear of disapproval or confrontation from fellow Jews.

Tradition hardly dies; nothing short of the grace of God can withstand its onslaught even in the most spiritual of men. Paul was vehement against the traditionalists at the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15.

Much later in Acts 21:17-26, the same Paul permitted the traditional leaders in Jerusalem to cajole him into proving that he **“walkest orderly, and keepest the law”** by submitting himself to the rites of the Mosaic law that specified **“an offering should be offered for every one of them”**. Were he not momentarily caught in the web of tradition, the quintessential Paul would have protested any attempt to add another offering to **“the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”** (Hebrews 10:1-11,14,18; Acts 13:39; Galatians 2:16,21). It is possible for the Church that once held on to Bible truths to succumb to the pressure of traditionalists and the corrupting influence of age-long conventions.

Question 2: *Explain how traditions and societal expectations can supplant biblical truth.*

THE POWER OF INFLUENCE (Galatians 2:13; Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; Matthew 5:13-16)

Simon Peter had a strong influence in the early Church but he seemed oblivious of it on this occasion. His sudden withdrawal from the Gentile brethren amounted to hypocrisy, an act which quickly spread to the younger Jewish brethren around. Spiritual leadership is a great responsibility not to be toyed with. Apostle Paul expressed the same concern to the Corinthians, **“For if any man sees thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ”**. Each of us is answerable to God for what we do with people within our circle of influence. We must beware.

The record we have here of Peter’s action validates the divine origin of the Scriptures. Were the Bible of human origin, painstaking effort would have been made to gloss over or even altogether hide Peter’s fault. The faithfulness with which faults of frontline

saints are recorded in the Scriptures attests to its divine origin.

Question 3: *What lessons do we learn from the encounter between Peter and Paul in Antioch?*

CORRECTION WITHOUT CONTENTION (Galatians 2:14-21; 6:1; Leviticus 19:17; Psalm 141:5; Proverbs 15:10; 25:12; 2 Peter 3:15,16)

We are now introduced to resounding proofs of the early believers' deep spirituality and experience of grace. Simon Peter, though a most respected apostle, had erred in doctrine. Promptly and without delay, Paul pointed out the error in the presence of all who had been affected by it. Giving and receiving correction is an essential feature of the church family. The Spirit's guidance is however required to match the correction with the error. As a rule, a public error must be corrected publicly while private correction is administered where other people are not involved. Church correction or discipline can take the form of verbal rebuke, withdrawal of ministry opportunity or in severe cases, excommunication. The severity of correction or discipline as well as the duration depends on a host of other factors but the goal is always the restoration and recovery of the erring believer.

There was no consideration for Peter's person when Bible truth needed to be upheld. The early believers upheld the glory of God and His truth above ego trips and personality cults. Financial considerations, family ties, friendship tenderness, fear of man, fame-seeking, flattery, and fleshly lusts are the reasons for the prevailing compromise and unfaithfulness in upholding scriptural standards common among contemporary gospel workers and ministers. Paul was as courageous for Christ as Peter was crucified with Christ. Although Paul's verbal rebuke was unsparing, sharp, direct and public, there was no trace of an angry retort or carnal resentment from Peter.

We learn deep spiritual truths about Peter's character here. One, he was crucified, not carnal. Two, he was committed to gospel truth, not contentious. Even if tempted to veer off for a little while, he yielded

to correction. Three, he was a consistent character. What he preached, he practiced. He writes, **“For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?”** (1 Peter 2:20) and now he practiced it. Although Paul was a younger minister, Peter accepted the deserved rebuke with grace and Christ-like humility. That stands in stark contrast to the display of a wounded ego or injured pride often seen in the unsanctified.

Years later, Peter wrote about **“our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.”** These are very instructive words indeed. Peter employed the most affectionate Christian expressions in referring to Paul, their earlier encounter notwithstanding. He obviously harbored nothing of ill-will or jealousy towards a more gifted brother in the Lord. He maintained that Paul’s epistles were sacred Scriptures and should be treated so. He acknowledged that the depth of divine wisdom in Paul sometimes went beyond ordinary understanding. What humility! He announced divine judgment on people who deliberately twisted the writings of Paul to their own carnal advantage.

Question 4: From our passage today, explain the issues you understand on church correction or rebuke.

REAFFIRMATION OF ESSENTIAL TRUTH
(Galatians 2:16; Acts 13:38,39; Romans 3:23-28; Galatians 3:8,11,24; Romans 5:1,2,9; Titus 3:3-7)

Paul’s words of rebuke are a reaffirmation of the gospel truth. God always has a witness. While one minister demurred on the truth of justification of Jews and Gentiles by faith alone, God raised another to defend it. Nothing is more central to the atonement of Christ at Calvary than the fact that it is the only hope of redemption for lost humanity. There is no

other means to securing salvation than the sacrifice of Christ for sin once for all. No works of righteousness, no act of human benevolence or self-mortification can open the gates of heaven to a sinner. It is only Jesus and His sacrificial death that can satisfy the demands of God's righteous judgment. While those who believe this truth will be saved, those who reject it will be lost eternally. By Jesus, **"all that believe are justified from all things"**. Justification is the wonder of God's grace that grants pardon to the guilty sinner when he repents and believes in Jesus. It is an act of God's grace that wipes out the old record of sin such that the forgiven sinner stands before God as though he had never sinned.

Scripture revelation does not place justification in a vacuum. Rather, we are presented with an inseparable connection between justification and faith (Romans 3:23- 28; 4:3-5), justification and forgiveness (Acts 13:38,39), justification and fellowship (Romans 5:1,2), justification and our freedom (Romans 8:1,2), justification and our faithfulness (James 2:21-26) and, justification and our future hope (Titus 3:7). The effect of justification in all who truly believe is a new life and walk in God's righteousness.

RESULT OF EXTRAORDINARY TRANSFORMATION:
(Galatians 2:17-21; James 2:21-26; Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 6:1-22; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

Grace is not idle: it produces the effect of righteousness in all who believe. This truth is succinctly captured in Galatians chapter 2 verse 17: **"But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid"**. How very important it is for every justified soul to realize that God's free grace results in the experience of righteousness. There is a transformation of life in all who repent of sin and believe in Christ. True, we are not saved by good works or our own righteousness, but by grace alone. **"It is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast"**. Christ's imparted righteousness becoming ours by faith. Moreover, we are saved unto good works. **"For we are his workmanship, created**

in Christ Jesus unto good works... that we should walk in them”.

Justified by faith, the believer is dead to the demands of the ceremonial law but alive unto righteousness of God in Christ; there is no intermediate state. Christ died once for sin, and the Christian is dead to sin. Death has no more dominion over Christ, and sin has no more dominion over the saint. As Christ rose from the dead by the glory of the Father, so the believer is risen from spiritual death into newness of life.

Question 5: In your own words, explain the case for and the effect of justification by faith.

Lesson 698

REBUKE FOR REVERTING TO LEGALISM

MEMORY VERSE: “Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Galatians 3:3)

TEXT: Galatians 3:1-29

Paul’s epistle to the Galatians was premised on defending the truth and especially the doctrine of justification by faith. Having labored in Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23), and laying a groundwork for the true gospel to thrive among the converts, the Apostle came hard on some unscrupulous elements who had insinuated that people could not be saved except they observed the law of Moses (Acts 15:1). He was particularly disappointed that some Galatian Christians were already carried away by this error. Therefore, he spared no effort in condemning the perpetrators and collaborators with hard words for demeaning the sufficiency of Christ’s work at Calvary.

In the chapter under consideration, the Apostle also scolded believers who allowed themselves to be carried away with strange doctrines contrary to the revelation of the New Testament. He frowned at their lack of requisite spiritual backbone to contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints. Moreover, he reaffirmed the truth of justification by faith and juxtaposed it with the faith of father Abraham. To leave no one in doubt, he reminded believers that the law was only given to show us the need to embrace Christ’s work of atonement and salvation.

Question 1: *Why was Apostle Paul disappointed in the Galatian Christians?*

REPROOF FOR REVERTING TO LEGALISM:
(Galatians 3:1-5; Acts 15:5-11,19,20; 16:1-3; 21:20-26; Galatians 1:14; 4:9,10; Luke 24:25; Mark 2:24)

It was obvious that the disciples in Galatia were having recourse to the former sacrifices and purifications

which some false apostles had told them were necessary for 'full' salvation. It was incomprehensible to Paul the Apostle that the people he so labored to establish in the gospel could be so easily swayed by some deceivers and fair-speech preachers. So, he screamed: **"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?"** (Galatians 3:1).

The Apostle could not hold his disgust at this sudden backsliding of the Galatians. With a six-fold query, he exposed their folly and demanded to know what befell them to have regressed and descended to the point of going back to some Old Testament rites that had been abolished on the Cross. He said, **"who hath bewitched you...?"** They had been enchanted to the extent that they lost their understanding of the demands of the New Testament and began to build again the things they once destroyed (Galatians 2:18). Second, he asked: **"receive ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"** The Spirit's power, gifts and graces which they received and manifested were not by the operations of the law but through faith in Christ. They had shifted their focus from the operations of the Spirit to the works of the law and had forgotten so quickly that everything was by the Spirit of grace.

Third, he said, **"Are ye so foolish?"** He wanted to know if they lacked basic understanding to be able to discern between the spiritual and the carnal. Fourth, he asked: **"having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"** That is, it does not make sense to start the Christian race in the Spirit and try to end in the flesh. His fifth poser to them was, **"Have ye suffered so many things in vain?"** He felt that if they had faced grave persecutions because of their stand for the truth, could they not endure to the end to receive their full reward? Finally, he queried, **"He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"** (Galatians 3:5). Truly, it is unwise to turn

away from the truth that transformed our lives, the truth that sanctified and blessed our souls, brought peace into our families, changed the lives of our wayward children, healed our sick bodies, and given us hope of eternal life. It is illogical to forsake the assembly where the Lord had taught us what it means to be born again, how to know the will of God in marriage, how to pray and receive answers, and how to overcome the enemy of our souls. It is unwise to abandon the truth that has set us free from bondage simply because a new wind of doctrine is sweeping across Christendom. Believers should demonstrate enough spiritual stamina and be diligent to search the Scriptures and **“hold fast that which is good”** (1 Thessalonians 5:21). This is the only way they can escape falsehood and its perpetrators. But the Galatian Christians failed this crucial test.

Employing the word ‘foolish’ to rebuke the Galatians sounded uncouth, but this only showed the gravity and imprudence of backsliding. The word describes someone who lacks understanding and stability of character and inability to stand for what is right. Galatian Christians fell so sheepishly for error. Likewise, believers are not expected to lack understanding of the truth that sets free but be so grounded in it so that they would not be **“tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive”** (Ephesians 4:14). Christ Himself used the same word to rebuke his disciples for their failure to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:25).

There had always been the tendency among men to revert to legalism – righteousness through observances without the grace of God. The Galatian believers were sliding into a very dangerous realm of trying to justify their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ through physical observances. Our call in the Lord is a call of faith, and it will be futile and dangerous to lean on our works for justification. All believers must prayerfully avoid this pitfall of unconsciously deviating from the path of faith. The scriptures states expressly that: **“The just shall live by faith”** (Galatians 3:11).

Apostle Paul was not a stranger to controversies concerning the gospel. Earlier, he had been confronted by **“certain men which came down from Judaea [who] taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved”** (Acts 15:1). He contended with them earnestly and took the matter to the council at Jerusalem for final resolution. In like manner, believers and Christian ministers should not give in to false teaching in any form no matter who is involved.

Question 2: *Mention some forms of legalism that are prevalent today.*

Acts that tend towards legalism are still found in various denominations all over the world. They seem to portray piety, zeal for righteous living, and commitment to the course of God, but are actual manifestations of will worship. **“But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years”** (Galatians 4:9,10). Some of these are: Period of Lent during which fasting is observed for 40 days and some foods are not eaten to identify with the sufferings of Christ. Worse still, several unsaved souls get entrenched in this ritual, thinking they are righteous. During such prolonged fasts, their focus is not on Christ as their merit; rather, it is on the ability of the flesh to endure prolonged abstinence to please the Lord. Two, Ash Wednesday. This is usually the first day to herald the period of Lent. On this day, the observers abstain from eating meat. According to them, this abstinence is to help them not to eat the body of the Lord Jesus Christ which was crucified for mankind. The observers also smear ashes on their foreheads as a mark of their mourning for the death of the Lord. Three, some Christian assemblies prohibit climbing unto the altar with any form of footwear. They have forgotten the word of God which says, **“rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God...”** (Joel 2:13). Four, it is a taboo in some churches for males and females to sit on the

same pew for worship. They have forgotten that the pew does not transmit immoral waves; it is the human heart that brews pollution (Matthew 15:19,20).

As New Testament believers, we are expected to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. External observances and rules – touch not, eat not, etc. are no longer acceptable in worship. We are to walk before the Lord in the attitude of the liberty which His Holy Spirit gives to us. Those who revert to the Old Testament ceremonial laws bring upon themselves swift condemnation because **“as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”** (Galatians 3:10).

Question 3: *What should be the attitude of true Christians to these ordinances?*

PROMISE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (Galatians 3:6-18; Genesis 15:6; Acts 13:39; Romans 3:28; 5:1; 1Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 3:24)

The emphasis of the New Testament is that salvation comes by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Believing in His finished work at Calvary is accounted to us for the righteousness that is acceptable to God. **“Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness”** (Galatians 3:6). We come to God through faith in Christ and our continuity in Him must be by faith. Our righteousness should not be based on human acts of piety – trying to be righteous through observance of set human rules. The Apostle points all men to Christ as our Merit and worthy Redeemer.

It is pertinent to note that the Lord Jesus came into the realm of mankind that through Him we may attain unto the righteous standard of God. Through mere adherence to the law, no man could fully satisfy the righteous demand of God. **“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for**

by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16). What differentiates a New Testament saint from a diehard legalist and adherent of other religions is our faith in Christ which enables us to be justified through His sacrifice. Whereas others struggle to attain so-called salvation, believers in Christ are given **"power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name"** (John 1:12). Works of men are often devoid of the grace of God. Yet, salvation is by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8,9). It is not by works so that the element of boasting can be eliminated. The glad tidings to all who believe in Jesus and have been made free from sin by Him is that we are no longer under the law. The burden of righteousness through the works of the law is done away with in Christ. As we walk daily with Him, we constantly enjoy the liberty which comes through His redemptive power. In our walk with the Lord, there is no place for boasting, the flesh

is not to be given a place of exaltation.

Question 4: *What should be our emphasis in our walk with the Lord?*

The believer is called into the family of God by faith and he is expected to live out his new life in Christ by faith. There must be strong emphasis and dependence on faith for a successful walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are made holy and have put on the robe of righteousness, yet if we neglect to hold on the shield of faith, we would soon fall under the barrage of Satan's fiery darts. When we possess the faith of Abraham, we are made partakers of the inheritance of saints in Christ. As Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness, so also are we. Besides, the blessings of Abraham abound to children of God who believe according to the faith of Abraham. **"So, then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham"** (Galatians 3:9).

Question 5: *What is the attitude that the Lord demands from those that worship Him?*

The New Testament explains that old covenant

practices have been jettisoned to pave way for the new (2 Corinthians 3:14). To what purpose then was the law given? It was to prepare the way for the manifestation of Christ.

PURPOSE OF THE LAW EXPLAINED (Galatians 3:19-29; Romans 3:20; 5:20; 1 Timothy 1:9)

As the Apostle strived to establish the promise and blessedness of justification through faith in Christ, he also revealed reasons why the law was given. This is to balance his argument in support of the dispensation of faith *vis-à-vis* the position of the law. **“Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator”** (Galatians 3:19). Lest readers of that epistle or any other should think that the advent of grace and justification have cancelled out the law and rendered its promise ineffective, he was quick to outline its purpose. One, the law was given to *create* the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20). Men would have been guiltless without heaven’s charter which properly condemns their evil deeds. Therefore, the law was given **“that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful”** (Romans 7:13). **“...Except the law had said, thou shalt not covet”** (Romans 7:7), humans would have been free to do whatever they liked without an inkling of guilt. Two, it was given to *convince* us of the need for a Savior. The law persuades men of the need for someone to save them. Three, it was given to *convict* the world of sin. The law brings the weight of sin to bear on the conscience of the sinner. Four, it was given to *check* and *curtail* the excesses of the human nature. Finally, it was to serve as a *compass* to lead and direct men to the way of salvation. The law therefore, became a school master to whip us into line pending the manifestation of the true Savior.

However, we need to understand that only the ceremonial aspects of the law—sacrifices, purifications, incensing, rites – were abolished. The moral laws of righteousness, holiness, love, gentleness, meekness, etc. – remain the cardinal teachings which must be

obeyed to see God on the last day. “...**Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God**” (1 Corinthians 6:9,10).

Question 6: *What are some reasons why we should walk by faith?*

When we walk by faith, we place our focus solely on the Lord who saved us. Faith walk keeps the believer from all unnecessary spiritual distractions; we are not given to sudden fears and doubts which assail the souls of mortal man. Walking by faith excludes all forms of boasting. Walking by faith makes us to avoid all forms of legalism, and to purely lean on the grace of God. The Apostle Paul was a man brought up and tutored in legalism, but when he found Christ, he began to walk by faith. His refrain was, “**I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me**” (Galatians 2:20). This can also be our experience as we surrender and consecrate our lives to Christ.

Lesson 699

ADOPTION AND SONSHIP THROUGH CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6).

TEXT: Galatians 4:1-11

Paul concluded the previous chapter by proving that Christians, Jews and Gentiles, are heirs of the Abrahamic covenant by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:26,29).

In this lesson, he continued his discourse on the superiority of the gospel of grace to the perverted gospel of works. He affirmed that those under the law were still babes or servants with limited freedom and privileges; that the power of God’s grace brings us into maturity in Christ and places us in our true position as adopted sons of God with full benefits of the gospel.

EXPLANATION OF THE CONCEPT OF SCRIPTURAL ADOPTION (Galatians 4:1-5; Romans 8:15-23; 9:4; Ephesians 1:4,5)

Having established the fact that believers are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, Paul the apostle went on to deal with the various stages of sonship in the context of the cultural setting of his primary audience. He also touched on the principle of adoption of sons which is quite different from civil adoption of orphans by benevolent people or childless couples, as it is being practiced in many societies today.

Question 1: *How is adoption in the physical different from the spiritual?*

The scriptural adoption is the Father’s act of giving full rights and privileges to His redeemed children, conferring on them the power of attorney to carry out responsibilities on behalf of the family. Believers have been adopted by God as His children with the aforementioned status conferred on them by God, the

Father. The adoption of believers has reference to the native custom of people in Bible days. It is applied to denote a son who has come to maturity and ready to assume his true position of full responsibilities and privileges as an adult.

Adoption ushers him into the full liberty of sons, whereas he had been under 'bondage' before. Although he has been a son to his father since he was born, he was not allowed to exercise the full rights of sonship until after his adoption. This is the point the Apostle emphasized in our text. As long as the heir is a child, he is not different from a servant (in terms of privileges enjoyed), though he owns his father's entire estate. Being in a state of immaturity would not allow an heir apparent to enjoy the full rights of his inheritance (because he is still a minor).

Question 2: *Explain the uniqueness of spiritual adoption of New Testament believers.*

There is another truth that makes spiritual adoption unique. In civil adoption, the adopted child has the rights and privileges of a biological son, but he does not have the nature of the father who adopted him. Usually, the reason for this kind of adoption is the need for comfort either for the child or the adopting parent or both. In the spiritual, God adopts those who have already become His sons through faith in Christ and they have His nature imparted to them by regeneration through the Holy Spirit. And the reason for adoption is the eternal purpose of God who seeks to save the lost and preserve them unto His Heavenly Kingdom. As a requirement for this lifelong relationship, those who are redeemed must maintain a filial relationship with God, the Father. So, it is not because the children are fatherless or the Father adopting them is childless.

Question 3: *What are the benefits of spiritual adoption of believers in Christ?*

There are great benefits attached to the adoption of believers. First, it confers on them the power of attorney, legal authority, to act as sons of God. They can transact Kingdom business on behalf of the

Father. Also, it frees them from bondage to “**tutors and governors**” of the old covenant. They can enjoy the privileges of the new covenant. Adoption empowers a true believer to enter his inheritance. It ushers him into a new realm of intimacy with the triune God and allows him to take his rightful place in the family. That intimacy is expressed in the affectionate and filial expression, “**Abba**”. That means, Father or more literally, ‘Daddy’. In practical terms, the adopted son can fully appreciate and enjoy the benefits that are linked with his Father’s name. Such benefits include power, love, supply, attention, protection, care and favor. Moreover, the Father can now share with him some deep family secrets and count on him to act responsibly on behalf of the entire household. What a great privilege to be adopted into God’s family!

THE SONSHIP OF BELIEVERS THROUGH CHRIST:
(Galatians 4:6,7; 3:26; John 1:12; Romans 8:14; 2Corinthians 6:17,18; 2 Peter 1:3,4; 1 John 3:1)

Paul the apostle earlier affirmed that Jesus Christ is the true Seed that God promised Abraham (Galatians 3:16). Through Him, He promised to bless all inhabitants of the earth. This blessing primarily concerns salvation and its accompanying benefits. When Christ eventually came, He died for the sins of humanity and rose again for our justification.

Question 4: *How can sinners receive adoption into God’s family and become sons?*

Paul had already proved that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:9,23). Through the fall of Adam, all men became sinners in nature and by practice. All sinners are children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2; 5:6; Colossians 3:6); children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3; 5:6); children of transgression and iniquity (Isaiah 57:4; Hosea 10:9); and children of Satan, the wicked one (Matthew 13:38, John 8:44; 1 John 3:10). But conversion to Christ gives the erstwhile sinner a new nature, the very nature of God. He thus becomes a child of God. It is only through the new birth that a sinner can become a son or daughter of God. “**But as many as received**

him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

The sonship of believers is more than legal adoption of children. In human practice, adopted children do not have the same genetic composition as the family members of their benefactor. But in the case of believers, not only are they adopted into the family of God, they receive the Father’s nature so they can bear the image of the only begotten Son (Romans 8:28,29).

Question 5: *In what significant way is sonship in Christ superior to that of Old Testament saints?*

Besides, the Israelites were also described as sons of God in the Old Testament (Exodus 4:22,23; Deuteronomy 14:1; Jeremiah 31:9; Hosea 11:1). The position of sonship of believers in the New Testament is higher than theirs. It was customary for a father in those times to place his immature son under tutors and governors (caretakers or child-minders) until he grows to maturity and would be able to assume his privileged position in the family. Apostle Paul describes this condition of being under caretakers as being under ‘bondage’ (not satanic bondage), a condition where liberty is curtailed and necessary restrictions are placed. This presents a clear description of sonship under the Old Testament dispensation. They were placed under legal restrictions of many ceremonial laws which were, so to say, the tutors and governors, to lead them to Jesus Christ, in whom they would enter their proper place as mature sons.

So, the Israelites were sons but they “**differed nothing from a servant**”. The full consciousness of their sonship and its implications could only be imparted when they received “**the Spirit of his Son**” in their hearts. This is the point where sonship in the New Testament sense supersedes the Old Testament condition. Believers in Christ, right from the moment of their salvation are adopted sons. They are considered fully grown, in terms of privileges, and do not need tutors and governors of legalism. Though, new believers in Christ, being inexperienced, need to be taught and

mature in faith, they are far ahead of Old Testament saints by their adoption. Jesus said he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist (Luke 7:28), the last of the Old Testament ministers.

Paul asserted that sliding back into legalism would bring forfeiture of this privilege and benefits of sonship of God. In fact, legalism would rubbish all gospel efforts that had been expended on such turncoats. This was the great evil that some Galatian believers were ignorantly committing by their relapse to legalism.

APPEAL AGAINST RELAPSING INTO LEGALISM:
(Galatians 4:8-11; 3:3; Romans 8:3; Colossians 2:20-23; Hebrews 7:18; 10:38,39)

Having pointed out the true relationship and position of believers in Christ, Paul appealed to the Galatians neither to relinquish their position of adoption nor forfeit their relationship of sonship by relapsing to legalism. Relapsing to legalism would be tantamount to outright backsliding.

Question 6: *On what basis did Paul appeal to the Galatians not to backslide?*

Paul based his appeal on their former state of ignorance when they did not know God. Before conversion, they worshipped idols which were not really gods and they were held in bondage. Why would they want to relapse into another form of bondage? Two, the awareness of their new relationship and position in Christ demands that they detest the former days of bondage. Following their conversion, they knew God. How would they exchange this for something less? Three, it would amount to inconsistency to get entangled to “**weak and beggarly elements**”. Paul used the expression to denote the rituals or legal rites of the Old Testament dispensation. Though they were instituted by God, they had become obsolete, having fulfilled their purpose. They were weak because they could not save the soul; and they were beggarly because they could not impart the unsearchable riches of Christ. So, a relapse to observance of days, months, times, and years was an evidence of going back into legalism which would rubbish all

the labours bestowed in bringing up a believer. So, present-day believers should avoid being lured and led into a legalistic gospel.

In many cases, there is a thin line between legalism and a sheer determination to adhere to strict scriptural practices. But in such cases, the Holy Spirit clarifies all doubts and questions. **“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”** (Romans 8:14). Paul used this powerful illustration about the dependence of children compared to the freedom of adult sons in showing the contrast between being under the law and under grace. Children, though they are heirs of their parents, are not given full access to the inheritance while they are still subordinate minors. Rather, they are given limited freedom and placed under guardians. This position of being in “bondage” would be maintained until such a child matures into adulthood. Example was Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahaziah, though of royal birth, was under tutorship until he was crowned king.

In our culture, what obtains in the school environment may be used to illustrate the need for transition from legalism to the liberty of the sons of God. Those who are under the law are typified as underage children who are yet under the schoolmaster that was appointed to teach and prepare them for their proper place in adulthood. Just as no one wants to remain and live in school for ever, it was not God’s design to keep people perpetually under the Old Testament dispensation which was only designed as a temporary means of bringing the people to Christ. The main thrust of Paul’s argument here is that: being under a schoolmaster is an acknowledgment that one is not ready for the proper position prepared by the Father. The Old Testament ceremonies and legal system, though put in place by God, were established to teach the alphabets of the redemptive plan. And that arrangement was to remain until **“the fulness of time”** (time appointed by the Father).

Now, the fulness of time has come. God has sent His Son, Jesus to redeem us so we can be adopted into His family by faith. Those who repent of their sin,

forsake religious rituals, exercise faith in Christ will be saved and adopted into the family of God as His sons and daughters.

Lesson 700

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

MEMORY VERSE: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).

TEXT: Matthew 1:21; Romans 10:8-13; Ephesians 2:8,9

Salvation is so vital that the whole Bible is full of plain teachings on the subject. Events recorded in the Bible all point to the very fact of salvation through the grace of God. The Jewish history shows God’s plan of salvation. The prophets in the Old Testament had the same truth to emphasize and to remind the children of Israel. Jesus Christ, the Son of God during His ministry, explained and taught, both in plain language and in parables, salvation through grace. The epistles are taken up with the same theme. If salvation is so important that it occupies almost every page of the sacred writings, it becomes necessary to study the subject in-depth to know what to do to have the plan of God fulfilled in our lives.

Question 1: *Why is salvation such an all-important subject?*

Salvation is so basic and so profound an experience that without it, all religious activities will be eternally worthless. But while some have unshakable assurance of salvation, there are others who are not so sure they are saved from sin. They are troubled with doubts concerning the experience, hence the need to look at the scriptural basis for the assurance of salvation. It is important to study the Scripture with the help of the Spirit of God so that we can settle it beyond any shadow of doubt that we have real conviction concerning our salvation.

The scripture is so clear about the meaning, significance and assurance of salvation that no one needs remain in darkness or confusion. False assurance is deceptive and will eventually damn the soul whereas true witness of the Spirit of God and

of the scripture will produce an abiding assurance in the soul. How can one know whether he is saved from sin or not? Can we confirm the assurance from the scriptures? If a person doubts whether he is saved or not, how can we help him? How can one overcome the attempt by the devil to confuse him? If, on the other hand, a person has false assurance, how can we help him from the word of God?

THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCES

(1Corinthians 3:11; Psalm 62:7; Acts 4:12; Hebrews 6:1,2; 2 Timothy 2:19)

Salvation is the foundation of all other Christian experiences. It is the first experience one must have to be called a Christian. Whatever we have, whatever we do and whatever we receive from God, if we do not have salvation, we are of all men the most miserable. The churchgoer, religious person must not be satisfied until he understands, appropriates and claims salvation through grace. To be healed and not be saved is to go to hell eventually. To have dreams that are continually being fulfilled, to have special revelations that come to pass without salvation is to live on earth with no tangible purpose. To read the Bible and to memorize its verses without the experience of salvation through grace is to live on earth as if one never really read the Bible.

If God counts salvation so important, then preachers ought to spend more time examining the word of God to be able to preach the message of salvation clearly. The very reason the Lord preserved the events recorded in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is to make us understand that we can only be saved through grace. It is not enough to understand how to cast out devils, deliver the oppressed, heal the sick or bring fire from heaven, if we do not understand salvation. Salvation is the foundation and the pillar of Christian teaching.

Salvation from sin is made possible through the grace and love of God. We cannot get saved from sin through our works but by exercising faith in what Christ has done to redeem us. The thief on the cross could not do anything except to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Question 2: *How is salvation compared to deliverance, divine healing, prosperity, promotion and miracles?*

THE MEANING OF SALVATION (Luke 1:71, 77; 19:9; Philippians 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:8,9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15; Romans 1:16; Acts 15:6-11; Matthew 24:12,13; Romans 10:1,9; Matthew 1:21; Titus 2:11-14; Acts 4:12)

Salvation can be defined as forgiveness of sin, deliverance from sin and reconciliation with God which comes because of repentance from sin and faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice on the Cross.

Salvation is different from healing, joining a church, renouncing idol worship or changing name. Salvation from sin is so essential that one must be sure to have it to avoid being disappointed on the last day. We are not saved by feeling but by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Outward moral change alone cannot substitute for salvation. Salvation includes freedom from the guilt of sin, the power of sin and the consequence of sin.

Salvation is aimed not to make us turn a new leaf but to make us live a new life. The grace of God teaches us to deny all ungodly acts or behavior and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2:11). Salvation makes it possible to live a godly life in the face of temptation, corruption and evil.

Some religious people try to preach salvation through human merits like prolonged fasting, animal sacrifices, religious festivities and pilgrimages, almsgiving to the less-privileged. They try to work their way through to salvation. But there is no salvation in any other except Christ (Acts 4:12).

Question 3: *What is the difference between genuine salvation and other religious experiences?*

FAITH'S INDISPENSABILITY TO SALVATION: (Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 10:13; Revelation 22:17; James 4:6; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Acts 4:33; 1 Peter 4:10; 2 Corinthians 4:15; 9:14)

Salvation is not dependent upon regular attendance to church or doing the best we can. **“By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”** (Ephesians 2:8,9).

God’s offer of salvation is by grace. Faith is the spiritual mechanism through which man receives salvation. Through faith, we access the grace of God that brings salvation. Grace means the favor of God which we receive without any merit or work. It is the provision of God for mankind. Someone said, grace is *God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense*. Right attitude to the grace of God makes us receive the salvation He provides. In other words, salvation is the object of grace.

We do not have to feel good or better to receive salvation. No one earns forgiveness and remission of sins by anything he does, any rule he keeps or by belonging to a religious assembly. This is one of the major differences between Christianity and other religions. Salvation is not obtained by keeping the Law of Moses. Someone rightly said, ‘grace is the provision of God for mankind who are so fallen that they cannot help themselves, so corrupt that they cannot change their nature, so averse to God that they cannot turn to Him, so blind that they cannot see Him, so deaf that they cannot hear Him, so dead that He Himself must open their graves and bring them to life.’

There are physical traits we inherited from our parents such as height, facial appearance, complexion, color of the eyes, etc., but salvation does not flow in the blood. We do not become saved because we are the son or daughter of a pastor or because our father is born again or our mother is the leader of the women fellowship in the church. It cannot be passed from husband to wife, from wife to husband, from parents to children or from children to their parents.

To benefit experientially from what Christ has done for us on the cross at Calvary, we need to acknowledge and repent of our sin; two, renounce Satan and all his activities; three, receive Christ as Savior and put

our faith in His atoning work, not our good morals or works; four, rely on God to live a victorious life. It is only Christ that can make one a new creature. This brings the inward assurance that a transformation has taken place. Then there is a change of character and conduct.

Question 4: *Of what significance is faith in the experience of salvation and how can we benefit from the atoning sacrifice of Christ at Calvary?*

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION (John 5:24,39; 3:36,15-19; 6:47; Acts 10:43; 13:39; Romans 10:9,10; 1 John 1:9; 2:1-5; 3:10,14; 4:15; 5:1,10-13)

Many people unfortunately have not been able to enjoy the Christian life because they lack assurance of salvation. Many struggles with the flesh and sin, rising and falling and are unable to live the victorious life because of their inability to appropriate grace to conquer through faith. **“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith”** (1 John 5:4).

Assurance of salvation basically means a firm and confident understanding that one's sins are forgiven. It means to be sure that one is born again and is a child of God. Christ came into the world and died to save sinners, but many are not able to have the joy of salvation because they lack the assurance that their sins are forgiven and their names written in the Book of Life. Anyone that lacks this assurance cannot overcome sin, Satan, the world and temptations. Assurance of salvation is like a title deed. A man who does not have a title deed to a property cannot make a sure claim to the property.

The reason many people confess sin every day is because they lack assurance of salvation. Others form the habit of answering the altar call every time because they are not very sure that their sins have been forgiven. To them, the Christian life becomes difficult and laborious.

The problem with people who lack assurance of salvation is that they place their confidence on feeling

rather than on faith. Many think, to be sure, one must have a certain kind of feeling. Others feel they must be happy always. Others believe in working their way to salvation through human self-effort like shedding of tears or a great deal of prayer. While genuine salvation experience could produce some of these experiences, they are only the outcomes, not the basis or condition. Salvation is not by feeling but by faith in the atoning work of Christ. It is based on genuine repentance. John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles and even the Old Testament prophets all preached it. Salvation becomes ours when we repent of our sins and receive pardon, power and grace that Christ gives to those who believe in Him (John 1:12). We must believe that He is the Son of God sent to die for our sins. We must confess with our mouth what we believe in our hearts. If we do, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

It is noteworthy that the Bible does not base that forgiveness and cleansing from unrighteousness on crying, rolling on the ground or feeling happy. There must be express faith in the word of God (John 5:24; Romans 8:1; 1 John 5:11,12). By way of analogy, the evidence of the ownership of a property is not one who feels he is but one that has the title deeds, written and sealed with the seal of authority. So is faith regarding the assurance of salvation. But it is not a dormant, inactive faith but a dynamic faith which produces not only assurance of salvation in our hearts but also fruits of righteousness in our lives.

Question 5: *What is assurance of salvation and how can one have it?*

FRUITS OF SALVATION (Matthew 3:8; Philippians 1:11; 2 Timothy 2:6; Galatians 5:22,23; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1John 3:9; Ephesians 4:17)

The first fruit expected of a truly born-again Christian is the fruit of repentance. **“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”** We show that we have been saved from sin by dispensing with ungodly habits. The places of sin we used to

visit, we do not go there anymore; the dresses that expose our nakedness which we used to wear, we get rid of them; the indecent and obscene words we used to speak no longer come out from our mouth. We begin to bear the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance (self-control) (Galatians 5:22,23). There is also the fruit of righteousness and holiness. A real child of God will not continue to live in sin.

Just as you cannot see the root of a tree because it is buried beneath the surface of the earth, so also your experience may be hidden beneath the soil of time and date. People will eventually come to know it through the fruits of your salvation.

Question 6: How can a believer bear the fruit of righteousness?

THE TRAGEDY OF NEGLECTING SO-GREAT SALVATION (Hebrews 2:2,3; 10:28,29; 1 Corinthians 10:3-12; Jude 5; Hebrews 4:1,11; 1 Timothy 4:14)

There is great danger in sinners neglecting so-great salvation. The believer is, likewise in great danger if he neglects to give diligent heed to make his calling and election sure. Our loss will be incalculable and unbearable if we neglect the message of full salvation preached by Christ and by those who received it directly from Him. One can know all there is to know about Jesus Christ and still go to hell if they do not receive Him as Savior and experience the moral transformation that faith in Him brings.

We should guard against letting God's word slip from us whether in times of suffering, deprivations, poverty, sickness, oppression and persecution or joy, progress, prosperity and sound health. If we allow our souls to be driven by circumstances, we will not be able to stay on course.

To reject Christ is to reject salvation and, to reject salvation is to reject everlasting fellowship with God in eternity. We need to be careful that we do not allow anything to hinder us from believing the

totality of the word of God. To neglect to watch and pray is to stand in danger of losing those things we have got from the Lord. There are some who claim to be saved but who neglect the warnings of the Scripture to watch, pray, resist temptation, and keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Others forsake the **“assembling of ourselves together”** while some neglect God’s provisions for Christian growth and maturity. Through neglect, our souls can be lost and there can be serious cracks in our spiritual walls. We may become weak and even backslide. We need to watch.

Fierce punishment and judgment await the unsaved and backslidden. Sinners and backsliders who die neglecting the blazing light of the gospel will suffer greatly in hell. Hell belongs to those who have rejected the gift of eternal life.

Question 7: State the consequences of neglecting the great salvation of God offered through Christ.

Lesson 701

THE SERVICE OF CONSECRATED SAINTS

MEMORY VERS E: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

TEXT: Romans 12:3-8

The believer is saved to serve. And the Scripture is replete with this truth as the basis of God’s exercise of mercy and redemptive work in the believer. For instance, while Israel was in bondage in Egypt, God sent Moses to release them so they could serve Him. It is for this same reason that Christ died and rose again, **“That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life”** (Luke 1:74,75).

Question 1: *Why should believers render consecrated service to God?*

This subject of believers’ usefulness is pivotal to the advancement of God’s kingdom. The Lord’s Prayer, **“Thy kingdom come”** would be a mere liturgy to be recited without any practical implication or fulfilment of it if the believer were to remain indolent and idle. But the truth is that every blessing the believer receives from God carries a responsibility with it. In the parable of the talents in particular, the slothful servant who gave excuses for not being profitable was condemned and judged. It is not out of place then for Apostle Paul to harp on the noble responsibility of the believer in advancing the kingdom of God. That service can be profitable and rewarding or unprofitable and unrewarding is revealed in the life and attitude of Christian servants. Apostle Paul here gives practical directions and discourse on how the consecrated believer should use his gifts fruitfully in the church of the living God.

GRACE AND HUMILITY IN SERVICE (Romans 12:3,16; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 3:10; Luke 14:11; Proverbs 16:18,19; 25:27)

Question 2: *Explain the priority of grace and humility in the service of God.*

“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3). The practical instructions Paul passes to the believer is as a result of his experience on the way to Damascus when he met Christ. He could boast of nothing his human ingenuity had done or could do. He said he owed everything to **“the grace given unto [him]”**. How indicting this is to Christian ministers who indeed received the grace of God but now boast of their own achievements. Christian servants who minister with pride are bereft of the grace of God. The proud do not have the grace of God because self has taken the centre stage in their service. But Paul affirms that the believer’s focus should be on God. If in wisdom **“God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith”**, what then is the basis for pride?

Humility precedes service and usefulness. Humility is a priceless Christian virtue. It is a state of modesty, meekness and sobriety. Humility enables the believer to have a modest sense or imagination of his significance. The apostle enjoins the saint to think soberly of himself, according to the limitation of the measure of faith God has imparted to him.

Question 3: *Why are believers warned not to be proud?*

As the apostle underscored the necessity of service for every consecrated believer, he cautions us against the destructive nature of pride. Pride is anathema to Christian life and service. It destroys whatever a man does for God. Pride truncates a growing, progressive ministry. It is only when a believer is humble that God can use him for His glory. Pride is a besetting temptation of the human nature. Man is prone to

exaggerate his own abilities and merits. The apostle would not take the subject lightly but repeated his warning in verse sixteen: **“Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.”** Paul left no room for the rich, educated or highly placed brethren in the church to display their status, but to condescend voluntarily and assume equality with others who may be less privileged. Our Lord did not spare the proud in heart – rich or poor. **“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”** (Luke 14:11).

The believer must realize that his salvation, gifts or talents are by grace. This knowledge will shut out pride from him. If we must be useful vessels in Christ’s hand, we must be cleansed from pride, vainglory and boasting. Pride makes the believer and all his talents, like those of Lucifer, to be useless and worthless. Those intoxicated with pride are running on a slippery precipice. **“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud”** (Proverbs 16:18, 19). Absalom fell because of his pomposity and haughtiness. Lucifer, having tasted of the glory of heaven where believers are still seeking earnestly to go, was cast out of it because of his thoughts and actions of pride. Incidentally, God has incisive and penetrating eyes that decode this hideous monster. Believers must understand that there is a spiritual gravity that pulls the proud down and lifts the humble up. That is why the apostle himself attributed whatever he was to the grace of God. In exhorting the believer, he did not appeal to his office as an apostle or to the authority he had. On the basis of his humility he exhorts all men to be humble. His exhortation is for everyone.

Note the triple mention of the word, **“think.”** Why was the apostle so much concerned with thought? This is because the thought produces the action. Our action and reactions originate from our thought. When a man takes care of his thought pattern, he will be able to control himself.

The apostle enjoins the believer not to **“think of himself.”** There are people who are preoccupied with themselves. They would not think of the good of their neighbors nor of the welfare of others. The believer should not think of himself **“more highly than he ought to think.”** He should not have an exaggerated view of himself. But he should think soberly and scripturally. **“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things”** (Philippians 4:8).

The apostle did not think of himself as a superman who is greater, higher and more talented than others. His ministerial greatness was not as a result of his ingenuity. He exalted the grace of God as the main factor in his ministry. Even though he talks of his labour, his exploits and his breakthroughs in ministry (which far exceeded those of his contemporaries), he attributed everything to God’s grace (1 Corinthians 3:10). He wasted no time in making all men realize that his missionary outreach, the writing of the epistles and all the enduring works he had done, were according to the grace of God (1 Timothy 2:12-14). The believer should never at any time lose sight of this truth. Obedience to this body of teaching on relationship would forestall conflicts (personal, interpersonal, church, family) among the brethren and in the society. The root of strife is when one feels that he has been slighted or that his personality or status is not recognised.

DIVERSITY OF GIFTS (Romans 12:4-6; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; Ephesians 4:16)

Question 4: *What is the danger of inferiority complex among believers? And how can we overcome the problem?*

Every believer in Christ is potentially endowed to serve God according to the proportion of God’s grace in his life. Just as there are no useless members in the

body, no believer in Christ is useless except by choice. Just as God condemns superiority complex among members of the body, He equally does not tolerate inferiority complex in any believer. Inferiority complex – the feeling that one is worthless or not needed in the service of God paralyses and makes people to hide their God-given talents. All the members of the body, seen or hidden, with different but determined places of operation and functions are mutually dependent in the same body. They fulfil their purpose each by working with other members of the body. **“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith”** (Romans 12:4-6).

Apostle Paul illustrates the gifts in the body of Christ with the members of our natural body. Members of the natural body are not disjointed. Rather, they are mutually united in their operation. As the body is one coordinated, organised, cooperating system, so also must the body of Christ be. This is compulsory to ensure the body fulfils its existence.

The body of Christ consists of many members with different ministry gifts. **“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit... For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ”** (1 Corinthians 12:4,12). While believers are members one of another, we are not reduced to a dead level of uniformity. So also are the operation of the gifts of believers in the body of Christ. Leaders and believers should identify their gifts and also encourage others to identify theirs so they (gifts) can be put to profitable use in the house of God. Christian leaders should also give opportunities to other members of the church to minister so the body of Christ can be edified and Christ glorified.

Question 5: What qualities of life should be found in each member of the body?

The apostle shows in our text the qualities and characteristics of each member of the body. First, every member possesses life irrespective of size or shape. Life is basic to each functioning member. Second, every member is limited. No matter how important, strategic or conspicuous a member may be, it cannot play the entire role or the functions of the entire body. Every member needs other members to be fulfilled. Third, every member is dependent on others: only one member cannot be enough, we need all. Fourth, members complements one another. Members are not competitive but complimentary. There should be no contradiction among believers in the Lord's service: they should each support one another. It will be unfortunate for a member to feel so great and so important that he has to contradict or compete with others.

Fifth, there must be unity in diversity. There is room for diversity in the Church of Christ. In the local church, there is room for varied gifts and activities. But this diversity must lead only to one thing – unity. Without biblical unity there will be division and confusion. And God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). Sixth, disunity delays progress. It defeats purposes, destroys life, decreases usefulness, and deprives us of our rights. We need to know that some members are conspicuous; they are easily seen. Others are less conspicuous, but this does not diminish their importance in the body. That is how the Lord designed the body and expects the church to learn from this super-structure. **“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:30).

CONDITIONS OF USEFULNESS (Romans 12:6-8; 1Peter 4:10,11)

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that

sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:6-8). Clinched in these verses are certain conditions which must be fulfilled to guarantee our usefulness in the body of Christ.

Question 6: *Mention five conditions the believer must fulfil to guarantee his usefulness in the body of Christ.*

First, we need the grace of God. Gifts are given according to the grace that we have. To possess gifts without corresponding sustaining grace brings destruction. James and John demanded of Christ liberty to command fire on unyielding Samaritans so they can have their way. Their lack of grace of gentleness, humility and self-control was exposed.

Second, we must wait and develop our ministry. The more our faith grows, the more our proclamation of the gospel. We must develop our faith as we wait on our ministry. A gifted teacher should remain in it. Teaching moulds immortal souls and inspires the old and the young.

"He that exhorteth" must wait on exhortation. Believers must not be known to be jack of all trades and master of none. Those with the ministry of giving should do it with cheerfulness; not with complaints and murmuring. Believers whom the Lord has endowed with the ability to rule should be diligent in ruling. We should count our service for the Lord more important than any other thing. Be cheerful as you show mercy.

Third, we should not minister above that which we have received. **"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen"** (1 Peter 4:10,11). The consecrated servant of Christ should minister according to the ability that God has given him. His goal should be to glorify God and not to make a show

of his gifts. This is because he who boasts of a false gift is like cloud without rain. Fourth, there should be the supreme love of God in our hearts. Our service must be wrapped in love. Any service without love will not attract any reward (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Fifth, our service must be rendered and based on the foundation of sound doctrine. **“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee”** (1 Timothy 4:16). The believer’s life and conduct must not contradict the doctrines of the Bible he believes so that the name of the Lord should not be blasphemed. Finally, there must be diligence, development and discipline. **“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest”** (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

That our text deals with ministry gifts should not make believers to excuse themselves from discharging their general responsibilities towards their neighbors. Giving, for instance, to meet others’ needs is the responsibility of all believers. But the point is that some are excellent in these areas. Other areas of Christian service where believers can use their talents or gifts for God include ushering, choir, security, etc. For our service to be fruitful and God-glorifying, it requires entire consecration. Self-abandonment and complete yieldedness to God makes for excellence in Christian service and ministry. If we carefully cultivate the highlighted qualities of Christian character and spice them with service, they will be life-giving, edifying, refreshing and much sought after. Thus, souls will be saved and believers will be edified thereby crediting our accounts of rich rewards and crowns in heaven. Though there are all-encompassing bountiful blessings we enjoy as we serve God on earth, we must grow in consecration and endeavor to get to heaven to be able to receive our rewards.

Lesson 702

THE RAPTURE

MEMORY VERSE: “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:51-55; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The rapture of the saints which is heralded by Christ’s appearance in the air at the trumpet of God, is the first phase of Christ’s Second coming. Though the rapture is also generally referred to as the Second Coming of Christ, it is actually an initial phase, since He merely appears in the air and raptures the saints who are ready.

The rapture is the greatest event of all ages that the Church is waiting for. It is the catching away of all true believers in Christ to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Christ, at the end of His first advent, was taken up in the air to go and prepare a place for His own. His parting promise to His disciples was that He would return in like manner to receive His ‘Bride’ to be with Him forever (Acts 1:9-11; John 14:1-3).

Question 1: *What do you understand by the term ‘rapture’?*

At rapture, Christ will appear in the air. He will not be visible to the inhabitants of the earth. His mission then will be to resurrect all dead saints, who, along with the living believers, will put on immortality and shall be caught up to be with the Lord. This event will take place in the twinkling of an ‘eye’ before the great and terrible day of the Lord when the wrath of God will be poured down from His cup of indignation without mixture – an event fitly called the Great Tribulation (1 Corinthians 15:52).

The time of the rapture is unknown, even by the angels (Matthew 24:36; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5). It will

be heralded by the voice of the archangel and the blowing of trumpets signalling the end of the Church age (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15).

THE CERTAINTY OF THE RAPTURE (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:10,11; Daniel 7:13,14)

Jesus himself assured His disciples of his coming. He comforted His troubled and sorrowful disciples with the message of His personal return to take them to the Father's abode. **"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"** (John 14:1-3).

God had underlined this great event in two different ways in the Scripture to assure us of its certainty. First, it was illustrated in Enoch and Elijah, the two living saints who did not taste death but were translated in a moment of time and caught up in the air (Genesis 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11,12).

Second, it was illustrated in Christ in the New Testament. He died, was buried and resurrected. While He talked with His disciples on Mount Olivet, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight (Acts 1:9-11).

Question 2: Cite scriptural proofs of the certainty of the rapture.

The rapture which was a mystery to the Old Testament prophets marks the end of the Church Age, also referred to as the time of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). This truth was veiled to the saints of old. However, known unto God are all His works from the foundation of the earth. In His mercy, He interrupted His program for Israel with the interpolation of Church Age. Christ the Messiah came for His people but they rejected Him (John 1:11), and God turned to the Gentiles to take a people for Himself. The rapture will mark the end of this special period of grace. Does this mean that God has forsaken His people Israel forever? Far

from it. He will resume His program with Israel immediately after the rapture, thus ushering in the beginning of the Seventieth week in Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27). The rapture is the present expectation of the saints.

It is the next event in the program of God for the Church. Any moment from now, the trumpet shall sound and He that shall come will come and will not tarry. It is very certain that Christ is coming back again. He assured the Church of the certainty of His coming (John 14:1- 3). Angels proclaimed it; apostles and saints throughout the ages preached it. All the signs of His coming are daily being fulfilled.

SIGNS HERALDING THE RAPTURE OF SAINTS:
(Matthew 24:3-14; Luke 21:24-36; 2 Timothy 3:1-5,7)

While we do not know and cannot tell the exact time of the rapture of the saints, we certainly do know the season for the Lord's coming will be heralded with signs. Since Christ knows more about His coming than anyone else, we draw considerable knowledge from His words relating to the signs of His coming in the period that precedes the rapture and the Great Tribulation in what is generally referred to as the last days or latter times. Our Lord did not leave us in the dark concerning His coming. "Long prophetic discourses of Christ are recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke and the new details added by each indicate that the original discourses was longer than any of the accounts we have in the gospel", writes a Christian author.

Christ, answering a pertinent question asked by His disciples on "**...What shall be the sign of thy coming...**"(Matthew 24:3), gave in detail what would be happening on earth shortly before His coming (Matthew 24:5-12,30- 39). He highlighted the following as what to expect: (i) many false Christ's will arise to deceive many unsuspecting believers; (ii) there will be wars and rumours of war; (iii) there will be international wars; (iv) there will be famines (global economic recession); (v) pestilences; (vi) earthquakes in divers places; (vii) there will be

persecution of Christ's followers and some cases of martyrdom; (viii) the emergence of many false prophets; (ix) backsliding from the faith will be on the increase; and (x) more people will be given to pleasure and merrymaking than those seeking the Lord.

Question 3: *How do we know the coming of the Lord is at hand?*

The Scripture also predicts the conditions, characterized by a system of denials, which will be prevalent within the visible Church, shortly before Christ's return. There will be a denial of God (2 Timothy 3:1-5), a denial of Christ (1 John 2:18; 4:3), a denial of Christ's return (2 Peter 3:3,4), a denial of the faith of Christian living (Jude 18) and a denial of authority. All these signs are being fulfilled before our very eyes.

THE SUDDENNESS OF THE RAPTURE (Matthew 24:27,36; Luke 12:40; 1Corinthians 15:52; 1Thessalonians 5:1-3)

The Spirit's choice of words on the subject of the rapture shows us the uncertainty of the time of His coming. **"For yourselves know perfectly that the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night"**, says the Holy Ghost through Paul. His coming is likened to the attack of a thief in the night. Thus, as thieves usually come in the dead of the night when they are least expected, such will be the coming of the Lord.

Question 4: *What does the Bible say concerning the time of the Lord's return and what lesson can believers learn from it?*

To assure the Church of the imminence, suddenness and unpredictability of the time of the Lord's coming, Paul gives an analogy of a woman in travail. **"For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape"** (1 Thessalonians 5:3). A pregnant woman knows she must travail to give birth but knows not the day or the hour it will happen; so it is with the time of the coming of the Lord. We know the times and seasons of His coming but the very moment, the day, or the

hour is known only to God.

READINESS FOR THE RAPTURE (1 Thessalonians 5:4-8; Matthew 24:44; Mark 13:35; Luke 19:13; 1 John 3:3; 1 Timothy 6:14)

Nothing should be of greater importance to the true believer than the knowledge of the kind of character, life and conduct that will make and keep him ready for the rapture. In almost all the areas in the Bible where the rapture is mentioned, there are accompanying warnings and instructions that border on readiness and necessary preparation. Actually, there is the ever-present need of watchfulness. Failure to be vigilant and consecrated to Christ is dangerous.

Question 5: *How are sinners and believers to prepare for the rapture?*

Great stress and emphasis has always been laid on watchfulness as part of the 'saints' preparation for the rapture. As saints prepare for the coming of the Lord, they must be sober and watchful. Watchfulness and sobriety are most suitable to Christian character and privilege, as being "**children of the day**" because "**they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night**" (1 Thessalonians 5:5,7).

The apostles repeated the commandment of our Lord on the subject of watchfulness. Peter admonished Christians: "**be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer**" (1 Peter 4:7). John wrote: "**Blessed is he that watcheth**" (Revelation 16:15) and Paul exhorted: "**watch ye, stand fast in the faith, be strong**" (1 Corinthians 16:13). The duty of watching is of paramount obligation; for the night is far spent, the day is at hand. A true believer must not slumber or please himself with the shadowy dreams of earthly glories; for he must keep vigil, watching always. The warning to watch is for all men and for all times: "**What I say unto you I say unto all, watch**" (Mark 13:37).

Toiling or laboring is also part of the saints' preparation for the coming of Christ. His command

is: **“Occupy till I come”**. Working and watching go together; for we are to comport ourselves like the Jews of Nehemiah’s day who built the walls of Jerusalem whilst they were armed and on their guard against the foes. Our Master has left us in the midst of dangers, not to depress our courage but to quicken our vigilance. We must work and watch so that at the Lord’s return, He will find us faithful.

We must also be sober. Christian sobriety is neither sadness nor gloom. As believers, we are expected to be serious and happy, sober and cheerful. Peter wrote: **“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer”** (1 Peter 4:7). The purpose of our preparation is that we will be found fit when He comes for His saints (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17).

There is a lifestyle peculiar to the saints who will be caught up at the coming of Christ. Those who are waiting for Him are the surrendered, serving and sincere saints. The Lord will not catch away fake Christians or loud, halfhearted, cold, filthy and fearful churchgoers. Only true saints will be caught away. Remember that the Lord is coming soon. **“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure”** (1 John 3:3).

In a nutshell, to qualify to partake in the rapture, one must be born again, live a transparent holy life, walk daily in the light, do service for God, watch daily, pray always with all prayer, and maintain these experiences at the time of the rapture or at the time of death as the case may be (John 3:3; Hebrews 12:14; John 4:35-38; 9:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17).

Backsliders will not be able to go at the rapture, though saved before and baptized in water. Careless and compromising preachers will miss the rapture; it does not matter what Christian work they might have done in the past. All sinners in and outside the church will be left behind to face the Great Tribulation.

Knowing that these things shall be, that the rapture will occur unannounced, and it is very imminent, what manner of persons ought believers to be?

Sinners are to make haste to repent and embrace Christ as their Savior. The saints of God are to watch and pray lest that day come upon them unprepared (Matthew 24:42- 44).

Lesson 703

DIVINE JUDGMENT ON ELI'S POSTERITY

MEMORY VERSE: “Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Samuel 2:30).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 2:27-36

The previous lesson from this chapter described how little Samuel, like a lily in the mud, was preserved in purity in the midst of godless people like the sons of Eli. Hophni and Phinehas had sold themselves to wickedness by perverting the course of God’s offering and committing adultery with the women who congregated in Shiloh. As a result, the people of Israel began to abhor the sacrifice and offering of the Lord. The mild reproof of their father could neither change them nor appease God’s determined wrath. Their father’s indulgence strengthened their hands in evil.

Eli was a priest and a judge in Israel. His sons joined in the leadership as provided by the law. They were saddled with the responsibility of leading and judging others to keep the whole nation holy before God. Unfortunately, the seat of power was corrupted and polluted and a leader’s sin became a leading sin. They robbed God’s people of the joy of giving, sowing and reaping.

The despicable deeds of Eli’s sons attracted swift and unmistakable judgment from the God who is of “**purser eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity...**” (Habakkuk 1:13). It is expected that those called to the service of God and His people should be careful to maintain good works lest they court His hot displeasure. Believers who minister in holy service are required to “**provide things honest in the sight of all men**” (Romans 12:17) and build holy confidence in worshipers. They should not despise the Lord in

word or action because He is a jealous God and a consuming fire.

Question 1: *Why was Eli also guilty of the sins of his sons?*

REBUKE AND CONDEMNATION OF ELI'S SONS (1 Samuel 2:27-29; 13:13; 2 Samuel 12:9; 2 Chronicles 24:20; Proverbs 27:5; Titus 1:13)

“And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s house?” (1 Samuel 2:27). The man of God sent to deliver this awful message was not mentioned; his identity may have been hidden for the purpose of modesty. Nonetheless, we are less concerned about the personality but the weight and fidelity of the message. The profligate and rapine nature of Hophni and Phinehas were public knowledge and Eli their father did less to rein them in. He had a chance to set things right in his family but he did not and seemed to prefer the honour and position of his sinful children to the honour and glory of God. The Lord had no choice but to wield the big stick because they failed to repent of their evil.

God asked Eli about five probing questions to indict and make him see the sinfulness of their sin. **“Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father... did I choose him out of all the tribes... did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire... wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice... and honourest thy sons above me...?”** These questions were as indicting as they were incriminating. Eli’s sons had impiously profaned the holy things and he bolstered them by not punishing them for their insolence and impiety. His reproof of them was unacceptable to God because he should have accompanied it with actions by relieving them of the sacred duties and sending them out of the Lord’s sanctuary (Isaiah 52:11). His action was taken as a tacit approval and indulgence of his sons and the Lord would have none of it.

Question 2: *Why was Eli's reproof of his sons unacceptable to God?*

In parental discipline, two essential ingredients are required: one, a firm resolve; two, a corrective action. Love and discipline must go together. Parents are not only to love and provide for their children; they are also to discipline them when they err, sometimes severely. The sons of Eli had grown to adulthood, perhaps, consecrated to the priestly ministry. Their father should have used his authority as high priest to restrain and punish them. When parents find their children in any evil way and leave them unrestrained, it amounts to honouring them more than God. **“Them that sin rebuke before all, that others may fear. Open rebuke is better than secret love. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith”** (1 Timothy 5:20; Proverbs 27:5; Titus 1:13).

Throughout the Scripture, the Lord always rebukes sin and evil especially among His servants because He would not permit a desecration of His sanctuary or disobedience to His commandments. This He does often without respect of persons. Moses was rebuked sharply for dishonouring God at the waters of Meribah; David the king came under scathing reproof because he brought shame to the name of the Lord through his sins of adultery and murder (2 Samuel 12:9); Zechariah could not refrain from scolding the children of Israel for their disobedience and rebellion. Therefore, those who stray from the faith should not expect commendation from the Lord.

REJECTION AND JUDGMENT OF IMPENITENT SINNERS: (1 Samuel 2:30-34; 15:11,23-28,35; Leviticus 10:1,2; 1 Kings 2:27; Malachi 2:1-3,8,9; Romans 1:32)

God normally warns of impending judgment through His servants – a prophet, an angel or an anointed minister. As a matter of duty, a man of God warns, rebukes, exhorts, counsels and teaches people. The man of God in the text boldly declared God's message in a clear manner. He was courageous and timely in

the proclamation of God's message of judgment on the sinning house of Eli.

Consequent upon His denunciation of their sins, God rejected and reversed the eternal priesthood which He had conferred on Eli and his posterity. **"Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed"** (1 Samuel 2:30). He said, **"but now"**; this is a revocation of what had been promised earlier.

Question 3: *How correct is the doctrine of eternal security in the light of God's revocation of His promise to Eli?*

God cannot bless the people who have backslidden and returned to live in sin and rebellion. The righteousness of yesterday will not suffice for today should anyone turn to unrighteousness. Thus, the promise of an everlasting priesthood for the family of Eli was changed to show that the doctrine of eternal security is false and deceptive. Those who preach that once someone is born again nothing can separate such from God, even when they fall from grace or backslide, err. This claim flies in the face of several Scripture passages where God rejected those who served Him previously but later backslid (1 Samuel 2:30; Exodus 32:33; John 15:6; 1 Corinthians 9:27; 2 Timothy 4:10).

It shows that it is possible to backslide and lose the experience of salvation. God has the power to reject one and raise another. He can exalt the meanest and put contempt upon the greatest (1 Samuel 2:8; Psalm 113:7). He rejected Saul and raised David in his place to sit upon the throne of Israel. When David's son could not establish the kingdom in righteousness, He divided it and gave the larger part to Jeroboam (1 Kings 14:8). Again, when He found unrighteousness and unfaithfulness in Jeroboam, He vowed to remove him. **"Moreover the LORD shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that**

day: but what? even now” (1 Kings 14:14). Judas Iscariot lost his place among the disciples of Christ and was replaced with Matthias.

Believers’ security in Christ is conditional and depends on their abiding in Him and keeping His words (John 14:15). However, if we hold fast the beginning of our faith steadfast to the end and will not permit the challenges of life or the love of this world to affect our love for Christ, we shall be secure from the danger of backsliding.

Question 4: What were the prophecies against Eli and his posterity?

Details of the judgment on Eli, his children and their posterity are:

1. that he and his father’s house (Ithamar) would be cut off;
2. his sons shall die in early age;
3. an enemy will take away the wealth of Israel;
4. his two sons shall both die in one day;
5. the remnant of his sons who survive would beg bread and silver from their successors;
6. they would not be extinct but they would not come to prominence, and
7. enemies would invade the land of Israel. All these were fulfilled on the family of Eli.

In rounding off the abasement of Eli’s posterity, king Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord, **“that he might fulfil the word of the LORD, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh”** (1 Kings 2:27). (Abiathar was a descendant of Eli, who had escaped when Saul slew all the priests in Nob [1 Samuel 22:20]).

Thus, the Lord would always visit sinning individuals with judgment unless they repent. The women that committed immorality with the priests were not guiltless. Though, the text did not specify the nature of their judgment, it was obvious that they would have received their share of punishment for their grievous sins (Leviticus 20:10). Women who aid and

abet immorality in fellowship will face the judgment of God.

THE RAISING AND EXALTATION OF FAITHFUL SERVANTS (1 Samuel 2:35,36; 1 Samuel 2:8; Psalm 113:7; Hebrews 3:1,2; 1 Corinthians 4:1,2; Isaiah 54:14; Hebrews 5:4,5)

God raises faithful servants and ministers to replace those found to be unfaithful in the administration of His grace. From generation to generation, He would not leave Himself without faithful witnesses to keep up the torch of truth, no matter the degree of darkness. Even when there is a famine and dearth of truth, He will preserve a lone voice that would cry and show His people their transgressions (Acts 14:17; Isaiah 58:1; Romans 11:3,4). **“And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever”** (1 Samuel 2:35).

It is wrong to think that **“the gifts and calling of God are without repentance”** (Romans 11:29) when conditions guiding such calls are flouted. God’s promise to bless carries with it the conditions of walking in righteousness before Him. He has the capacity to reject one and raise another. It was not a surprise that the Lord raised alternative priests in place of the disgraced sons of Eli. If we are faithful, He deals more favourably with us than we deserve, but if we do otherwise, God’s work will never suffer for want of true godly men and women to carry it on. Unfaithful children would deprive themselves of divine blessings accruing to saints now and in eternity. It behoves ministers of holy things therefore, that they must not fail or falter in God’s service.

There are innumerable blessings, honour and promotion attached to the obedient and faithful servants of God. The Aaronic priesthood, for example, was laden with much good things, including peculiarly close relationship with God to mediate between Him and the people, divinely apportioned food from the offerings, specially reserved portion of meat and

first fruit of crops, etc. Above all, God had avouched Himself to be their portion and inheritance.

Question 5: *Mention the blessings attached to the priest's family in Israel.*

If Eli's sons were faithful, they would have enjoyed the blessings continually but they chose otherwise. The priesthood continued in the lineage of Eli until unfaithfulness was found in Abiathar in the days of kings David and Solomon (1 Kings 1:25; 2:26,27,35). Had Abiathar remained faithful, the priesthood would have continued further in the lineage of Ithamar, Aaron's last son, but he was replaced with Zadok of the lineage of Eleazar, the third son of Aaron after Nadab and Abihu died for their sins.

Judgment awaits all who sin and refuse to repent. But God is merciful and willing to pardon all sinners and backsliders who turn to Him for forgiveness because He does not take pleasure in the death of sinners. The door of grace is still open today and everyone who comes knocking and pleading for mercy will be forgiven (Ezekiel 18:32; Isaiah 55:7; John 6:37; 1 John 1:9). As the promised fulfilment of a faithful priest, Christ has accomplished the work of atonement for all sinners, backsliders, believers and servant-ministers. If a sinner genuinely repents and manifests faith in His blood, he will experience pardon and redemption.

Lesson 704

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF TO SAMUEL

MEMORY VERSE: “And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD” (1 Samuel 3:21).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 3:1-21

The previous study revealed the pronouncement of imminent judgment that should come on Eli’s household because of the corrupt practices and perversion of the priesthood by his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Being indulgent and negligent, Eli honoured his sons more than the Lord. God’s unchanging response to decent into evil is a reversal of fortune, promised blessings or favor (1 Samuel 2:30,35). It was this thorny issue of profaning divine worship for which Eli failed to discipline his children and the divine displeasure it attracted that form the subject of God’s revelation of himself to Samuel.

Prior to this, Samuel lived a blossoming godly life in an ungodly environment created by the sinful lifestyle and practices of Eli’s children. This is God’s expectation: that a consistent godly life should precede and attract divine revelation and usefulness. Such “**shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work**” (2 Timothy 2:21).

Question 1: *Why did God abandon Eli, the aged and experienced priest?*

God is no respecter of persons and His eyes are purer than to behold iniquity. He is merciful and loving but He does not condone sin in whoever and wherever it is found. God hates sin.

THE CALL AND ATTRIBUTES OF SAMUEL (1 Samuel 3:1-10; Amos 8:11,12; 2 Chronicles 15:3; 1 Samuel 2:11,18; Isaiah 52:11; Daniel 1:8; Genesis 39:2)

God called and commissioned Samuel at a time when the word of the Lord was very precious (scarce). **“And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.”**

Question 2: *What can true believers do to prevent famine of the true word of God?*

Prophets or servants of God to whom the people might have recourse for counsel or divine instructions were scarce at this time when Samuel ministered unto the Lord. The known and available priests were also defiled. The impiety and impurity that prevailed in the tabernacle provoked the Lord and made Him withdraw His presence from the people. The situation is not different in many religious gatherings today. A critical look at the entire world shows that the true and undiluted word of God is scarce. There is famine of the true gospel message. The modern gospel, centred on materialism, carnality and sensuality, has driven away the presence of God from many Christian gatherings. Worse of all, many people have cravings for sensational gospel message of half-truth. This situation calls for passionate prayers and urgent action of preaching the sound word of God by true believers to rescue the perishing before they are lost forever.

Question 3: *Enumerate the good qualities found in Samuel.*

“And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see.”

Eli the priest was aging with dimming eyesight while Samuel was growing up in the courts of the Lord. It was not aging but inability to maintain pure worship that also dulled his spiritual senses. Thus, divine revelation was hard to come by. God found a replacement in the lad, Samuel, who emerged as a lily in the valley **“and ministered to the LORD”**. God always has substitutes for the indulgent, disobedient and unrighteous in leadership. Samuel was like Joseph

amidst Jacob's sons and like Daniel in Babylon. He had many good qualities. One, he was dedicated to God. He had laid his entire life on the altar, serving in the tabernacle. Two, he was incorruptible. He would not be influenced by the wayward lifestyle of Eli's sons. Three, he was active and industrious. Four, he was available at his duty post in the tabernacle. He demonstrated readiness for divine assignment even in season and out of season. Five, Samuel was humble and obedient. He would always answer Eli: **"here am I, for thou didst calleth me"**, even at odd hours of the day. All these qualities positioned Samuel to hear from God and became a mighty instrument in His hand.

"And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli... Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him." It is important to note that God called Samuel three times but he had not known how God speaks to His children. He mistook the call of God for Eli's and ran to him each time the call came. The same behaviour is common among many believers today. They run here and there in search of revelation because they are ignorant of the ways God speaks and by so doing, many have fallen into the traps of 'church herbalists', false prophets and fortune tellers in prayer houses. They think it is very difficult to know the mind of God in the choice of career, marriage, business, ministry and other life situations. Others resort to casting lots, use of fleece (Judges 6:37-40), tying objects on the Bible, prolonged unhealthy fasting and so on.

Question 4: *How does God speak to His children today?*

The truth is that God delights in speaking to His children and He does this in diverse ways. It may be through the still small voice of the indwelling Christ (1 Kings 19:12,13); audible voice (Matthew 17:5; 2 Peter 1:17); dreams and visions (Genesis 37:5-11); intuitive perception in the heart (Luke 5:22; Acts 10:34); divinely arranged events (Acts

8:26-35; Genesis 24:12-22); the written and the spoken Word during personal devotion or through anointed ministration of His servants (Luke 24:32; Acts 2:37). Above all, the greatest revelation of God to mankind of all ages is the written word of God (1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21). The Word is the unchanging and sure standard of God's dealing with mankind. It cannot mislead. Believers therefore, must study and subject every leading to the word of God. No leading or revelation must go contrary to the written Word.

“And Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child...” As a faithful and honest tutor, Eli, gave useful advice and guidance to the young prophet in the making. By teaching Samuel how to respond to the call of God, he demonstrated a good tutor-servant attitude. He was not envious of divine revelations granted Samuel. This is a good lesson for older believers and ministers who should consider mentoring of younger ministers as their responsibility. Mentoring may be through direct training programs, practical guidance, guided and supervised assignments, encouragement and prayers. Based on instruction received from Eli, Samuel knew how to answer God's call. Samuel, like Isaiah, responded, **“speak for thy servant heareth”**.

CONDEMNATION OF THE CORRUPTED PRIESTHOOD (1 Samuel 3:11-14; Ezekiel 3:17-21; Ecclesiastes 8:11-13; Ezekiel 7:3; Acts 10:34; 1 Timothy 5:22; Revelation 3:16)

“And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end” (1 Samuel 3:11,12). The message of wrath came once again to ratify the previous warning from a prophet in 1 Samuel 2:27-36. The repetition was necessary because Eli did not pay proper attention to divine warnings. As a father, priest and judge, he had the power to restrain, rebuke or remove his children from office but he did not. Hence, the punishment would be so terrible that everyone would be struck

with terror and astonishment to hear that in one day, Eli's two sons have died; that Eli's neck is broken; and his entire family simmering in tragedy. This is a serious lesson for all and sundry that God is no respecter of persons. He will judge all categories of unrepentant sinners.

Two, judgment delayed does not mean that it will not come. So, God's mercy and long suffering must not be taken for granted. Three, sin has consequences. It degrades, demotes, destroys and damns in hell. Eli and his sons made light of God's standard, perverted the priesthood by making God's offering vile in the eyes of the people and they were condemned. Four, those who do not restrain or report the sins of others they know about are also guilty of encouraging its spread and will be judged.

Question 5: *What should be the attitude of believers to sin?*

CHARACTER AND CONSECRATION OF FAITHFUL PREACHERS (1 Samuel 3:15-21; 2:26; Proverbs 20:6; 1 Corinthians 4:2; Matthew 25:19-23)

“And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.” Samuel was always dutiful, opening the doors of the temple early in the morning for worshipers. But the revelation he received from God was grave that he did not want to divulge it to Eli. His aged mentor has attracted the anger of God and the tidings was grievous. Younger believers can also hear from God if they purge themselves from all filthiness and lead a holy life.

When Eli prodded to know what he heard from God, Samuel declared the message faithfully, plainly and fully as he received it. God is in need of faithful, courageous and uncompromising preachers all over the world. The truth is scarce. People wander about in search of clear undiluted and liberating truth of God's word. Therefore, faithfulness is required in declaring the gospel message, the anticipated responses of the hearers notwithstanding (Ezekiel 3:19).

While some will respond positively, others will tow a similar path with Eli. **“...It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good”** was Eli’s response to God’s warnings. One wonders why Eli just resigned to facing God’s wrath rather than repent, set his house in order, discipline or remove his children from office. How can a priest be so obstinate knowing it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God?

No one needs to perish in his sinful practices. The clear testimony of the Scripture is: **“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy ...and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”** (Proverbs 28:13; John 6:37). Though a God of justice, He is also merciful, pardoning iniquities if there is genuine repentance and restitution. He forgave David (Psalm 51), the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:5-10), the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43), the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11), and many others. This is good news for all categories of backsliders and sinners. If there is true repentance, there will be pardon and favor from God. **“And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground”** (1 Samuel 3:19). Samuel knew the Lord from childhood and retained divine presence to the end of his life and ministry. With a humble beginning as a servant who was faithful in opening the door of the tabernacle, he grew to receive and deliver God’s message faithfully to Eli and later became known as a prophet of God throughout the nation of Israel. **“And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD”** (1 Samuel 3:21).

Question 6: How can ministers retain divine presence and anointing to the end of their lives and ministries?

Many ministers today have lost the presence, power, original vision and fresh revelation of God. Sins of disobedience, compromise, unfaithfulness, pride, covetousness and pleasure-seeking are cancers that ruin once viable and vibrant Christian lives and

ministries. If Christian servants will take care of their relationship with God, they will continue to enjoy His divine presence and revelation. Following the path of Eli and his sons will lead to a tragic end.

Lesson 705

GOD’S GLORY DEPARTS FROM ISRAEL

MEMORY VERSE: “And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband” (1 Samuel 4:21)

TEXT: 1 Samuel 4:1-22

The previous chapter captured Samuel’s call by the Lord into the prophetic ministry and his maiden message to Eli. It also recorded Eli’s careless and indifferent response to God’s clear warning of looming judgment (1 Samuel 3:18). The current text showcases the war between Israel and the Philistines to bring to fulfillment part of the prophecy of the destruction of Eli’s house. “Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain” (1 Samuel 2:31,34; 4:11).

Question 1: *What should be the responsibility of parents over their children?*

Though it was Hophni and Phinehas that committed the grievous offense, Eli paid for it dearly because he failed to train them in the way of the Lord. When he heard that Hophni and Phinehas had been slain and that the ark of the Lord was taken by the Philistines, he fell off the seat and died. As parents and servants of God, it is our responsibility to train our children in the way of the Lord. The Scripture says, “**Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it**” (Proverbs 22:6).

DIVINE JUDGMENT AGAINST SIN AND COMPROMISE (1Samuel 4:1,2; Deuteronomy 28:15-68; 1Kings 21:20-24; Matthew 25:41; Jude 5-7; Revelation 14:11)

God hates sin and judges it severely wherever it is found. Sin provokes God to anger (Deuteronomy 9:18); incurs His hot displeasure (Psalm 6:1; 38:1), fiery indignation (Hebrews 10:27) and execution of great vengeance (Ezekiel 25:17; Nahum 1:2).

Question 2: *Outline the sins of the sons of Eli that made the glory of God to depart from Israel.*

In our text, the nation of Israel experienced God's fiery judgment in the form of humiliating and devastating defeat in the battle against their enemies. For the purpose of clarity and caution to believers today, the outline of what made the glory of God to depart from Israel is as follows: (1) the sons of Eli who were called into the priesthood with their father were sons of Belial. This means that they chose to serve the devil rather than God. They knew not the Lord, yet they went ahead to work for Him. (2) They served without regard to the standard of the service; they served in covetousness and for their personal interest, not to please God. (3) They robbed God in the offerings of His people. (4) They committed adultery with the women who gathered to worship and offer sacrifices unto the Lord. The sin of immorality whether in the church or outside the church is a terrible sin and drives away the presence of God and His glory from a believer or from the church. (5) They sinned with impunity. They were adamant even when they were corrected. (6) Eli was weak in bringing up his children in the fear of God. We need to examine ourselves because whether it is the leader or a member that commits sin in the church, it repels the presence and glory of God.

God did not leave Eli in doubt of His judgment. He sent clear warnings to him through an unnamed man of God and Samuel, but he remained passive. The men of Israel were also indifferent though the sins of the priesthood were common knowledge (1 Samuel 2:27- 36; 3:11-18; 2:17). Consequently, Israel suffered

a great defeat in the hands of the Philistines because they failed to reconcile with God first before going into the battle. Sincere repentance and restitution are necessary to secure God's awesome presence that guarantees victory in all battles of life.

The consequence of Israel's backsliding and empty religion was severe. They are summarized as follows: (1) the first battle recorded the death of four thousand Israelites (1 Samuel 4:2). (2) In the second battle, thirty thousand Israelites were killed (1 Samuel 4:10). (3) The ark of the Lord was captured by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:11). (4) Hophni and Phinehas, priests and sons of Eli were killed in the battle. (5) Eli, on hearing that his two sons were killed and that the ark was captured by the Philistines, collapsed and died (1 Samuel 4:17,18). (6) Phinehas' wife, while mourning her husband, gave birth to a baby at the same time. **"And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband."** (7) Israel served the Philistines for over twenty years (1 Samuel 7:1-4).

When an individual or a whole church indulges in sin and goes on in the service of the Lord, he or she faces the danger of failure and defeat (1 Samuel 4:2; Judges 16:20,21). It is necessary that we set things right before it becomes too late.

Question 3: *What urgent step should sinners and backsliders in the church take to escape God's judgment?*

DANGER OF RELIGION WITHOUT RIGHTEOUSNESS: (1 Samuel 4:3-10; Isaiah 1:11-20; Matthew 23:13-33; Luke 18:9-14; 2 Timothy 3:1-7; Romans 10:1-3)

"And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies" (verse 3).

Routed by the Philistines, the Israelites returned to their camp shocked and amazed at their defeat. The elders, conscious that their defeat was from the Lord, sought how they could gain victory over the Philistines. A reasonable question which ought to lead them to sincere self-examination was quickly abandoned for an urgent resolution to bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh to the camp for their deliverance. The parting of waters of Jordan and the collapse of the walls of Jericho before the ark of the covenant of the Lord were the results of obedience to direct instructions from the Lord (Joshua 3:1-17; 6:8-20). The ark of the Lord which was a symbol of divine presence was to be a place of communion between God and His people (Exodus 25:10-22), not a magic wand that gives victory over the enemy. Israel was commanded to go to war at the inspired counsel and exhortation of the priest of the Lord (Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 20:1-4). Although this service was apparently not available because the priests were overtaken by spiritual blindness (1 Samuel 3:1), they never sought for counsel, at least from Samuel whose prophetic ministry had already been noticed by all Israel (1 Samuel 3:19-21; 4:1). Instead, they ventured into the battlefield in their spiritual darkness and superstition.

Question 4: *Mention some shortcuts religious people take to escape the consequences of sin and why they are insufficient to secure victory.*

Israel experienced the pain of defeat and death and learned that there is no shortcut to victory in the divine economy of grace. Many religious people today hang the symbol of the cross on their necks, embroider it on their garments or engrave it on their gates and sleep with a copy of the Holy Bible under their pillows hoping that these materials will attract the presence of God, deliver them from their enemies and destroy every evil work against them. This superstition is further perpetuated and strengthened by some false preachers who capitalise on it to make merchandise of their ignorant followers by selling to them various supposedly “anointed” materials like aprons,

handkerchiefs, water, oils, rings, chains, stickers, pictures etc., for supernatural healings, protection, favor and breakthroughs. But the question to all such superficial seekers who abandon the substance to go after the shadow is: **“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him”** (Hebrews 2:3). It is evident therefore, that salvation from sin and its consequences will remain a mirage to all who do not exercise saving faith in Christ’s atonement on the cross with a gracious obedience to the demands of the gospel. In a nutshell, the fundamental keys to victory over sin and its woeful consequences are sincere repentance and steadfast righteousness.

“And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again” (1 Samuel 4:5). The response of Israel to the arrival of the ark of the covenant of the Lord in the camp was dramatic. They enthusiastically gave an earth-shaking shouting ovation to the perceived arrival of the Lord of hosts in the camp. This is reminiscent of the empty shouting and noise-making that goes on in many places of worship where the word of God is relegated to the background. Worship, prayer, fasting, material offerings/sacrifices and all other religious activities become vain and even offensive when they go contrary to the righteous principles of the Scripture (Proverbs 21:27; Isaiah 1:10-15; Mark 7:7).

Moreover, revival is not emotionalism and deafening noise of worship, but the heat of the sacred fire in the soul expressed as fruits of righteousness. The noise at Pentecost attracted the crowd, the apostles ministered to them and multitudes were converted. These converts continued steadfastly in the doctrines of the Lord and fellowship with the brethren. Indeed, this is true revival! (Acts 2:1-47).

Question 5: What will be the inevitable end of all impenitent hypocrites who substitute religion for righteousness?

Although the ignorant and superstitious Philistines were initially affrighted at the prospects of the arrival of the **“mighty Gods”** in the camp of Israel, they soon mustered courage and mobilised to fight valiantly with a determination to maintain their mastery over the Hebrews. Men may be deceived and intimidated by worthless external gimmicks, but the Bible declares that **“...God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”** and **“...the hypocrite’s hope shall perish: Whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider’s web. He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand: he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure”** (Galatians 6:7; Job 8:13-15). The confident, hypocritical hope of the Israelites was soon dashed into irretrievable pieces as they suffered a more deadly defeat – thirty thousand foot soldiers were slaughtered by the Philistines (verse 10). This is the woeful picture of the fate of all hypocritical, religious sinners and compromisers who instead of repenting from their evil deeds cover them up with the filthy, self-righteous rags of religious activities. They will inevitably end up in delusion, disappointment and death if they refuse to repent.

DEPARTURE OF THE GLORY OF GOD (1 Samuel 4:11-22; Psalm 78:60,61; Hebrews 2:9,10; 2 Peter 1:3)

The glory of God denotes His honour, dignity, splendour, brightness, majesty and infinite perfections. The expression also refers to a visible, dazzling appearance indicative of God’s special presence especially in the Old Testament (Exodus 16:7-10; 24:9,10,16,17; 1 Kings 8:11; Zechariah 2:5). God reveals His presence by the manifestation of His glory. No wonder, Moses earnestly pleaded with God for His presence and glory while he led Israel through the dreadful wilderness. God’s presence and glory separated and distinguished Israel as His peculiar people of power and praise (Exodus 33:12-18). When God’s presence and glory leave a place or a people, all that remains will be dryness, dullness, dearth and death. Jesus told His disciples emphatically:

“...He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The inspired writer summarised all the calamitous consequences of the fall of man as coming “...**short of the glory of God**” (Romans 3:23). All men born into Adam’s fallen race may be appropriately called “**Ichabods**”. But Christ died to restore man to a life and destiny of the glory of God. The first step on the path to restoration is the possession of genuine salvation experience and purity of heart. This is a gracious transformation (Titus 2:11-14; 3:5). The second step is the literal transfer of all blood-washed saints in the rapture to be with the Lord forever in heaven. This is a glorious translation (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Question 6: State five important lessons derivable from the events in our text.

Believers learn a number of lessons from this significant event in the history of the children of Israel. First, God’s warning about the judgment of sinners will surely come to pass (1 Samuel 2:13,34; 4:11). The seeming delay of divine judgment is an expression of God’s tender mercies and longsuffering toward the sinner since He is “...**not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance**” (2 Peter 3:9).

It will be wise for sinners to run into God’s outstretched arms of love while the door of mercy is still open. Those who abandon themselves to drink the abominable water of the pleasures of sin “**because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily...**” (Ecclesiastes 8:11) are laying up to themselves “...**wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God**” (Romans 2:5). Second, the message from a man of Benjamin who ran out of the army to Shiloh was concise and cutting. He was dispassionate and faithful in telling all that he saw at the battlefield. Gospel ministers must first be partakers of the salvation they seek to present to others; and, they must be faithful in it (2 Timothy 2:6; 1 Corinthians 4:1,2; Jeremiah 48:10; Acts 4:20).

Third, the anxious and fearful disposition of Eli, the high priest, leaves little to be desired. Our text recorded that he “...**sat upon a seat by the wayside watching; for his heart trembled for the ark of God**” (verse 13). He knew God’s threats of judgment would be fulfilled (1 Samuel 3:18).

Also, he was so weakened by compromise that he released the ark of God to the camp in the custody of his corrupt and polluted sons. A spiritually strong and God-honouring leader would have politely but firmly turned down the request of the elders to bring the ark out of Shiloh to the camp. The compromise of Eli was multi-faceted; no wonder he was expecting the worst to happen. Fear and anxiety are indicative or symptomatic of spiritual malady. The righteous man who stands in the will of God has great peace and boldness (Proverbs 28:1). Although it is clear from our text that Eli was more concerned about the safety of the ark of the covenant than that of his sons (verse 18), this greater concern did not translate into definite actions of enforcing repentance and restitution to defend God’s glory by removing his sons from the priestly office. Fourth, we observe the virtuous soul of a dying woman. The burden of Israel’s misfortune swallowed up the joy of childbirth and the comfort of caring neighbors. With her last breath, she named her child “**Ichabod**” to perpetuate the memory of this sad event when the temple at Shiloh became empty and ordinary – void of the presence and glory of God. Finally, God’s departure from the people is invariably the departure of everything that is good. Shiloh, which was a famous city of Ephraim (Judges 21:19-23) soon faded into insignificance with the permanent removal of the ark of God. It became an inglorious example of God’s fiery indignation against sin (Jeremiah 7:12,14; 26:6,9). The city abandoned by the Lord of glory is left desolate (Matthew 23:37-39). There is no sufficient reason for glorying in the whole of the universe except in Christ (Jeremiah 9:23,24).

In conclusion, sin and compromise rob people of peace on earth and paradise in eternity. The divine stroke of chastisement is intensely felt on earth and will be

interminably felt in the flames of hell. Those who take pleasure in sin and jeopardise the eternal happiness of their souls are not wise. Repent now before it is too late.

Lesson 706

GOD CHASTISES THE PHILISTINES

MEMORY VERSE: “And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god” (1 Samuel 5:7).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 5:1-12

In the previous chapter, the predictions of the Lord concerning the house of Eli had begun to be fulfilled: Israel was disgraced in an encounter with the Philistines which made them to bring in the ark of God to the camp. The result of this was fatal as Israel was smitten and the ark captured. The aftershock of this defeat put the city of Shiloh in confusion and made Eli to faint, fall and break his neck. His daughter-in-law also fell into emergency labour, bore a son, but she died afterwards.

This study therefore focuses on the aftermath of the ark seized by the Philistines and the judgment it brought upon their idol and inhabitants of the cities it was taken to. God defended His name and glory and proved to the world that He could not be compared with any other god. **“I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images”** (Isaiah 42:8).

THE CAPTURE OF THE ARK OF GOD (1 Samuel 5:1-5; 4:11-17; Psalm 78:60-64; Jeremiah 7:12-14; Leviticus 26:17; Deuteronomy 28:25; Joshua 7:8,12)

“And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod”. There was a battle between Israel and the Philistines and Israel could not stand before their enemies, but was roundly defeated. The ark of God which was the symbol of divine presence among the Israelites was captured. The defeat and humiliation would have been impossible **“except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD hath shut them up”**. Prior to this time, **“the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us!**

for there hath not been such a thing heretofore" (1 Samuel 4:7). They knew that the God of Israel could not be confronted whenever He fought for His people. They must have heard of how He fought against the Egyptians, inflicted numerous plagues on them, showed signs and wonders, and finally overthrow their armies in the Red Sea. They were not unaware of the exploits of Joshua when he fought a confederacy of armies and defeated them because the Lord was on his side.

But Israel lost this heritage of steady victory because of sin and rebellion and the Philistines prevailed against them. **"Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies..."** (Joshua 7:12). When saints sin, defeat ensues and sinners become emboldened to desecrate holy things and blaspheme God.

Question 1: What led to the capture of the Ark by the Philistines?

On capturing the ark, the Philistines immediately took it to Ashdod one of their five strong cities and placed it beside their god, Dagon – the deity of fertility whose worship extended over Syria as well as Mesopotamia and Ch aldea. Dagon was represented by a monstrous combination of a human head, breast and arms joined to the belly and a tail of fish; the upper part resembling a woman, the lower, a fish.

It was customary in all nations then to dedicate the spoils of war to their gods, so they thought it was proper to bring the ark into Dagon's shrine. David deposited the sword of Goliath in the house of God (1 Samuel 21:8,9). When Saul was killed in Mount Gilboa, the Philistines put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth (1 Samuel 31:9,10). Three possible reasons would have informed their decision to place the ark in their temple. One, to pay some religious respect to it in conjunction with Dagon or as a trophy of victory in its honour with a possible plan to offer sacrifice as they did when Samson was captured (Judges 16:23,24). Two, to dishonour the true God by declaring Him inferior and subject to their false god. Three, to give

glory to themselves and boast of their power and military prowess.

Obviously, they placed the ark beside Dagon with a feeling of triumph and as a mark of subjection, submission to it and a humiliation to the God of Israel. But the God of Israel proved Himself to be stronger than the strongest. To their shock, **“when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD...”** (1 Samuel 5:3). Determined not to accept this reality or to prove that it was a coincidence, **“they took Dagon, and set him in his place again”**. To their utter humiliation, **“when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him”** (1 Samuel 5:4). It is utter abomination to equate the God of heaven with the idols of this world. There is only one God and beside Him there no other. Any god or idol beside Him is merely a contraption of men’s imagination (Isaiah 45:18).

From the capture of God’s Ark by the heathen, we learn that He will not honour the misuse of the Ark of the Covenant if the covenant itself is broken and negated by His people. This informed the Psalmist’s lamentation: **“...he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand. He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance”** (Psalm 78:60-62). To put the Bible or any religious material under the pillow will do no one any good unless its content is believed and practiced. Another lesson is that God sometimes allows the wicked to triumph for a while so that He will prove His power and glory. **“And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen”** (Exodus 14:17). **“...The triumphing of**

the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? (Job 20:5).

Question 2: *What can we deduce from the way God allowed the capture of the ark?*

Analysing the fall of Dagon, we agree that: 1) it is utter sacrilege to place the ark of God beside Dagon, an idol made with hands. 2) It is folly to equate the God of Israel with any other god. 3) God is capable of defending Himself and does not need the help of any man. 4) The idols of this world are works of men, powerless and need to be helped by their makers to be able to stand. 5) The only God worthy of our worship is the God of heaven. **“Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name”** (Deuteronomy 10:20).

CALAMITIES UPON ASHDOD AND GATH (1 Samuel 5:6-10; Jeremiah 50:2; Ezekiel 6:4,6; Micah 1:7; Exodus 9:3; Deuteronomy 28:27; 1 Samuel 6:5; Psalm 78:66; Acts 13:11)

As soon as the ark of God was placed beside Dagon, the power of God was in manifestation. He took it upon Himself to plead his own cause since He does not need anyone to fight for Him. The sojourn of the Ark in the house of Dagon taught the Philistines that their victory over Israel was not due to the supremacy of Dagon over Jehovah, but God's permission to teach Israel some lessons.

“But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof”. Apart from the humiliation of Dagon, the Lord went ahead to punish the Philistines for their insolence. Rather than repent from their sins, they chose to move the ark from Ashdod to Gath and then to Ekron. The downfall of Dagon did not teach them enough lessons. It is not good to wait until there is retribution or sickness as a result of sin before one repents. The best time to amend our ways is now (2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:15; 4:7). Instead of

repenting, many sinners choose to change church or relocate to another city.

Question 3: *When is the best time for a sinner to give his life to Christ?*

The hand of the Lord was described as being **“heavy upon them”** and **“against the city”**. The destruction His hand sent among them progressed from a great destruction to a deadly destruction. He destroyed them by cutting them off; the rest of the people were smitten with emerods in their secret parts. “Emerod”, severally translated “hemorrhoids” or “piles”, “boils” or “tumors” refers to an infectious type of bubonic plague whereby the lymph glands in the groin are enlarged and inflamed and made very painful. The pains were unbearable and wide spread throughout their coasts. **“And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach”** (Psalm 78:66). The Lord has promised that He would wound the head of his adversaries and those who refuse to recognise His lordship. Even if they seem to prosper in wickedness, His judgment will eventually catch up with them (Psalm 68:21). It’s no use kicking against the pricks because those who do can never prosper. It is indeed **“a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 10:31). Thus, God would have honour even out of the revolt of the people. The fall of Dagon before the Ark is a demonstration that Satan will certainly fall before the Kingdom of Christ and that truth will surely triumph over error in the end. **“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly”** (Romans 16:20).

CARRIAGE OF THE ARK BACK TO ISRAEL
(1 Samuel 5:11,12; Genesis 20:7,17; Psalm 2:12)

As it was obvious to the Ashdodites that the presence of the Ark was the cause of the plague that befell them, they relocated it successively to Gath and Ekron – two other chief cities of the Philistines – but the same plague broke out and raged fiercely that the lords of the cities could think of no other solution than to resolve to send it back to the land of Israel as quickly

as possible. **“So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there”** (1 Samuel 5:11). They finally realised that the booty they seized as a spoil of war has turned to be their undoing. They must hastily return it to its place. Some people are not as wise. They retain objects and loots which continue to be objects of reproach and spiritual leakages in their lives. As long as one retains stolen goods, church money, someone else’s spouse (like Abimelech - Genesis 20:7,17), and refuse to make restitutions, one would court the judgment of God.

From the efforts the Philistines made to retain the ark, we learn that devices of men against the Lord are foolish and vain (Proverbs 21:30). Secondly, man’s continued resistance to God’s will causes increased misery. Thirdly, man’s efforts against God afford opportunities for a wider display of His power. Fourthly, what man is unwilling to do in the beginning, he will, after much suffering, be constrained to do in the end (Psalm 119:17).

Question 4: What lessons do we learn from the way the Philistines waited till they were punished before returning the ark?

Lesson 707

THE ARK RETURNED TO ISRAEL

MEMORY VERSE: “And they said, If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return him a trespass offering: then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you” (1 Samuel 6:3)

TEXT: 1 Samuel 6:1-21

The victory of the Philistines over Israel was short-lived as we found them simmering in divine displeasure in the preceding chapter. No doubt, God allowed the Philistines to defeat Israel in battle for profanity, sacrilege and sinful indulgence of the family of Eli. That also means He would not condone similar sins in the instruments He used to mete out justice. As a holy God, He proved His distaste for the idolatrous lifestyle of the Philistines and His supremacy over their idol. Ignorant of the fact that the Ark symbolised His holy presence, word and power, they sacrilegiously moved it to Dagon’s shrine, to Ashdod and to Ekron and engaged in consultations among themselves while their people suffered disease, death and destruction until **“the cry of the city went up to heaven”**. Following seven months of continual divine chastisement, the Philistines consulted with their priests and diviners and were advised to return the ark to its place. But first, they had to contend with the questions of **“what shall we do to the ark of the LORD?”**, and how shall **“we send it to his place”**. These two pivotal questions are what form the fabric of our present study in this chapter.

RELUCTANCE TO RETURN THE ARK AND RESULTANT PUNISHMENT (1 Samuel 6:1,2; Romans 1:19; Revelation 9:20,21; 16:9; Proverbs 27:22; Proverbs 29:1)

The Philistines were ignorant of God’s ways and attributes. As a result, they had doubts with regards to the source of the calamity that had befallen them.

They never knew that their victory over Israel was because the latter had sinned against God. Rather, they ascribed their victory to their prowess and the power of their god, Dagon. They were confused as to how disease and death could follow a resounding victory over Israel. They never knew the Ark they had taken had the divine presence. Theirs was a combination of spiritual ignorance and confusion leading to reluctance in releasing the Ark of God. **“And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the LORD?...”** (1 Samuel 6:1,2).

Question 1: What can believers learn from the reluctance of the Philistines to promptly return the ark to Israel?

On two previous occasions, they had asked this same question (1 Samuel 5:8,11) and were told, **“send away the ark of God of Israel and let it go again to his own place that it slay us not”**. Rather than heeding the counsel at once, they chose to assemble a third council of priests/ diviners on the same issue (1 Samuel 6:1). This is reminiscent of Balaam, the apostate prophet, who though knew the express will of God, presumptuously decided to pester God for a change of mind to his own hurt (Numbers 22:12,19-22).

Believers and sinners alike should understand that prompt obedience to God’s revealed will always attract His blessings. Delay is dangerous. Had they taken the counsel for damage control, many of their people would not have died.

Question 2: Cite other examples in the Scripture where people enquired about divine truth but treated the answer with levity.

Some people are not sincere about the questions they ask. Pilate asked rhetorically, **“What is truth?”** but was not interested in the answer (John 18:38). Felix insincerely **“sent for Paul and communed oftener with him”**, but **“hoped ...that money should have**

been given him of Paul that he might loose him...” (Acts 24:26). Christ told the rich man who enquired how to enter the kingdom to sell all, give to the poor and follow Him. The rich man found the answer was beyond his expectation of consecration. These represent the attitude of some people in the church today. It is surprising that some sinners are perplexed at their calamities and woes but will not forsake their evil ways (Exodus 9:34,35; Revelation 9:20,21; 16:9). Man’s fallen nature loves to linger in self-will and unbelief rather than obey the commandments of God (Genesis 19:16,22; 1 Kings 18:21; Judges 5:15, 16; Genesis 43:10; Isaiah 26:10). It sometimes takes deadlier divine blows for sinners to repent of their evil deeds.

Question 3: What can we learn from the continued chastisement of the Philistines and their final submission to divine plan?

After God’s continuous chastisement of the Philistines, they finally accepted to return the ark. Jonah and his co- travellers also unsuccessfully tried to resist the chastisement of the disobedient prophet (Jonah 1:4-16; Proverbs 19:21). Under heavy chastisement, Pharaoh and the Egyptians feigned repentance but soon relapsed into hardness of heart once the judgment was lifted (Exodus 8:8-15; 9:27,28,34,35). Sinners should be warned not to take God for granted by hardening their heart as sudden judgment can catapult them into hell if they refuse to repent and receive Christ. The purpose of divine chastisement is to make people “**learn righteousness**” (Isaiah 26:9).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD’S SUPREMACY (1 Samuel 3:9; Act 3:19; Hebrews 10:12; Isaiah 43:7,21; 1 Peter 2:9)

“And they said, if ye send away the ark of God of Israel, sent it not empty, but in any wise return him a trespass offering...” (1 Samuel 6:3-9). The priests and diviners acknowledged that the Philistines had trespassed by taking the ark hostage. Their prescriptions for trespass offering were five golden emerods, five golden mice, a new cart, driven by two

milch kine **“which no yoke has come upon”**. Yielding to idolatrous inclinations, they urged the Philistines to make images of emerods and mice but they strongly enjoined them to **“...give glory unto the God of Israel”** in open acknowledgment of His sovereignty over all the earth and other gods, **“peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land”**. Accompanying this wise counsel to give trespass offering and glory to God is a warning against further delay occasioned by hardness of heart (verse 10). The counselors made allusion to the deadly consequences of recalcitrance in acceding to divine demand by the Egyptians for the release of the children of Israel from captivity.

From the counsel of the priests and diviners, we learn that some people know what God requires and counsel others to do it but they would not. It is obvious that as idol worshippers who touched the ark of God, they trespassed. Even in Israel, it is only the people chosen by God that could touch the ark; any Israelite who violated this would die. All who have trespassed God’s commands are required to repent and exercise faith in Christ who is our final trespass offering. **“But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God”** (Hebrews 10:12). Besides, God created and redeemed men to live/show forth His praise and glory (Isaiah 43:7,21; 1 Peter 2:9). Believers have a duty to warn sinners of the impending judgment of God on the obstinate.

RETURN AND RECEPTION OF THE ARK IN ISRAEL (1Samuel 6:10-18; 5:7-11; Deuteronomy 5:32,33; Job 34:31,32; Joshua 1:7,8; Proverbs 4:25-27; 1 Corinthians 14:40; Titus 1:5)

The Philistines heeded the counsel of the priests and diviners. **“And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home: And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods. And the kine took the straight way to the way of Bethshemesh,**

and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Bethshemesh" (verses 10- 12). The Philistines carried out the detailed instructions and set the ark on the carriage to be taken to Israel. The ark was received at Bethshemesh, a city of Levites situated twenty-four miles west of Jerusalem. It was a frontier post between Judah and Philistia. That was why the kine went straight to it. The wonder here was that the animals followed the right way to the city. And when the lords of the Philistines **"had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day"**, carrying home to their country this final confirmation to their earlier fear that, **"the LORD hath done us this great evil"**.

Believers learn prompt obedience to divine counsel through His ministers from the foregoing. **"Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitudes of counselors, there is safety"** (Proverbs 11:14). Two, Christian workers and ministers are required to entirely consecrate to God in the same manner the kines, deprived of their calves and later given freedom of choice but did not submit to their bestial instincts of returning to their detached calves. The kines **"turn not aside to the right hand or to the left"** in doing the will of God (1 Samuel 6:12; Numbers 22:28-30; Jonah 2:10). Three, as the lords of the Philistines demonstrated thoroughness in returning the ark of God to Israel, ministers should do nothing less when it comes to doing God's will. Three, as the ark of God was borne by a **"new cart"** drawn by two milch kine **"on which there has come no yoke"**, believers should serve God in **"newness"** of life, without any **"yoke"** or **"yeast"** of sin, malice, grudge, bitterness, or unequal yoke of compromise, hypocrisy and duplicity in their lives (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). Lastly, the people of Bethshemesh rejoiced that the ark which symbolised the presence, power and glory of God among the children of Israel had returned. Believers need to rejoice at the restoration of spiritual revival, power and glory.

Question 4: Does God's acceptance of the heathen priests' counsel imply that believers should consult or listen to idol worshippers?

The counsel of the priests and diviners worked in this instance because God wanted the ark returned. The diviners drew inspiration also from their knowledge of history of God's judgment on the Egyptians and urged their people to submit. Knowledge of past judgment of God upon the unrepentant should make believers untiring in soul-winning. Christians are forbidden to consult diviners. Note that their counsel was a clear departure from God's express command on the mode of conveyance of the ark, yet He had mercy on them. His clear command that only His chosen and holy priests should bear the ark was irreversible (Numbers 4:15; Deuteronomy 31:9). On the other hand, when king David attempted to carry the ark on a "**new cart**", God smote Uzzah and he died (2 Samuel 6:3,6,7) because He expected them to have complied with His command on this subject from the laws He gave to them (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). Therefore, when David realised this bitter truth, he later warned the priests, "**None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever. For because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order**" (1 Chronicles 15:2,13). Believers need to endeavor to do all things decently and in order.

REPERCUSSION FOR RIDICULOUS CURIOSITY (1 Samuel 6:19-21; Exodus 19:21; Numbers 4:15,20)

"And he smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and three score and ten men: and the people lamented because the LORD had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter" (verse 19).

Question 5: What admonitions can we learn from the chastisement on the men of Bethshemesh?

Though God overlooked the improvised use of a **“new cart”** by the Philistines in returning the captured ark to Israel, He would not condone similar ignorance from those to whom His word had been committed. Thus, the Scripture rightly warns that **“that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more”** (Luke 12:47,48). The men of Bethshemesh with the priests were expected to know the law of God governing the handling of the ark. Christian servants are expected to **“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”** (2 Timothy 2:15; Deuteronomy 17:18-20). Besides, all believers should be careful not to overstep the boundary of grace or breach the demands of God during merriment, celebration, festivities, weddings, burials, naming ceremonies, etc., like the men of Bethshemesh. The Scripture enjoins us to be sober, watchful, prayerful and transparent in godliness in view of and readiness for the Lord’s return (Philippians 4:5).

The main content of the ark is God’s law/word. The Word is as immutable and unconquerable as God Himself. Paul the apostle affirms this truth in his epistle to Timothy that **“the word of God is not bound”** (2 Timothy 2:9). At the time of the early church, the word of God grew mightily and prevailed (Acts 19:20). God’s presence and power in His word will continue to prevail as it did among the Philistines.

Lesson 708

SYMBOLS OF LAW AND GRACE

MEMORY VERSE: “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Galatians 2:21).

TEXT: Galatians 4:12-31

From the preceding chapters of this book, it was obvious that false teachers who gained inroad into the Galatian church convinced them to rely on their own works for salvation instead of the grace of God received through Jesus Christ. Paul the apostle set out to correct the erroneous course the Galatians had chosen by pointing out that no one could add anything to what Christ had already accomplished on the cross at Calvary for the salvation of sinful humanity. Sometimes, there is the temptation in many to believe that they need to add something to God’s perfect plan of salvation. That is why many Christian assemblies rely so much on water baptism, confirmation, holy communion, keeping the ten commandments, holy water, anointing oil, pilgrimage to Israel and other practices as prerequisites for inheriting the kingdom of God.

In order to recover the Galatian Christians from the impressions made upon them by the Judaizers, Paul used symbols in the text to address and explain exhaustively the issues of law and grace. He pointed to their previous perfect state in Christ and present perverted stand in error. For this purpose, he presented to them their weakness and folly in allowing themselves to be drawn away from the doctrine of justification by faith to bondage of the law of Moses. In addressing this grievous issue, he still expressed his affectionate concern for their spiritual well-being. He was passionately jealous for his “**little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you**” (Galatians 4:19).

SIGNS AND CAUSES OF DEFECTION IN THE GALATIAN CHURCH (Galatians 4:12-18; 3:1-5; 4:9-11)

Paul wrote to challenge the Galatian church over their defection from the truth of the gospel they had previously received. After reminding them of the great affection they formerly had for him and his ministry, he called them to a realisation of their present behaviour towards him which was contrary to what they had professed. He did this in order to make them ashamed of their defection from the truth which he had preached to them.

Question 1: *What major lesson do we learn from the way and manner Paul rebuked the Galatian brethren?*

Paul's approach to the sad development in the spiritual state of his Galatian converts leaves many invaluable challenges and lessons for contemporary believers, especially Christian leaders. First, while rebuking the brethren in the church, he made them know that he was not talking to them because of personal injury or affront done to him. This teaches that in reproofing others, leaders should make it clear that their action or reproof does not come from any private annoyance or resentment but from a sincere regard for God's honour and His gospel, and the desire to promote the people's welfare and happiness. Second, before rebuking the defecting Galatians, Paul lovingly reminded them of the great affection they previously had towards him thus: **"And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus...for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me"** (Galatians 4:14,15).

How uncertain and unreliable the respect and praise of man are! It is better to wait and obtain divine approval than seek the praise of men. However, Paul began with the bright picture of the tender relationship that existed between him and his Galatian converts. He affectionately addressed them as brethren, though he knew their hearts were to a great extent evidently alienated from him. He magnified their former affection to him so that they might be the more ashamed of their present behaviour towards him. Appreciation

and commendation of the good qualities and activities in others is an effective method of preparing their hearts to receive admonitions.

Question 2: *From the example of the Galatians, how would you identify the tendency towards defection in a believer?*

“Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?... Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” (Galatians 4:15,16). The evidences of defection among the Galatian believers were clearly revealed in the negative changes that had taken place in their lives at this time. These signs include: (i) shift from living in the Spirit to a life in the flesh (Galatians 3:3); (ii) unwillingness to promptly obey the truth they had learnt (Galatians 3:1);

(iii) loss of the first love, zeal, excitement and enthusiasm manifested at the initial point of salvation (Galatians 4:15; Revelation 2:4); (iv) dwindling reverence and affection for spiritual leaders and ministers; and, (v) outright hatred and disaffection for God-sent ministers for telling the truth. Every sincere and heaven-bound believer should constantly test his/her present spiritual state on the litmus paper of spiritual condition to know whether he/she is still in the faith (1 Corinthians 10:12). Although true ministers may sometimes create enemies for themselves by the faithful discharge of their duty as was the case of Paul, they must not forbear speaking the truth for fear of offending others and courting their displeasure.

Question 3: *What major factor was responsible for the defection of the Galatians from the faith?*

Certain Judaizers deliberately destabilised Paul's new converts in Galatia. This they did by imposing on them the rite of circumcision and the yoke of the Mosaic Law as additional requirements for salvation. Paul wrote to convince the Galatians of their sin and folly in turning away from the truth of the gospel. He emphatically explained that legal requirements of the law such as circumcision have nothing

whatsoever to do with the operations of God's grace in Christ for salvation under the new covenant.

In his determined desire to convince the Galatians of their sin and folly in departing from the truth, Apostle Paul gave them the character of those false teachers who preyed on them to make them realize that they had no reason to accept error from self-serving false teachers. They showed a great deal of pretended and suspicious zeal, affection, respect for the Galatian believers but they were not sincere. Their chief aim was to misdirect their affections from Paul and the truth to themselves. Whatever pretences false teachers may make, they are usually more concerned with their own interest than that of others, and will not hesitate to tarnish the reputation of others as a means of raising theirs.

SUPPLICATION FOR BACKSLIDERS IN THE GALATIAN CHURCH (Galatians 4:19,20; Luke 22:31,32; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; Ephesians 6:18)

“My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.” Beyond verbal rebuke of his erring Galatian converts, Paul here expressed his affection toward them and the tender concern he had for their welfare through his earnest intercession for them. His character was remarkably different from that of the false teachers who interacted with the Galatian Christians. Paul's affection for them was not dependent on their attitude towards him. He desired to be present with them because he sought not theirs but them. The false teachers, on the other hand, pretended to love them but were rather after their own interest. While they were regarding him as their enemy, he assured them of his parental affection as he called them his children. This underscores the fact that he had been the instrument of their conversion to the Christian faith.

Question 4: *What was the motivating factor in Paul's intercession for the Galatians?*

The utmost expression of his concern for them and earnest desire for their spiritual welfare and prosperity is the vivid metaphor of the pangs of a travailing woman in birth for them. He earnestly desired that Christ be formed in them so that they might become Christians that are truly confirmed and established in the faith.

There are useful lessons from the foregoing. One, faithful ministers should always show an unflinching tender affection towards those whom they are called to minister to. Two, true ministers have a primary duty of interceding for weak, erring, confused, deceived, discouraged, backsliding and defecting church members rather than criticizing, castigating and hastily disciplining or giving up on them. Sharp and rash public rebuke which is not preceded by sustained secret intercession will miss the mark and destroy rather than edify those we seek to help. The chief point of our travailing in prayer for such members is that Christ may be formed in them, that they may be renewed in the spirit of their minds, conformed to the image of Christ, and more fully settled in the Christian faith and life (Ephesians 3:14-19). Three, Christ is not fully formed in men till they are weaned of trusting in their own righteousness, and made to rely only upon Him and His righteousness.

SYMBOLIC ILLUSTRATIONS AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LAW AND GRACE: (Galatians 4:21-31; Genesis 21:9-14; Romans 10:1-5; 3:24-28; Ephesians 1:7; 2:5-9; Titus 3:3-7; 2:11-15)

“Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman” (Galatians 4:21,22). The Apostle illustrated the difference between believers who trusted in Christ only and those Judaizers who depended on the law. He used the story of Isaac and Ishmael to draw a comparison. By drawing their attention to the records of the Law, he introduced the subject in such a striking and impressive manner that was proper to convince them of their folly in departing from the truth. On that basis, he authoritatively questioned

the desire of the Galatian Christians to be under the law considering its intricacies. In a dramatic and systematic manner, he unfolded the mystery surrounding the two covenants. Paul's discussion here has three elements, namely, historical allusion, allegorical interpretation and practical application.

First, he set before them their history by making allusion to and highlighting the different states and conditions of the two sons of Abraham. He pointed out that while Ishmael was by a bond maid, Isaac was by a free woman. The former was born after the flesh, that is, by ordinary course of nature and the latter by promise. Second, Paul provided allegorical interpretations of these historical records to show their spiritual import and significance.

Question 5: Briefly explain what Hagar and Sarah were meant to typify.

Paul admitted that these things are an allegory, implying that apart from the literal and historical sense, Hagar and Sarah were meant to represent, typify or prefigure the two different dispensations of the covenants. Hagar represented that which was given from Mount Sinai which tends or leads to bondage and further typifies Jerusalem that now is and is in bondage with her children. This refers to the Jews who, remaining in their infidelity and adhering strictly to that covenant are still in their bondage. Sarah, on the other hand, was meant to symbolise or prefigure Jerusalem which is above or the state of Christians under the new and better dispensation of the covenant. This covenant is free from both the curse of the moral law and the bondage of the ceremonial law, and serves as a mother of all (both Jews and Gentiles) who are admitted into this state as a result of their faith in Christ.

Third, Paul made a practical application of the relationship between Ishmael and Isaac to present believers. **“Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now”** (Galatians 4:28,29).

Question 6: *Identify those described today as being born after the flesh and those born after the Spirit.*

Today, sinners and backsliders are in the category of those said to be born after the flesh. Christians, who have accepted Christ, rely upon Him, seek justification and salvation by Him alone represent those born after the Spirit. We have become the spiritual, not the natural seed of Abraham and so are entitled to the promised inheritance and the blessings therein. Those born after the flesh almost always persecute those born after the Spirit. They persecute them through evil speaking, hatred, misrepresentation, denial of rights and privileges at workplace and attempting to frustrate their evangelistic activities and outreaches.

The main idea in the comparison is that Sarah and Hagar symbolised the old and new covenants. While Hagar represents the Mosaic Law that brought bondage, which has been cast out and abolished (verses 24-25,30), Sarah represents the new covenant that gives freedom from bondage and brings man to God, making them children of His by the new birth (verses 26-31). Just as Hagar and Ishmael were cast out of Abraham's home and received no inheritance with Isaac, so the ceremonial Laws of Moses and the gospel cannot mix. They are two different contracts. One is abolished and the other is still in force. In spite of the persecutions believers face today, true Christianity will continue to flourish forever.

Lesson 709

MAINTAINING SPIRITUAL LIBERTY

MEMORY VERSE: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1).

TEXT: Galatians 5:1-21

The preachers of circumcision had brought their influence to bear on believers in the Galatian church and this resulted to confusion among the brethren. These preachers were Jews who professed faith in Christ but still kept to the Mosaic Law. Their teaching was in conflict with the New Testament teaching of salvation through faith in the vicarious death of Christ. Regrettably, some Galatian believers had fallen for this error. In this epistle, Apostle Paul debunked this erroneous teaching and earnestly contended against any kind of mix-up of grace and the law. He urged the believers not to turn to the weak and miserable principles of the law so as not to be enslaved again. He pointed out that those who try to be justified by the law alienate themselves from Christ and have fallen from grace. For him, liberty in Christ entails constant watchfulness and godly living devoid of the works of the flesh.

Question 1: *What do we derive from Apostle Paul’s boldness in debunking the error of circumcision?*

The apostle emphasised that anyone that relapsed into circumcision is obliged to keep the entire law and such a believer has subsequently fallen from grace and the benefits therein. He maintained that grace could only be appropriated through faith which works by love. He was unequivocal in condemning false teachers, denouncing them boldly as enemies of the gospel of Christ. He charged Timothy, saying: **“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their**

own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:2,3). Similarly, faithful preachers of the gospel should be bold and unapologetic in exposing false preachers and their heresies.

The Apostle also urged the Galatian believers to uphold the spiritual liberty which Christ has procured for all true believers. This apostolic exhortation is in conformity with the admonition of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to the Jews who believed in Him: “... **If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed**” (John 8:31).

DENUNCIATION OF THE MIX-UP OF GRACE AND LAW (Galatians 5:1-10; 2:21; Matthew 9:16,17; Hebrews 8:6-8; 10:9; Acts 15:1-21; Colossians 2:8-10,13-17)

The Jewish preachers of the doctrine of circumcision had made an incursion into the Galatian church. Their message to the Gentile believers was: “...**Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved**” (Acts 15:1). This is contrary to the gospel of salvation through faith in the finished work of Christ which Paul the apostle had preached. Some of the brethren in Galatia were confused. Before now, brethren in the Antioch church had been confronted by the same preachers when Paul and Barnabas were on the missionary field. These men always took advantage of the absence of the Apostle to preach false doctrine. This shows the importance of diligent and watchful leadership over God’s Church. Moreover, all believers should have full understanding of the word of God to enable them detect any deviation from the truth. Like the Apostle, the church should confront false doctrine by Declaring Apostolic Word Nationwide (DAWN).

On the futility of mixing grace and the Mosaic Law, Jesus had taught that “**No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and**

the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved” (Matthew 9:16,17).

Question 2: *State why adhering to the Mosaic Law is unnecessary for believers in Christ.*

The Scriptures declare that believers are: complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10); He made the only perfect offering for sin (Hebrew 10:14); fully satisfied all the requirements of the law for our salvation (John 19:30); liberated us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13); there would not have been any need for Christ to die if righteousness could be secured through the law (Galatians 2:21); there was no perfection through the law (Hebrews 7:19).

The Apostle reminded the brethren of how they fared well in the faith in time past and wondered how they had so easily turned out of the way. He expressed displeasure that those who sowed this evil seed and confusion in them could not have been sent by the same Lord who called them. He declared that a little corrupting influence, if not rooted out, would spread and cause much damage (Verses 7-9). Wherefore, believers should watch against little corrupting influences lest they spread and destroy the entire body (Song of Solomon 2:15).

DEMAND TO RETURN TO SPIRITUAL LIBERTY: (Galatians 5:10-18; Jeremiah 35:15; Isaiah 1:18-20; 55:6, 7; Luke 15:11-24; Ezekiel 33:11,13-16; Revelation 2:4,5)

Paul expressed his confidence that the Galatian believers would listen to him and return to their liberty in Christ. **“I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be”** (Galatians 5:10). He declared that the frequent persecutions he had suffered were due largely to his uncompromising commitment to the gospel of salvation through Christ by grace and not by the works of the Law.

Question 3: *What is spiritual liberty?*

Paul urged the believers in Galatia to return to spiritual liberty in Christ and free themselves from bondage to the works of the flesh. He persuaded them that Christ has set us free from the demands of the Mosaic Law which required circumcision and other ceremonies.

Spiritual liberty refers to the freedom the gospel grants believers through the new covenant in Christ. The old covenant was one of bondage, legalism, rites, ceremonies (which ultimately lead to spiritual death), while the new thrives on freedom, righteousness and life. However, believers are warned not to abuse or use this liberty for an occasion to sin (1 Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16). This warning became necessary so that believers would not assume that their liberty from the ceremonial laws meant that they were free to do whatever they liked. It does not mean that we are free from God's standard of righteousness, otherwise called the moral law. Rather, it means that we have been set free from bondage to sin and released unto good works (Ephesians 2:10).

Furthermore, the Apostle explained that Christian liberty is couched in love whereby the believer esteems the welfare of others above personal gains and privileges. True love is found in service to others not self; it takes pleasure in giving than receiving, reaches out than recoils, and sacrifices to make others happy and fulfilled (Romans 13:10; Galatians 6:2). Above all, it shows others how to find true liberty in Christ by sharing the gospel of grace.

Question 4: *Mention the steps backsliders need to take to return to the love of Christ.*

God wants those who have turned away from the true faith to return to the fold. Like the prodigal son who lavished his resources with riotous living and later realised his folly, backsliders are persuaded to return to the love of Christ while the door of mercy is still open. Those who abandon their faith in Christ for the law “...**have forsaken me the fountain of living waters,**

and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). There is a clarion call to them to return to their first love before it is too late. The following steps are necessary for backsliders to return to Christ: 1) recall their former position in Christ (Revelation 2:5); 2) repent of their backsliding (Revelation 2:5); 3) renounce false doctrine and false teachers; 4) return to Christ; 5) re-establish fellowship with people of like-precious-faith; 6) resist any temptation to detach from Christ.

In order to remain steadfast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, the Apostle enjoins us to walk in the Spirit. **"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh"** (Galatians 5:16). The Christian life is sometimes represented as a journey. To be able to reach our destination safely, we are to **"walk in love", "walk circumspectly", "walk in newness of life", and "walk in the light"** (Romans 6:4; Ephesians 5:2,15; 1 John 1:7). We can accomplish this under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Question 5: How can spiritual liberty be maintained?

Liberty from spiritual bondage can be maintained through the Spirit's continued indwelling and obedience to His leading (Galatians 5:18). Life by the Spirit is neither legalism nor licence. It is a life of faith and love. The Holy Spirit does not move in us to gratify our fallen desires and passions, but to guide us in the path of righteousness. To maintain spiritual liberty, the believer must be steadfast in the faith and not rely on the observance of the Mosaic Law (Galatians 5:1-13); obey the truth of the gospel constantly (Galatians 5:7); walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16); be led by the Spirit (Galatians 5:18); crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts (Galatians 5:24); manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23); and, live in the Spirit (Galatians 5:25).

DAMNATION FOR DESCENDING INTO CARNALITY: (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Romans 1:18-32)

In order to leave no one in doubt, Paul the apostle sets forth the works of the flesh. These are the out-workings of the sinful nature in unregenerate men. **“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God”** (Galatians 5:19-21). The presence of any of the above sins in anyone is a clear indication that the grace of God is absent. Where grace to overcome these sinful passions is absent, an individual has no relationship with Christ. For those who knew Christ before, relapsing into sin is indicative of sliding back from faith in Christ.

Believers should not make the mistake of embracing unconditional eternal security. Those who go into sin after they had been born again lose heaven's favor except they repent and come back to the faith. The moment one is cut off from Christ he withers away. The Spirit of God who spoke through the Apostle was emphatic that anyone who manifests these works of the flesh cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Anyone who descends from the life of grace in Christ has forfeited his liberty and the consequence is that he becomes enslaved to carnal passions. The consequence of this is that such will be rejected by Christ and will suffer eternal agony in the lake of fire. For this reason, believers should not toy with their salvation experience but guard it jealously knowing that its price is great. **“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot** (1 Peter 1:18,19). A believer should be ready to give up everything to keep his salvation. It is unfortunate that many are giving up their faith for mundane things of the world.

However, the Lord expects us to hold fast our profession till the end. It is only then that we can be assured of a place in God's kingdom. Perdition awaits those who turn back from the Lord (Hebrews 10:38,39).

Lesson 710

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

MEMORY VERSE: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22,23).

TEXT: Galatians 5:22-26

The fruit of the Spirit is a biblical term that sums up the nine visible attributes of a true Christian life. The original Greek term translated as “fruit” is singular, signifying that there is just one fruit with nine attributes. It is worthy of note that the righteous are likened to a tree that are endowed and expected to bear fruit of righteousness. In Galatians chapter 5, Paul explains what fruit a righteous tree bears. It is arguable whether one who does not bear this fruit is truly a Christian.

Question 1: What is the fruit of the Spirit?

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” The fruit comes from the Spirit and not from the Christian’s human spirit. It is this same Holy Spirit that convicts the sinner to get him born again and leads him in the path of righteousness. The fruit of the Spirit is God’s divine personality and character traits that are imparted in the Christian. These true Christian virtues are collectively called **“the fruit of the Spirit”** and couched in the best words in Galatians 5:22,23. Here, we have the exact definition of the total Christian personality and a beautiful resumé of Christ’s sermon on the mount represented in a most digestible form. It is the character of Christ reproduced in the Christian through the Holy Spirit.

Some people produce the fruit of human efforts. They strive, struggle, labour and by a great exercise of the will produce some fruits – good culture, courtesy, calmness (outward), kindness – which are

commendable to human beings. But these products of natural effort are not the fruit of the Spirit revealed in Scripture.

The true source of the fruit of the Spirit is God. “... **From me is thy fruit found**” (Hosea 14:8). God is the Source of all grace and goodness and it is His ultimate purpose to mould and transform believers into the express image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ teaches that the believer who detaches himself from God ceases to bear fruit (John 15:6). This shows that it is wrong to feel, think or believe that once you are saved you are always saved. A Christian who does not bring forth the fruit of the Spirit stands in danger of being cast away and rejected.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: (Galatians 5:22,23; Ephesians 5:9; 2 Peter 1:5-8; 3:18; John 13:34,35; 1 John 4:7-13; Romans 6:22; 2 Corinthians 3:18)

Grace, virtue and character are the basic essence of the Christian life and testimony. Paul the apostle, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, states the nine characters of the fruit produced by the Spirit of God in the believer, which are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance (Galatians 5:22,23). The singular composition of the fruit of the Spirit which embodies nine virtues underscores the fact that they are to function in clusters. Explanation of each of the fruit is necessary, as follows.

The first is **Love** (1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Romans 13:10; John 13:34,35; 1 John 4:7-12). Love is the basic essential life of Christ which expresses itself in all the nine fruits.

Question 2: *How does love embrace all other fruits of the Spirit?*

A Christian writer beautifully illustrates how the eight other fruits are subsumed in love. He said: “Joy” is love exalting; “peace” is love reposing; “longsuffering” is love enduring; “gentleness” is love refined; “goodness” is love in action; “faith is love confiding; “meekness”

is love with a bowed head; “temperance” is true self-love, and so that the whole sum of Christian living is just loving”. Love, therefore, is the crowning grace which brings us to completeness, perfectness and spiritual maturity. It binds all other virtues together in harmony and unity.

Second, **Joy** (Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 15:16; John 16:22; Acts 8:8; 1 Peter 1:8). Joy is a spiritual feeling of great delight, pleasure and satisfaction that comes from the Lord. It is more than outward happiness. Jesus is the source of joy. The way into this joy is repentance and practical confession of faith in Christ. Money, mansions, might or material wealth never gives this joy; they only give transient happiness. The book of Acts talks about people being filled with joy in the Holy Ghost following their experience of salvation (Acts 8:6). Paul said, **“The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost”** (Romans 14:17). This joy transcends troubles and challenges of life; it leaps over tough circumstances and abides through problems, pains and even death. It is unspeakable!

Third, **Peace** (Philippians 4:7; Romans 5:1; Psalm 119:165; Isaiah 26:3). It is the state of Spirit-enabled restfulness, calmness, serenity and freedom from anxiety, fear or worry in the soul of the believer. As the Source of true peace, Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. The heart that receives Him as Lord and Savior will begin to experience peace. The peace He imparts is the quiet, potent, gracious attitude and goodwill that meets the bitterness of others with good cheer and repose. This peace is calm in crises, untroubled in trial and determined in disaster.

Fourth, **Longsuffering** (1 Corinthians 13:4; Colossians 1:11; 3:12; 2 Peter 3:9; Exodus 34:6). Longsuffering is more commonly called endurance or patience. It is the powerful capacity of selfless love to bear all things and forge ahead even in adverse situations. It is the generous willingness to try to understand difficult people, disturbing events and unwelcome situations that God allows to come our way. This

quality of character was beautifully displayed by Christ **“who for joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...”** (Hebrews 12:2). Longsuffering possesses the attributes of discipline, forbearance and equanimity.

Fifth, **Gentleness** (1 Thessalonians 2:7,11; 2 Timothy 2:24; Psalm 18:35; James 3:17). Gentleness is sweetness of temper, affability and courteousness. Gentleness is God’s enduring quality in the centuries of His dealing with man. The gentleness of God has drawn man to Him with a bond stronger than steel. Gentleness, the fruit of the Spirit is different from natural gentleness which is exclusively enjoyed by loved ones. Gentleness which grows out of the Spirit is enjoyed by all our friends as well as our persecutors, revilers, scorers, scoffers and all who speak evil against us. Gentleness is loving, appreciating, caring, tending, accommodating and correcting a friend, child or partner in a sweet, yet firm manner.

Question 3: Explain any four of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in our text.

Sixth, **Goodness** (Genesis 45:5-8,15; 1 Samuel 24:17; Acts 7:60; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). Goodness refers to the spiritual quality of being virtuous and kind towards others. Goodness is God’s special peculiarity and He puts a great emphasis upon it. Christ Himself **“went about doing good”**. The Christian whose life reflects goodness is one with a notable purpose, strong character, reliable conduct and trustworthy lifestyle. He is good, gracious, generous, gentle, peaceful and joyful in the business of making others happy. Goodness takes away any sense of pride or arrogance.

Seventh, **Faith** (1 Samuel 17:37; Psalm 37:3,5; Isaiah 26:3-4; Psalm 125:1). Faith, in its general sense, is our basis for belief. It is the divinely implanted principle of inward and wholehearted confidence, trust in and reliance on God and all that He says. This faith makes the believer rely on God, exercise confidence and assurance in the church, believe the leadership of

the church and the brethren. The basis of our faith is love. The Christian, who is full of faith, loves to the point of trusting and yielding himself faithfully to the service of the church and his fellowmen. Faith, therefore, is active. It pushes on, perseveres and remains loyal even when there are reverses and disappointments.

Eighth, **Meekness** (Luke 6:29; 1 Peter 3:4; Galatians 6:1; Numbers 12:3). Meekness is the very true nature and character of Christ. The meek is gentle, pliant, flexible but firm and frank. He is strong, courageous and mild. He uses his strength and courage to defend the glory of God. The meek sees the good virtue in others and gives his best to help the brethren to live a happy life. The meek Christian is submissive, quiet, kind, soft and patient especially with the weak.

Ninth, **Temperance** (Titus 2:2; Proverbs 16:32; 2 Peter 1:5-7; James 3:2). Temperance is also called self-control, moderation or self-restraint. It is the outward sign of a well-disciplined life. Temperance means bringing the whole person – body, soul and spirit – under subjection and to do just what Christ wants him to do. Here, the entire body's appetites, drive, desire, instincts are governed by God.

CONDITIONS FOR FRUIT-BEARING (John 15:1-8; Psalm 1:1-3; John 12:24; Romans 7:4; 2 Corinthians 9:10; Psalm 92:13,14; 2 Corinthians 12:9)

Many think it is impossible for someone who has not been baptized in the Holy Spirit to bear the fruit of the Spirit. But this is wrong because the virtues in Galatians 5:22,23 are not called the 'fruit of the baptism in the Holy Spirit'. Besides, mere membership of a church does not qualify anyone to bear the fruit of the Spirit, neither does tithing our income or being involved in church activities guarantee that.

Question 4: *What are the conditions for fruit-bearing?*

Possessing the fruit begins with being born again. This means therefore that everyone that would bear fruit must first establish a living relationship with Christ, the true Vine. *Second*, there is the necessity

of abiding in the Vine to continue to bear fruit. The power to overcome sin, do good and flourish in the grace of Christ comes from Him. **“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing”** (John 15:4,5).

Third, believers need to have God’s nature of holiness imparted into them to bear fruits that glorify Him. *Fourth*, death of the old man is crucial to bearing fruit (John 12:24). The old life with sinful appetites and passions inhibit God’s grace so that it does not find full expression. Therefore, those who hope to flourish in God’s grace must put to death the old corrupt life (Colossians 3:5). *Seventh*, there is need for fellowship and communion with Christ (Romans 7:4). It is a natural prerequisite that there cannot be fruitfulness in marriage without the union and fellowship of the couple. In the same breath, believers who wish to bear fruit of grace must abide in regular and continual fellowship with Christ

Unlike ‘branches’ that are severed from the vine resulting in their withering away, believers who remain with the Lord and bear fruits enjoy abundance of the juice from the Vine.

Question 5: *Mention some of the benefits of bearing the fruit of the Spirit.*

Christ, in the fifteenth chapter of John commends fruit-bearing Christians and condemns fruitless Christians. **“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit”** (John 15:2). The benefits of the fruit-bearing Christian life include assurance of answered prayers (John 15:7); fulfilling the purpose of our redemption of bringing glory to God – **“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples”** (John 15:8); revelation of true discipleship – **“By this shall all men know that ye**

are my disciples, if ye have love one to another"; greater usefulness in the service of God; present and eternal rewards from God.

CRUCIFIXION OF THE FLESH AND WALK IN THE SPIRIT:(Galatians 5:24-26,16; Romans 8:1; 13:14; 1John 2:6; Colossians 2:6).

"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lust. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Believers must be resolute and determined to constantly crucify the flesh with all its corrupt affections and lusts. The reason is, living in the flesh displeases God, leads to spiritual death (Romans 8:4-6,13) and loss of inheritance in God's kingdom. The Christian life demands that a believer should not only die to sin, but also live unto righteousness; should not only oppose the works of the flesh but also walk in the Spirit.

Question 6: What does it mean to walk in the Spirit and what is the sure way of being free from sin's bondage?

Walking in the Spirit does not mean being fanatical, lawless, unteachable and irrational as it is in some Christian assemblies today. Neither does it mean introducing 'strange fire' in the fellowship or in the church. To walk in the Spirit means to pattern our lives after Christ, to mortify the deeds of the flesh and to have the fear of God and submission to Christ. Fruit-bearing continues as we are rooted and grounded in Christ (Ephesians 3:17,18), live in constant and total separation from the world, and lead a life of holiness, submission and obedience to God (Romans 6:22). Christ's unchanging word is, **"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit"** (Matthew 12:24).

Lesson 711

BELIEVERS' DUTY TO THE FALLEN

MEMORY VERSE: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

TEXT: Galatians 6:1-5

In the previous chapter, Paul the apostle had admonished the Galatian brethren to realize that at Christ's substitutionary death on the cross was to fulfill the primary purpose of freeing them from ceremonial laws and works of the flesh. Thus set free, they were expected to be spiritually consistent so as to bear fruit of the Spirit. While he condemned the works of the flesh, he enjoined them to live and walk in the Spirit.

In our text, the Apostle admonished the Galatian disciples concerning their responsibilities toward one another in Christian service and drew their attention to the possibility of faltering. Believers are not to be indifferent to the spiritual welfare of fellow brethren. Joseph, though in prison, was mindful of the well-being of his fellow inmates (Genesis 40:1-8); and Paul the apostle, in spite of the torture of incarceration, was more concerned about the care of the churches (2 Corinthians 11:28). A major lesson from Paul's admonition in this text is that believers should be concerned for the physical as well as spiritual welfare of their fellow brethren.

Question 1: *What do we learn from Paul's admonition to restore believers overtaken in a fault?*

THE POSSIBILITY OF BACKSLIDING (Galatians 6:1; 1 Corinthians 10:5-12; Song of Solomon 2:15; Hebrews 12:1; 2 Peter 3:17; Revelation 2:14; Ezekiel 16:49; 1 Corinthians 5:6,8; Matthew 24:12,13)

The statement “**if a man be overtaken in a fault...**” addressed to “**Brethren**” shows the possibility of believers falling into sin. Although the principle of

living in the Spirit is no mere idealism, the Apostle knew perfectly well that some believers through carelessness could falter and derail. Christ predicted that in the last days, **“because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold”** (Matthew 24:12). John the beloved also affirm this truth when he said, **“...these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”** (1 John 2:1). The possibility of believers sliding into sin nullifies the doctrine of eternal security as false, misleading and condemnable. Believers’ security in Christ is guaranteed as long as they remain steadfast to the end (Hebrews 3:6,14; Matthew 24:12,13; 1 John 5:18). And those who keep themselves in faith enjoy the blessedness of being kept by God (Jude 21,24,25).

Question 2: What is the danger of believing the doctrine of eternal security?

A believer who is **“overtaken in a fault”** could be described as a person who has committed an act of sin rather than one who is habitually sinful. Such a brother is to be assisted by spiritual and more mature believers. The consequence of a believer being overtaken in a fault is that it leads to spiritual weakness. The major causes of being overtaken in a fault are self-confidence (1 Corinthians 10:12), carelessness (Judges 18:7; Isaiah 32:9,10), prayerlessness (Matthew 26:40,41), secret sin (Proverbs 9:17,18), ungodly association (2 Corinthians 6:14-18; James 4:4), frivolity and worldliness (1 John 2:15-18), and absence of profitable daily quiet time (Joshua 1:8).

As Christians, we should strive earnestly to maintain a consistent spiritual life by separating from all compromisers (Romans 16:17; Nehemiah 13:28; Proverbs 14:7), having no fellowship with false prophets and false teachers (Ephesians 5:11; 1 Timothy 6:3-5), refusing to read books, watch or listen to recorded messages of false ministers (2 John 9-11).

COMMITMENT TO RESTORATION OF THE FALLEN:
(Galatians 6:1,2,5; Romans 14:1; 15:1; 1 Corinthians 9:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Isaiah 35:3,4; Genesis 40:1-8; James 5:19,20; Luke 22:31,32)

The text outlines how a weak believer overtaken in a fault could be handled by other strong and abiding brethren. It is in sharp contrast to the law which decreed judgment on offenders in the posture of a holier-than-thou attitude (Isaiah 65:5). In Greek, the word 'restore' means *katartizo* which is used for mending fishing nets and perfecting human character. It also means conversion from a deplorable and miserable state to a glorious one (Luke 22:31,32). Also, it implies to share in the burden of the fallen believer to make it lighter through prayer, intercession, visitation, caring and counseling.

To carry out these God-given assignments, we should bear in mind that whatever we do must not be to please self. **"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another"** (Galatians 5:13). Our service to the burdened brethren demands sacrifice. Except we are willing to sacrifice and bear long, the necessary edification may be absent from the fellowship. Also, self-denial and humility are necessary if we shall bear one another's burden.

Question 3: *How can steadfast believers restore those overtaken in a fault?*

Interestingly, the Scripture provides the formula and pattern for restoring believers who fall. The Apostle pointed out that it is the responsibility of strong and spiritual believers to raise the fallen. He, however, hinted that it should be done with meekness and gentleness knowing that each of us is susceptible to temptation daily. Paul's concern that the brethren should be conscious of the burdens and weaknesses of others could unwittingly lead to a sense of superiority complex and carnal boasting; so, in verse five, he calls to mind the propriety of looking inward for personal evaluation (2 Corinthians 13:5). By this, he meant that one should look at the weakness of others only

for purpose of compassion and not for comparison (2 Corinthians 10:12-18).

Question 4: *What attitudes should believers who seek to restore those who are fallen avoid?*

From the admonition of Paul, it is necessary that every believer jettison any form of boasting or carnal comparison (Luke 18:9-14). However, the Scripture commands that **“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”** (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). In Galatians 6:2, the **“law of Christ”** that believers are called to fulfill includes all the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ found in the New Testament. And the sum of all the commands is love for God and fellow men. Note the wide difference between the law of Christ and the Law of Moses in Hebrews 10:28 where it is stated that **“He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses”**. While the Law of Moses promised life for obedience, it gave no power to obey it. It could only encourage obedience by the fear of punishment. But the law of Christ, on the other hand, is a loving instruction for those who already have life. Believers are enabled to keep its precept by the power of the Holy Spirit propelled by the love of Christ.

SPIRITUALITY OF HUMBLE AND WATCHFUL SERVANTS: (Galatians 6:1,3,4; 5:1; John 15:4,5; 1 Corinthians 16:13; John 8:30,31; Hebrews 3:6,14; Jude 23,24; Revelation 2:25,26)

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.” (Galatians 6:1,3). Apostle Paul identifies the spiritual role of steadfast brethren in the family of God. These are brethren who have been delivered from the clutches of the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21); are bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23) and walking and living in the Spirit (Galatians 5:24,25). To be spiritual means to be governed and directed by the Holy Spirit in every

facet of life (Revelation 1:10; Luke 2:25-27; John 4:23,24; Romans 8:9- 11). It also means to possess the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5; Romans 8:6), to be strong in the Lord (Romans 15:1; Ephesians 6:10; 2 Timothy 2:1,2) and to worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:23,24).

Question 5: *What does it mean for a believer to be spiritual?*

Spirituality is a state of freedom from sin and error, fervency, current graceful ability to obey God's word, a state of complete self-circumscription, surrender to be possessed, controlled and used by the Spirit of God. To be spiritual, one must ensure he has the following: (i) sound salvation experience (Matthew 18:3; Psalm 11:3; Ephesians 6:17), (ii) sanctified heart (Matthew 5:8; Psalm 24:3,4; Acts 24:16; 1Thessalonians 5:23,24), (iii) Spirit-filled life (Ephesians 5:18; Revelation 1:10; Galatians 5:16,18,22- 24), (iv) the enlivening word of God (Acts 20:32; Ephesians 6:17b; Matthew 4:4), (v) supplicating grace (Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17), (vi) strength from above (Ephesians 3:16; Philippians 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:17), and (vii) steadfast walk with the Lord (Hebrews 3:6,14; Galatians 5:1).

Believers who are spiritual need to be watchful while making efforts to restore the erring to avoid fallen into the same error. If anyone thinks he is standing, the Scripture warns that such should take heed so as not to fall. Godly fear and hatred for sin should characterise believers who make sincere efforts to restore backsliders. **"And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh"** (Jude 23). Since the contemporary society is filled with tempting sounds and dazzling sights, there is need for constant watchfulness. **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"** (1 Peter 5:8).

Question 6: *What should be the attitude of spiritual believers who make effort to restore the spiritually weak?*

It is clear that all mortals were fashioned out of the same dust. Thus, when we see a brother commit sin or overtaken by a fault, we should remember that it could have been us but for the unmerited grace of God. For a Christian to develop superiority complex is a form of self- deception. Certainly, we should never think that bearing one another's burden demeans our status. Believers should be warned against the habit of comparing themselves with others and finding justification for self-satisfaction and pride. Apostle Paul cautions that we shall be examined individually at the judgment seat of Christ and not in comparison with others. Therefore, we should take heed to ourselves so that we might be able to rejoice in our work rather than in the failures and vicissitudes of others. Above all, spiritual and restored believers must maintain holiness in life and service till the end to be saved.

Lesson 712

THE LAW OF SOWING AND REAPING

MEMORY VERSE: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Galatians 6:7,8).

TEXT: Galatians 6:6-18

Paul the apostle, in this segment of his epistle to the Galatian church reminds believers of their binding duty of supporting the ministry and the needy members of the church with their God-given resources. But in doing this, he did not allow the appeal to degenerate into arm-twisting and high-pressured emotional gimmicks that are rampart in some assemblies today. It is interesting to note that he used the word “communicate”, which is a derivative of the Greek word “koinonia” which connotes fellowship, sharing and distribution. This then means that giving and hospitality are aspects of believers’ fellowship.

Paul used the epistle to stir up their liberality and beneficence to faithful ministers and members of the church. It is obvious from the Apostle’s exhortation and his earlier warnings about false teachers that the love of the Galatians to the word of God and His ministers had grown cold. It was, therefore, needful to stir them up by reminding them of the unfailing and unchangeable law of sowing and reaping.

Christian liberality and beneficence in general, towards the gospel minister is here compared to the seed sown and the harvest obtained. Likewise, the eternal destiny of every man is anchored upon the present input to his flesh or spirit. The Apostle revisits the issue of circumcision, which teachers whose interests are selfish and directed to sway believers from the true gospel had taught them, pointing out that their foundation did not avail anything in justification and

salvation. He concludes the epistle with a benediction preceded by a firm charge not to trouble him over this clear gospel for which he had sustained the mark of slavery to Christ.

Question 1: *How is Christian giving related to fellowship?*

CHRISTIAN LIBERALITY AND WARNING AGAINST SELF-DECEPTION (Galatians 6:6,9,10; Hebrews 13:16; Psalm 126:5,6; Job 4:8; Hosea 8:7; 1 Corinthians 6:9; James 2:15-17; 1 John 3:17,18; Romans 2:4-6)

Christians of all ages are expected and commanded to support the gospel work through sacrificial giving. **“But to do good and communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased”** (Hebrews 13:16).

Question 2: *What should be the Christians’ proper attitude to giving?*

Believers are to realize that every gold of theirs belong to God and must not be kept away from Him. Christians are, therefore, to submit themselves to God and be willing to give with a heart glowing with gratitude and loving confidence that God will not forget their labour of love. They should know that the reason God places material blessings in their hands is to promote His kingdom on earth. We are stewards of God’s manifold blessings. God owns us and all that we have.

Question 3: *Explain the purpose of Christian giving and reasons some people do not give for God’s work.*

Some Christians shun giving in the church for various reasons. One, they follow the example of carnal members in the church. Two, some feel that the demands are too many and too frequent. Three, others feel that people take advantage of their liberality to begin to make personal demands from them. Four, few also feel that their liberality is not acknowledged and rewarded by men. Five, there are those who fail to recognise the true purpose of Christian giving.

The purposes of Christian giving are: to sustain the ministry, support the weak and needy members, subdue human greed, supply seed for the future, and open doors for divine blessings especially to members of the household of faith. This is because the God of heaven who has enjoined these duties provides the means, creates the opportunities for the performance and rewards us in due season.

The apostle warns the Galatian church about the unchanging fact that insensitivity to this duty stemming from selfish excuse cannot be a smoke in God's eyes but self-deception on the part of the disobedient. Thus, the apostle likened Christian liberality to the seed sown with the expectation of a harvest in quality and kind that depends on the measure of input.

COMPREHENDING THE LAW OF SOWING AND REAPING: (Galatians 6:7,8; Genesis 8:22; Luke 6:38; Job 4:8; Proverbs 22:8; Hosea 8:7; Romans 2:4-6; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15)

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

Question 4: *What is the law of sowing and reaping?*

From creation, God set laws to govern life on earth and regulate the choices and actions of men. Sowing and reaping is called a law or principle God established from the beginning. His covenant with Adam and all creation is: **“While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease”** (Genesis 8:22). This law works for sinners and saints alike. Sowing conjures a picture of a farmer planting seeds of crops he intends to harvest in future. The businessman calls it investment. Relating to the Scripture, it is written that **“...to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward”** (Proverbs 11:18). Every man is a sower who will reap his harvest.

The implication of this law is that there are consequences of choices and actions. Many tend to make choices without considering the consequences and live their lives as if there are no consequences. The deception is in thinking that there are no consequences when, in fact, they are just delayed. It is not until later years that the truth becomes clear and we discover just how true they are. Too many today dwell on the present without regard for the future. There is a price to pay for all choices and actions and God will not be mocked. This law grants us insight into the future by enabling us to consider what kind of consequences we can expect from our actions. It is then a matter of faith to believe God for what He has promised.

The law of sowing and reaping is universal and applies in both spiritual and physical realms. Everything in nature reproduces its kind. Life is like echo, you get what you give out. Harvest follows sowing; effect follows cause; so every man will reap what he sowed. Those who sow to the flesh (those who indulge their flesh in all forms of sensuality living) will reap corruption, sorrow, pain and damnation, while those who deny their flesh and cultivate the spirit in obedience to divine demands will reap peace and eternal life. As the seed is sown, so shall the harvest or reward be to the sower in the present and the next world. Any labour directed to please the flesh shall come to corruption and perdition, while a labour in the spirit and fear of God will of necessity produce harvest that will last forever with God. This principle is unchanging.

Question 5: What are some life implications of the law of sowing and reaping?

There are some basic truths about the law of sowing and reaping. One, what we will be tomorrow will depend on what we do today. The right or wrong choices that we make today will affect the rest of our life. It is imperative that we sow good seeds of obedience to the word of God. In future, they will blossom into a harvest of righteousness, not just for us, but also for

our children and grandchildren. As the saying goes, “sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny”.

Two, reaping is not always immediate. So, there is the danger of growing weary in well-doing because of opposition to good in our own nature or the outward hindrances we may meet from a gainsaying and persecuting world. But we must remind ourselves of the importance of perseverance. God promises that we will reap if we persevere.

Three, there is no shortcut to prosperity. Our hands must continually be on the plow as opportunity or the season provides us to sow by doing well to others and working hard. While it is the time of sowing, let us sow the good seed; and let our love be, as the love of Christ, free and manifested to all. Let us help all who need help according to the measure of God-given grace in our lives. But let our priority be people of the household of faith.

Paul here sounds a note of caution to men who presume they can mock God by their false profession and hypocrisy. **“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatian 6:7).** **“Is it good that he should search you out? or as one man mocketh another, do ye so mock him?” (Job 13:9).** God cannot be mocked or deceived. He sees through every man’s work and activity; He tries the hearts and the reins. This warning is for people who excuse themselves from duties of lending support to their ministers and needy members in the church, pleading poverty as reason; people who vainly entertain the hope of enjoying divine approval and reward while neglecting true piety; and people who run after the world and the things of the flesh while putting the garb of religion. Paul exhorts true believers not to be weary in well-doing. Christians are not to deviate, withdraw or exempt themselves from their religious duties.

APOSTOLIC AFFECTION AND BENEDICTION:
(Galatians 6:11-18; Philippians 3:2,3; 2 Corinthians 11:13; Philemon 1:25; 2 Timothy 4:22; Colossians 1:24)

It is clear from the foregoing that the apostle's closing remarks was to deliver the believers in Galatia from doctrinal errors they had imbibed from the false teachers and Judaizers. To achieve his purpose of winning back the misguided believers, he highlights the erroneous ways of these people, proving how vain it was for them to follow their pernicious ways. The false teachers are merely satisfied with making some religious impressions. They emphasise the external forms and rituals of religion while neglecting the real spiritual aspect and tried to compel others to do so. They also repose confidence in the flesh and not in the spirit, as men-pleasers who shun the cross of Christ.

Question 6: *What are the characteristics of false teachers and seducers?*

The apostle further charged his adversaries to give him no further trouble or disturbance, either by destroying his doctrine or detracting from his authority because he bore in his body the marks of his sufferings for Christ. It was customary for slaves to bear the names or stamp of their owners on their bodies. Paul's scars of wounds received for Christ's sake indicated to whom he belonged, and in whose service he was. This was the point of his boasting in contrast to the Judaizers who boasted in the circumcision mark in the flesh of their followers. Paul gloried in being the slave of Jesus Christ. This should be the attitude and path of every heaven-bound believer.

In concluding the epistle, the Apostle gives a parting benediction on those who will take heed to his corrections and instruction saying, **"as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God"**. He also prayed that the grace and favor of Christ might remain in their spirit. It is interesting to note that Paul called them **"brethren"** despite rebuking them. This is the spirit of a concerned father and minister which should be emulated by believers with spiritual children.

Lesson 713

CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE DURING PERSECUTION

MEMORY VERSE: “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:11,12).

TEXT: 1 Peter 4:12-19

Persecution is suffering for righteousness’ sake or suffering for biblical principles and beliefs the Christian upholds. So, everyone who has repented of his sins and received Jesus as Savior and Lord is bound to suffer persecution. All categories of believers – young believers, older believers as well as fathers and mothers in the Lord suffer one form of persecution or the other at different stages of their Christian life. Persecution, therefore, is not a strange experience for the believer in Christ. **“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s suffering...”** (1 Peter 4:12,13).

Question 1: *What is persecution? Mention the kinds of suffering that cannot be regarded as persecution.*

Believers need to understand that persecution or trial of faith is not (or even a part of) the Great Tribulation. While persecution is suffering for Christ’s cause, the Great Tribulation is a worldwide unparalleled suffering of unbelievers during the reign of Antichrist after the rapture of the saints.

Besides, believers who suffer as a result of their unscriptural attitudes to others or wrong doing should not hide under this Christian precept and claim they are suffering persecution. That is why the

Scripture admonishes believers to maintain good works before men. To suffer as a result of any of these sinful attitudes can not be for Christ's sake. **"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters."**

Christ predicted that believers would be persecuted as He was persecuted. **"These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me"** (John 16:1-3). Therefore, no believer is exempted from it.

PERSECUTORS AND SCOPE OF PERSECUTION (1 Peter 4:12-19; John 16:3; Galatians 4:29; Acts 7:2)

Question 2: What are the identifying marks of those who persecute believers?

Christ revealed the identity of persecutors as those who have not **"known the Father, nor me"**. Sinners and backsliders are the ones the devil inspires and uses to persecute believers in his attempt to dissuade them from continuing in the Christian faith. This is the uniform testimony of the Scriptures. **"But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now."** Persecution then can come from unbelieving relations, co-workers, bosses, fellow- students, teachers or anyone that the believer chances to have interactions with. Though persecution generally comes from people who are yet to be born again, carnal believers also do allow themselves to be used by the devil to stand in the way of other brethren.

Question 3: In what ways can the believer be persecuted?

Suffering persecution can take different forms. It can be mild as verbal assault, serious as physical assault or critical as martyrdom. A righteous believer can be evil spoken of or hated, have his promotion withheld

in the place of work or have his entitlements seized by his parents, be denied jobs that he is qualified for, be beaten, etc. for his principled stand on the word of God.

It is interesting to note however that the persecution the believer suffers today cannot be more than what Christ suffered. Christ suffered all forms of persecution during His earthly ministry. Thus, He is our Example, not only in conduct but also in suffering.

PERSECUTION: A COMMON EXPERIENCE OF SAINTS: (Matthew 24:13; Mark 10:38,39; 2 Timothy 3:12; John 15:33; Matthew 10:17,18; John 9:28,34; Jeremiah 38:6; 1 Peter 1:6; Matthew 5:39,40)

Question 4: *Mention some believers in the Bible who experienced persecution.*

To prepare the minds of His disciples for what they were going to suffer when He eventually leaves the world, Christ declared that they would be persecuted. This was essentially part of the beatitudes He taught on Mount Olives. Persecution is the lot of every Christian. Old Testament believers had their share of persecution. Joseph was hated and sold by his brethren for relating his God-given dream. Moses was derided by some as he led Israel under God's guidance through the wilderness. Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and other prophets were plotted against for upholding the scepter of righteousness as were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego for their stance in worshipping the only true God.

Persecution did not end with the Old Testament dispensation as some erroneously believe. The truth needs be told that in any Christian assembly where persecution is no longer the experience of members, compromise with the world exists either in doctrine or lifestyle. The reason is, the devil who is the god of this world is highly intolerant of a holy lifestyle and truth such as Christ lived and preached. The Lord Jesus Christ was vehemently persecuted by the religionists of His days for declaring the good news of the kingdom. He was spoken against, falsely accused

and finally arrested and killed because He claimed to be the Son of God. His forerunner, John the Baptist, was given a similar treatment. The early church leaders (and members) were also persecuted by the religious Jews as well as pagan Gentiles wherever they preached the gospel. While some were arrested, whipped and jailed, others were martyred for **“speaking in the name of the Lord Jesus”**. Paul the apostle went through similar experiences after his conversion and in the course of his obedience to the heavenly vision. The believer therefore, must bear in mind that doing the will of God or obeying His commands does not exempt him from being persecuted. The Scripture affirms that **“...all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”** (2 Timothy 3:12).

Question 5: Why are believers persecuted?

Christ, addressing His “brethren” who did not believe in Him said, **“The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil”** (John 7:5,7). Since inception, the society has always hated anyone who walks contrary to the course of the world and its accepted norms. Religionists have always despised non-conformists to existing tradition. As our lives and preaching expose and rebuke sin and its foolishness, we are bound to be persecuted.

CHRIST-LIKE ATTITUDE DURING PERSECUTION
(1Peter 4:12-19; Matthew 24:13; 1 Peter 2:21-23; Luke 21:14-19; 21:28; 2 Corinthians 4:17,18; 1 Peter 1:3,4)

Question 6: How should believers react to persecutors during persecution?

It is obvious from the Scripture that every sincere and practising Christian will go through persecution like our Lord Jesus Christ did. But while going through it, certain principles of behaviour are expected of him: sinlessness, non-retaliation and submission to God.

Whatever we, as believers, go through in the world - however bitter our neighbors, superiors or peers are to us because of the faith - the Bible is clear as to

what our attitude should be. As our perfect Example endured, blessed and prayed for the forgiveness of those who persecuted and crucified Him, so we are instructed to forgive our persecutors. We are to bless those who curse us, rejoice for every opportunity to suffer for His sake, patiently cleave unto the Lord and His Word and be ever conscious of the eternal weight of glory reserved in heaven for us (2 Corinthians 4:17,18; 1 Peter 1:3,4).

When we do these, we are promised divine help. As the Lord promised (Isaiah 51:12,13) and as He stood with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 3:14-30) Daniel (Daniel 6:16-23), Paul and Silas (Acts 16:19-20) and many others, He will uphold us in all experiences throughout our stay on earth. If we patiently hope and cleave unto Him, love and faith will open the door out of every dungeon for us. Heaven's windows for an immeasurable outpouring of divine blessings will be open unto us. We must not allow persecution, which the Bible calls our light affliction, to becloud our view of our promised eternal inheritance. Rather, we need to renew our consecration and commitment to the Lord as we remain in unbroken communion with Him to see us through whatever we may be passing through. Or, **"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"** During persecution, believers must hold to their Christian convictions. Since Jesus did not compromise with the world to avoid suffering persecution, believers must not. The time of persecution should be made a time of unceasing prayer for our persecutors and for grace to suffer shame and reproach for his name without sinning. We must not recant to avoid suffering; our conviction must remain intact because **"in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Romans 8:37-39).

BENEFITS OF SUFFERING PERSECUTION

(Matthew 16:25; 5:10-12; Mark 10:30; 13:9-11; Isaiah 43:2; Psalm 124:1-8; 129:1,2; Daniel 3:8-25; Revelation 1:9-18; James 1:12; 2 Timothy 4:8)

Though it is the will of God to suffer persecution, some believers are afraid of it, hence their resolve to be secret disciples of Christ. They are ashamed to identify with the Bible or Bible-believing people for fear of ridicule. They do not profess to know Christ openly because of the privileges they presently enjoy which might be denied them. Such a life leaves much to be desired as they will not be able to bear fruit as expected. Such people are also not far from compromises that affect their loyalty to Christ. Obviously, love of material things and weakness of faith in God's omnipotence underpin such a lacklustre lifestyle. There is not a demonstration of wisdom as standing for nothing or being of a double standard smacks of cowardice. Christ revealed that those who seek to save their own lives will lose them, while those who trust in the Lord and lose their lives – opportunities and privileges that should have been theirs were it not for their profession of faith in Christ – will gain them. Again, those who deny Christ before men risk being denied by Him in heaven. The believer needs to note that persecution is part of his light affliction that cannot in any way compare with the suffering that awaits sinners and those who deny Christ in hell.

Question 7: Mention some blessings believers who endure persecution with Christ-like attitude stand to enjoy.

The believer who endures persecution with Christ-like attitude will have the Spirit of Christ and glory rest upon him. His also will be the blessedness Christ pronounced during His teaching on the kingdom life. **“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake... for great is your reward in heaven...”** (Matthew 5:10-12). Persecution

fires the believer's longing for his real, eternal home. That is why it is part of saints' promised blessings (Mark 10:30; Acts 5:41). Persecution opens rare opportunities for believers (Mark 13:9,10). The Philippian jailor and his house, for instance, would not have been saved were it not that Paul and Silas maintained Christian attitude of peace, endurance, prayer and praises unto God. Thus, the gospel spread when believers endure persecution and stand firm on their Christian conviction.

Persecution provides opportunities for believers to enjoy the comfort of the Spirit during tribulation as promised by Christ. Obviously, God does not forget His children in the fire of trials of faith. Those who endure will discover God's promise of protection, preservation and provision (Isaiah 43:1,2; Psalm 27:10) to be true and sure. And such discovery strengthens the faith of the believer to continue to grow into maturity of godliness. It is clear from the cases of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Peter and John the beloved that special revelation and the divine presence and ministration of angels attend intense suffering and persecution of saints. Above all, the believer who endures persecution and continues in the race to the end will be saved and given a crown of life. So, **"blessed is the man that endureth temptation (persecution): for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him"** (James 1:12).

Lesson 714

VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION

MEMORY VERSE: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:12).

TEXT: Luke 4:1-12; James 1:12-16; Jeremiah 35:1-10

Salvation from sin, the blessedness of it, the moral agency of man, the purpose of Satan at thwarting the will of God for the redeemed and the possibility of believers spiritual downfall make the subject of temptation a crucial one to consider. To begin with, Satan does not want anyone to be saved from sin. So, he wages war against everyone who is saved from sin to make sure he does not continue in the real experience of salvation, and thus, disqualify him from enjoying the benefits of salvation here and in heaven. But since he cannot force the Christian to sin, he takes advantage of the free moral agency of man to make choices. He coats wrong, sinful practices in living and attractive colours and urges man to choose and damn the consequences which he hides from him.

God however, urges the Christian who seeks to enjoy abundant life to align his choices with His (Deuteronomy 30:15). This is because in His goodwill, He has ordained that believers be conformed to the image of His dear Son and walk according to the guidance of His all-knowing- seeing-powerful Spirit. Unfortunately, most believers are “blind” and “deaf” in a sense that they do not see and know who is behind some subtle suggestions that appear to be good. **“Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the LORD’S servant?”** (Isaiah 42:19 with Job 33:14). Note that temptation is not sin; it is when the believer yields to temptation that he sins.

Question 1: *What is temptation and how do sinners and backsliders fare during temptation?*

Temptation is a common experience of all men - saints and sinners alike. In our lead text, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ was not spared. Just as it was with the Lord, temptation is an enticement or a suggestion (in thought, feeling or action) to sin or do evil. It cuts across age, race, social class, colour, spiritual level or estate in life. No saint lives long enough or grows enough in grace to get rid of it.

Pitiably however, sinners and backsliders do not have the power and strength with which to overcome temptations. This is because they, by their lifestyles, are of and controlled by the devil (1 John 3:8; John 8:44; Ephesians 2:2). Sin weakens and robs the sinner of spiritual energy to resist continued indulgence in it. The only way to receive the initial deposit of divine strength with which to live and maintain a righteous life is salvation through Christ. The sinner/backslider must repent of his sins, confess them to God and receive Jesus as Savior and Lord (John 1:12). Although temptations, like the circumstances around them, may differ from one person to another, the believer needs to know the different sources of temptation to be able to overcome them.

SOURCES OF TEMPTATION (James 1:14; Matthew 4:1; 1Chronicles 21:1; Genesis 3: 6; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 Corinthians 2:11)

Question 2: *What are the sources of temptation?*

Satan is the source of temptation. He and his spirits or human agents delight in bringing temptations in the pathway of Christians with the purpose of making them to fall.

God is never the author of temptation or sin. **“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed”** (James 1:13,14). God can never be

blamed for sin though men in their desperate attempt to break loose from responsibility for their actions often heap blame of their failure on God. What then is God's place in the spectrum of temptations? The Apostle James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, posits that temptation begins with man's desire which may be perfectly legitimate by itself, but which leads away from God-appointed goals to baser, inferior and transient ideals. Indeed, the devil tempts the believer with what he is craving for. It, therefore, means that the first and greatest source of temptation is the heart. The enemy within – pride, lust, revenge, envy, etc. – is greater, fiercer, more ravenous than the enemy without. No wonder the Bible in Proverbs says, **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”** (Jeremiah 17:9). And Christ in the New Testament notes: **“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man”** (Mark 7:21-23). Temptation comes when one **“is drawn away of his own lust...”**. Satan, however, is he who does the ‘drawing away’. Satan sees the propensity to sin in the heart and then fans the smouldering coal into a full-blown flame. This is the first source of temptation.

Second, the flesh is another source of temptation. The inordinate cravings of the flesh in the areas of appetite and immoral urge lead men to temptation. Undue closeness between opposite gender especially amongst young people, often spark unholy, carnal feelings of lust and uncleanness.

Third, apparently close and indispensable pals like neighbors, relatives or even parents can be sources of temptation. A neighbour can impress some unscriptural idea, practice or sentiments on our mind and evoke the base nature in us. Relatives can craftily edge us out of the counsel of God and set our feet on the quicksand of sin. Non-Christian

parents, can lead us into wrong marriages, get us into unscriptural or even sinful work environment, gently blow the breeze of spiritual coldness on our heart and make us lose grip of our consecration.

Fourth, over-confidence or being self-opinionated more often than not, proves a source of temptation. Fifth, looseness during courtship between intending couples leads to temptation. Sixth, the believer's weakest point, his besetting sin is a sure spot for or source of temptation. Seventh, greed and inordinate ambition is another. The craze to get-rich-quick or sit tightly close with the opposite gender on a motorcycle ride is a modern source of temptation a believer must avoid.

Question 3: Mention some Bible characters who fell into temptation. How and why did they fall?

The fall of some Bible characters, which flags the teaching of eternal security as false, highlights pitfalls believers need to avoid. Quest for new, higher knowledge or spiritual enlightenment and willingness to learn from any source – even from Satan – without consultation with her husband made Eve to fall. Quest for greener pasture and independence without counting the cost made Lot to pitch his residence near a city doomed for destruction. Willingness to satisfy the appetite at whatever cost was Esau's undoing. Achan, Gehazi, Balaam, Judas Iscariot and Demas are in the same class with the covetous; their apparently blossoming life and ministry hit the rocks as a natural consequence. David, Amnon, Solomon, Samson all committed immorality because of their lust-filled eyes. For restlessness, wandering carelessly and aimlessly in the company of the ungodly, Dinah was also involved in sexual immorality. Besides, unequal yoke in marriage was what made Samson's fall more terrible (Genesis 3:6; 13:10- 13; 25:29-33; Joshua 7:21; Judges 14:17; 16:17; 1 Samuel 13:12; 1 Kings 11:1,4; Mark 10:35-37; 2 Peter 2:20; Genesis 34:1,2; Hosea 7:9; Proverbs 22:24,25; Joshua 25:12,13).

THE PURPOSE OF SATAN IN BRINGING TEMPTATIONS: (John 10:10; 1Chronicles 21:1-4,7,14; Job 1:8-11; 2:9; Luke 22:31; 2Corinthians 11:13,14; Daniel 8:25; 11:21,24,32a; 1Thessalonians 2:9-12)

The ignorance of some saints in the Scriptures concerning the purpose of Satan in orchestrating their downfall made him to achieve his devices against them. But the word of God exposes his purpose for bringing temptations to Christians. **“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”** (John 10:10). The devil plans, calculates and develops strategies to carry out his devices in a well- structured and organized manner. Whatever God stands for, Satan stands against; whatever God loves, he hates; whatever God appreciates, he devalues; whatever God builds, he wants to destroy. When **“Satan stood up against Israel”**, David was ignorant of his devices. He became the devil’s target because God found him a man after His own heart. The same way, Satan hates and seeks to destroy the believer who has a similar testimony of divine approval. Rather than provoke physical warfare through another Goliath in which David would have brought his experience to bear, he came through an unfamiliar terrain. He **“provoked David to number Israel”**. Through this unrecognized method, he achieved his aim of destroying seventy thousand Israelites. Numbering the people of God is not a sin if it is commanded by God. But it is Satan’s device to influence a believer to do what is good but not commanded by God. Believers need to know therefore, that anything that does not originate from God is from Satan.

When God testified of the godly private and public life of Job, Satan told God that Job would **“curse”** Him if the divinely bestowed blessings were taken away. God, knowing that the devices of Satan will not always succeed against committed believers, proved the devil wrong. He brought suffering upon Job for

him to blame or “**curse**” God. When Job did not do that as Satan expected, he inspired his wife through a suggestion that he should “**curse**” God but Job held to his integrity. The point here is that Satan operates through demon-inspired suggestions. Obviously, when God exalts a man, Satan wants to pull him down; if He blesses a man, Satan wants him to lose that blessing; when God saves a man, Satan will want him to backslide.

Seeking to prevent a glorious experience such as Peter had at Pentecost and his usefulness thereafter, Satan sought to sift him like wheat. When Peter sliced off the ear of the high priest’s servant and denied the Lord thrice before the little maid, he did not know Satan was subtly behind the scene. Sometimes, he comes in a cheerful way as an angel of light. Crafty and deceptive, some agents of Satan appear peaceful, generous, profitable and cheerful with the purpose of destroying the believer. They also use flatteries and miracles that originate from the devil to deceive believers. But we must determine to overcome.

VICTORY FOR THE CHRISTIAN (Matthew 4:1-11; Genesis 39:7-13; Proverbs 22:24,25; James 1:16,19,21; Jeremiah 35:5-10,12,14,18,19)

Whatever form or shape a temptation may take, the joy of heaven is to see a believer come forth victorious. And true enough, some Christians always enjoy victory in times of temptations. Others struggle under strain and stress without overcoming.

Question 4: *How can a believer be victorious over temptation?*

The cause for such a miserable spiritual life is a result of living too near to the border line. One who persists in walking near a precipice is in far greater danger of tumbling over than one who seeks to tread on sure ground. The Lord was victorious because, first, He did not rush with a light heart into temptation, nor shirk it. He confronted it bravely when he must face it. It is only in such a spirit that we can hope to resist

temptations successfully. If we handle temptations prayerfully, victory is sure. The defeat of the devil, the tempter, in his encounter with the Lord in the wilderness assures us that we will overcome him if we resist him through the power of the Spirit.

The second secret of victory in temptation is single-minded devotion to do God's will. Anything less than a wholehearted determination to please God regardless of the cost would give the enemy an edge in the battle. Joseph's victory in Potiphar's house and in prison were the results of single-minded devotion to do God's will. Essentially, victory in temptation is obtained through knowledge of and obedience to the word of God (Psalm 119:9,11).

Besides, there must be a strong passion for Christ to do His will, to keep a vital, living relationship with the Lord and to always exalt and honour Christ in word and deed. Genuine enduement with the power of the Holy Ghost gives us victory over temptations in doctrinal pollution, worship adulteration and false fellowship.

Question 5: What principles must a believer bear in mind during temptation?

Victory is secured as we carefully and prayerfully follow some biblical principles especially the ones derived from the acrostics: v ictory. – vigilance, integrity, circumspection, trust, obedience, righteousness and yieldedness. In summary, the Christian pilgrim on his way to heaven will have victory over every temptation as he rejects evil (Proverbs 1:10-15), lives righteously (Proverbs 4:20-27; Isaiah 33:14-17; Titus 2:11,12), obeys God (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 27:10; Acts 5:29), lives by faith (Hebrews 10:38), endures in times of temptation (James 1:12) and depends on divine help (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Dallying with the devil is disastrous. To overcome temptation, we must **“Resist the devil and he will flee from you”** (James 4:7). We must **“fight the good fight of faith”** (1 Timothy 6:12). And above all, we

should take the shield of faith with which we can quench all the fiery darts of the devil (Ephesians 6:16). To take sides with the devil or his agents is to invite defeat. It is important to note that the spiritually lame or sick cannot muster enough strength to fight or resist evil; so is the spiritually sin-sick. Thus, it is the pure in heart who triumphs.

The Scripture offers some practical helps on how to overcome temptations and the tempter. (i) Abstain from all appearances of evil – do not go to places (brothels, bars, etc.) where you can be tempted. (ii) Reject legitimate offers/favours that lead or predispose you to sin, like the Rechabites did. (iii) Flee outrightly from persons who want to coerce you to sin, like Joseph and Christ did. (iv) Like Christ, quote relevant Scripture verses to counter those who misinterpret and misapply the Scriptures to lure you into sin. (v) Part with sinful friends because they can influence you to do evil. (vi) Depend on the Spirit of God to show you God's way out of temptations.

PRESERVATION FROM TEMPTATION AND THE OVERCOMERS' BENEFITS (Hebrews 2:18; 4:14-16; James 1:2-4,12; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Timothy 4:18)

Question 6: *What are the benefits that believers who overcome temptations and the tempter enjoy?*

The devil designs temptations to destroy God's children but God's grace is abundant to make them overcome. The saints who were most used by God were also those who were most severely tempted. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David and Paul all had their fair share of severe temptations but they overcame by the grace of God.

When we overcome temptations, our Christian character is developed and strengthened. If there were no temptations, we would lack the toughness of spiritual fibre needed to forge ahead. It takes the heat of fire to refine gold.

God permits temptations as a trial for the perfecting of the Christian's spiritual life. But He limits Satan in the temptation he thrusts on His faithful servants (Job 1:12; 2: 6; 1 Corinthians 10 :13). He also overrules those temptations which are permitted to fulfil His own glory to the edification of the saints and the humiliation of Satan. Victory is sweet for those who endure and overcome temptation. The believer's faith in Christ is strengthened so as to keep overcoming in subsequent temptations. "Each victory will help you; Some other to win", says a songwriter. Besides, the believer who overcomes in temptation knows more about the way and faithfulness of God and His unfailing promises. For standing firm and consistent, he bears fruits to the glory of God. He also ultimately receives a crown of life at the end of life.

Lesson 715

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

MEMORY VERSE: “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28,29).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:3-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16

The resurrection of the dead is a cardinal doctrine of the Bible. God’s word teaches the resurrection of the dead as the immortality of the soul. Since God imparted His undying breathe into man at creation and he became a living soul, every human being born into this world has had a never-dying soul.

Death is, therefore, not the end of life. Everyone will live forever after physical death either in a desirable or damnable eternity. Every individual who has ever lived will resurrect, some to honour and glory and others to everlasting shame and contempt. “**And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt**” (Daniel 12:2).

Question 1: *Explain the meaning of the resurrection of the dead?*

As a fact, all who die in this world will undergo physical resurrection before the Great White Throne Judgement. The body will be resurrected to join with the soul to meet the Lord, either to be admitted to His bosom in peace or to be eternally banished in hell to face punishment and torment.

**SCRIPTURAL TRUTH ON EXPECTED
RESURRECTION OF ALL MEN (John 6:40; 11:25;
Matthew 16:21; 22:23-32; 28:1-20; Job 19:25-27;
Isaiah 26:14,19; Daniel 12:2; Psalms 16:10; 17:15;
Hebrews 11:35; Mark 6:14-16; Philippians 3:8-11;
1Peter 1:3; 3:21; Revelation 20:4,6,12,13)**

The all-knowing Christ and Prophet of God declared that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall live again. This truth of resurrection of the just and unjust rings through the teaching of Jesus Christ. He reveals that **“this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day”**. Christ’s discussion with Martha after the death of Lazarus shows that she had imbibed this truth (John 11:24,25). Rather than rebuke her for expecting the resurrection of her brother in future, Christ declared that: **“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”** Shortly after this, He demonstrated His teaching by raising Lazarus to life – a foretaste of the final resurrection of the dead.

The Sadducees heard and understood Christ’s teaching on this subject but did not believe it. In order to ensnare Him, they asked to know the status of a woman who got married to seven different brothers and died one after the other, including the woman. Their enquiry was: **“in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her”**. Responding, Christ declared that **“Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living”** (Matthew 22:29-32).

Christ authenticated His message as divine by predicting that He would rise from the dead the third

day after crucifixion. And it happened. An occult man, Lauron William de Lawrence of Chicago, United States attempted to equate himself with Christ by boasting that he would rise the third day after death. On the set date of his resurrection – September 11, 1936 – a thunder-strike silenced him as a mortal forever.

Question 2: Cite some specific statements of Christ and other saints on resurrection of the dead.

Glorious resurrection was the hope of Old Testament saints. They believed and spoke about it. Job spoke specifically of his eyes and flesh seeing God after worms have destroyed his body; Isaiah did not mince words about the earth casting out the dead; Daniel pointed to the awakening of many that sleep in the dust, some to everlasting life and others to shame and everlasting contempt; and David also expressed his hope and joy of seeing God's face after death. These and other saints in Scripture endured severe persecution so **“that they might obtain a better resurrection”** (Hebrews 11:35).

Many New Testament saints and angels who witnessed Christ's resurrection believed and proclaimed it (Mark 16:1-18; Luke 24:1-49; John 20:19-21). Prior to His death and resurrection, Herod, a wicked king and the generality of the people of his day believed in the resurrection of the dead (Mark 6:14-16).

Paul and Peter believed and proclaimed it as pivotal to the Christian life and hope (Acts 17:18,32; 1 Peter 1:3; 3:21). In fact, Apostle Paul reveals that no one can be saved without faith in Christ's resurrection, which is the basis and guarantee of our future resurrection. **“And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming”** (1 Corinthians 15:16-23; Romans 10:9). He further contended with those who discountenance this truth and encourage epicurean

living among Corinthian believers that: **“why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing ...If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die”**. The hope of future resurrection makes believers persevere in faith and in His service in spite of all odds. Believers will be the most miserable if the dead rise not.

Question 3: *How should believers live in the light of the truth of future resurrection of the dead?*

The form to be associated with the resurrected body of the just is exemplified by the glorified body that Jesus, the first fruit, had after His resurrection (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:11-20,24-31; 1 John 3:2). All resurrected bodies will be immortal (Daniel 12:2; Mark 9:42-48). Resurrected bodies of saints will possess different degrees of glory. **“There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead”** (1 Corinthians 15:39-54).

In the intervening period between death (when the body and soul are separated) and the resurrection, one may ask: Where is the soul? The soul of a saint of God goes immediately to meet God in heaven. The repentant malefactor on the cross received forgiveness and assurance of Jesus: **“Today shall thou be with me in paradise”** (Luke 23:39-43). Righteous Lazarus died and was **“carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom”** where he was comforted (Luke 16:19-31). Stephen, at death said, **“I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God”** ready to receive him (Acts 7:54-60). Paul was **“willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord”** (2 Corinthians 5:1-8). Many other Scripture references confirm that the soul of the saint rejoices in God’s presence at death (Philippians 1:21-23; Ecclesiastes 12:1,7). On the other hand, when a sinner dies, his soul goes immediately to hell. In hell, he is conscious; he can see, feel and hear (Luke 16:19-31).

The timing for the resurrection to life of the just and resurrection to judgment of the unjust is well spelt out in the Scriptures in accordance with the ordained program of God.

THE FIRST RESURRECTION OF LIFE (John 5:28,29; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16; Revelation 20:4-6)

The resurrection of the saints of God variously described in the Scriptures as resurrection of life (John 5:28,29), resurrection of the just (Luke 14:13,14), a better resurrection (Hebrews 11:35) and the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6) has four phases: (i) The resurrection of Christ, the first fruit (1 Corinthians 15:3,4,12,20,23). (ii) The resurrection of the Church-age saints at the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16). (iii) The resurrection of the tribulation-period saints (Revelation 20:3-5). (iv) The resurrection of Old Testament saints at the second advent of Christ to the earth (Daniel 12:2; Isaiah 26:19).

All the saints of God that ever died would resurrect in the first resurrection. Not a soul will be left behind. What joy! What triumph!! **“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years”** (Revelation 20:6).

Question 4: *Highlight the four phases of the first resurrection.*

THE SECOND RESURRECTION TO DAMNATION: (John 5:29; Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:11-15)

The second resurrection is still part of God’s program but deals with the unsaved dead. There is a difference in time of one thousand years between the first and second resurrection (Revelation 20:5-15). The second resurrection is also described as the resurrection of damnation (John 5:29). There will be everlasting punishment and torment in the lake of fire for all who partake in the second resurrection who missed the first resurrection and whose names are not found in the Book of Life (Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:11-15).

All who peddle or believed in false teachings on the resurrection of the dead (2 Timothy 2:17,18; Matthew 22:23-32; 1 Corinthians 15:16-20) and other doctrinal untruths will also be part of the second resurrection.

As in the early church when Hymenaeus and Philetus erred concerning the truth by teaching that the resurrection was past already, thereby making a shipwreck of their faith and that of all those who followed their false doctrine, there are many false teachers today who **“know not the scriptures nor the power of God”** and overthrow the faith of many. Today, many false teachings on the resurrection of the dead abound having the same devastating effect on all who believe them. Among such doctrines are: annihilation and purgatory. Annihilation simply means “total destruction” or “complete obliteration” of an object. As a false doctrine, peddlers say the final punishment of human beings results in their total destruction rather than their everlasting torment. They believe that God will grant immortality to only those who are saved and will completely destroy sinners. Purgatory, as a fake doctrine, is said to be an intermediate state after physical death in which those destined for heaven “undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven”. Both doctrines of annihilation and purgatory are not supported in Scripture. Christ spoke repeatedly about hell as a place where no one is exterminated while purgatory is a doctrine of licence to live without restraints and seeking to be purged in this world. No verse of Scripture supports purification after death.

The doubt, unbelief and scoffing of sinners will not prevent the complete resurrection program of God for both the saved and the unsaved, the same way it did not alter the resurrection from the dead of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ (Acts 23:8; 2 Timothy 2:15-18; 1 Corinthians 15:12-23; Romans 3:3,4).

The resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of the saints form the foundation of our Christian faith. **“For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised, your faith is**

vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead!" Those who disbelieve and contend against the resurrection of Christ are not saved and do not have hope of future resurrection.

PARTAKING OF RESURRECTION OF LIFE
(Ephesians 2:1,2,4-6; 1 Thessalonians 4:14,16; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Romans 16:17; Luke 21:36; 1 Timothy 4:13,15,16; Hebrews 10:25; 12:14)

Question 5: *What should sinners and believers do to avoid resurrection to damnation?*

To partake in the resurrection of the saved, there must first be a spiritual resurrection in the present life, whereby the spirit is quickened from death in trespasses and sins, and the whole being renewed in the glorious likeness of God to a life of righteousness. Saved, believers must avoid erroneous teachings and teachers, pray and watch, feed on God's undiluted truths and obey them, abide in fellowship with the children of God, continue to overcome temptations, endure trials and live in holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

Lesson 716

ISRAEL'S VICTORY OVER THE PHILISTINES

MEMORY VERSE: “Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us” (1 Samuel 7:12).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 7:1-17

The previous lesson described how the lords of the Philistines heeded the much delayed counsel of their priests and diviners to send back the ark of God to Israel. They had been terribly plagued under God’s divine displeasure for their profanity. As the ark made its way back to Israel, Bethshemesh was the first port of call. Unfortunately, the handlers mismanaged the situation and the Lord “**smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD...**” (1 Samuel 6:19). Bothered by this development, they “**sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjathjearim, saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the LORD; come ye down, and fetch it up to you**”.

This study opens with the acceptable return and reception accorded God’s ark by the people of Kirjathjearim which led to Israel’s repentance and restoration to the Lord and their eventual victory the over Philistines.

ACCEPTABLE RETURN OF THE ARK (1 Samuel 7:1,2; 1Chronicles 15:2,13-15; Deuteronomy 31:9; Numbers 4:15; Job 34:31,32; Deuteronomy 5:32,33)

“And the men of Kirjathjearim came, and fetched up the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD” (1 Samuel 7:1). Following the arrival of the ark of the Lord from the land of the Philistines, it remained in the house of Abinadab for twenty years till the nation began to long after it. This national feeling was a result of the absence of God’s power and presence to defeat

their ever-rampaging adversaries – the Philistines. The period of the absence of the ark in the nation had been devoid of divine presence, revelations and prophecies leading to suffering and defeat in the hands of their enemies. The Lord had neglected them as an evidence of the decay in the land and their apathy to the ark. God's presence was lacking in the land till **“all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD”** (1 Samuel 7:2).

Contrary to the attitude of the people of Bethshemesh, the men of Kirjathjearim joyfully **“fetched up the ark of the LORD”**. They probably consulted Samuel, who appeared to be the custodian of the counsel of the Lord for direction and an acceptable mode of handling the ark, lest the fate of their brethren should also befall them. They avoided the mistakes of others in order to succeed. Those who learn from others will probably avoid their pitfalls; those who do otherwise will learn the hard way.

The ark of the Lord was a sacred structure, the construction of which was commanded by the Lord Himself (Exodus 25:10-22). It contained the tablets of stone on which the law was written, the mercy seat and the cherubims. Its presence meant a lot to the children of Israel: it was an assurance of divine presence and a consolation to them whenever they were challenged by their adversaries. It also showed that God was on the march with them whatever befell them. Thus, when the ark was captured by the Philistines, it was a sign that the presence and power of God was absent.

This sacred structure could not be handled anyhow, anytime by anyone. Its administration must follow proper procedure by the appropriate people. **“Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever”** (1 Chronicles 15:2).

Question 1: *Why was there punishment for a breach in handling the ark?*

Those whom God calls into His holy service must be set apart unto holiness in order to qualify for service. Isaiah declared: **“Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD”** (Isaiah 52:11).

The ark was brought into **“the house of Abinadab... and [they] sanctified Eleazar his son to keep”** it. They understood the sacredness of the assignment and promptly dedicated a qualified servant to attend to it. They remembered that there was judgment because they failed to follow the due order. **“For because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order”** (1 Chronicles 15:13). Now that the proper steps were taken, the ark remained in Abinadab’s place for twenty years without an incident of plagues until the people desired it. They must have realised that God is just and that though He is the God of love, His love does not cancel His holiness. Their consciences reminded them that there has been a vacuum and a breach in their relationship with their Maker. They knew that the time had come to right their wrong.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SIN AND RETURN TO GOD (1 Samuel 7:3-6; Psalm 32:3-5; 2 Chronicles 7:13,14; 15:1-4; Proverbs 28:13; Luke 15:17-20,24)

In the previous battle between the children of Israel and the Philistines, Israel had relied solely on the ark of God for victory, while ignoring an important ingredient for victory: their relationship with God. They vainly supposed that the ark of the Lord could save them when they had departed from the Lord of the ark though their wickedness and sin (1 Samuel 4:3,4). It was against this backdrop that Samuel admonished the people that **“...If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines”** (1 Samuel 7:3). The people needed

to repent of their idol worship, neglect of the house of God, wickedness against one another and all that have affected their relationship with the Lord. It was not enough to hide under the guise of religion and religious activities without priority to a godly lifestyle. The children of Israel must have been shocked at the utter defeat they suffered despite the presence of the ark among them (1 Samuel 4:5-10).

Question 2: *Mention some ways people substitute religion for righteousness?*

As a true prophet and servant of God, Samuel laid bare the conditions for divine intervention. He gave them the whole counsel of God. Every true minister of God must be true to the Scriptures by saying it the way it is, not the way they feel, what suits their fancy or what the people like to hear, feeding them with half-truths. First, Samuel admonished them to return to the Lord. This means retracing their steps from their backslidden state. **“Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers...”** (Jeremiah 35:15). Moreover, the Lord insisted that it must be done wholeheartedly **“with all your hearts”**. He will not have a half-hearted worship.

Second, they were to get rid of all idols. Idol worship is an aberration to divine service and a slap to divinity. It attempts to exalt the creature more than the Creator. Third, they needed to prepare their hearts to serve the Lord. Preparation is paramount to obedience. Ezra is a ready example (Ezra 7:10). Fourth, the children of Israel must serve the Lord **“only”**, not with any other personality, object or deity. **“I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour”** (Isaiah 43:11).

Question 3: *What practical steps must sinners and backsliders take to return to God?*

The children of Israel got the message, acknowledged their transgressions and confessed that they **“have sinned against the LORD...”** They promptly **“put**

away Baalim and Ashtaroth and served the LORD only". They had deep sorrow and regret for their evils against the Lord. Those who desire forgiveness from the Lord must acknowledge their transgressions and be ready to forsake them. **"I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin"** (Psalm 32:5). This is always the way to go and the quickest way to receive divine favor and pardon.

"And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh." Samuel was the last among the judges in Israel and he administered the affairs of the nation. He heard and redressed their grievances, gave them ordinances, taught them how to reconcile and make their ways right before God. Besides, he did not fail in his responsibility of praying for the people. After leading them to repentance from sin, he prayed for them and his prayer brought victory to the nation. When we receive and obey God's appointed leaders and ministers, our blessings are guaranteed. Israel's attitude opened the floodgate to an abiding victory over the Philistines.

VICTORY OVER THE ARCH-ENEMY (1 Samuel 7:7-17; 2Chronicles 20:20-24; Isaiah 41:8-12; Job 17:9; Romans 8:31,32,35-37; 1 John 5:4,5,18)

"And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 7:7).

As a mark of genuine repentance, the children of Israel relied solely on God. Amidst fear over the approaching Philistines, they besought Samuel: **"Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines"**. They had strong confidence in the intercession of Samuel, because they knew he was a holy man of God.

Question 4: *What lessons can we draw from Israel's request from Samuel?*

Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it for a burnt offering. This was in line with God's requirement in the Old Testament. Then he cried unto the Lord and He heard him. God promised to answer all who call upon His name in truth and sincerity (Jeremiah 29:12; 33:3; Isaiah 58:9). He is willing and ready to play His part as soon as His people do theirs. Unlike Samuel's offering, believers today do not need any other sacrifice to approach the throne of grace. Jesus Christ is the perfect Lamb of God, sacrificed to take away our sins and to guarantee answers from God (Hebrews 10:5-8; John 14:14). The New Testament believer needs no other sacrifice, nor to anchor his confidence on the gods of this world.

“But the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.” Those who leave the battles of their lives to God find that He cannot fail, no matter the size and number of enemies involved. As Israel went after their enemies only to gather spoils, believers who trust the Lord for victory in life will live to raise an “Ebenezer” to God.

Samuel had a very successful ministry in Israel. Born and consecrated to the Lord at a tender age, his whole life was devoted to service of God and his nation. He was the architect of restoration and revival in Israel. During his day, genuine repentance was established, the nation was brought back to the way of the Lord, people longed to serve God, righteous living was instituted, the arch-enemy of Israel was defeated and put to perpetual submission and the nation experienced long peace. Besides, he was an effective and a diligent leader who **“judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places”** (1 Samuel 7:15,16; Romans 12:8). Above all, with an altar built for the Lord in his house, Samuel personally served and worshipped the Lord all the days of his life.

Question 5: Highlight some of the qualities that marked Samuel out among the judges in Israel.

In conclusion, we learn from the passage that first, righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people (Proverbs 14:34). Second, when repentance is wholehearted, God forgives, pardons and even blots out the consequences of sin (1 John 1:9). Third, every true child of God should leave their battles to God because victory comes from Him alone (Exodus 14:14; 1 Samuel 17:47). Fourth, when God is involved in our battles, victory will be permanent (Romans 8:31,37; 1 Samuel 7:13,14). Fifth, we should maintain an attitude of gratitude to God for the victory He gives us in battle (1 Samuel 7:12). Lastly, in order not to short-live our victory, we should be devoted to the service of the Lord, like Samuel, who **“judged Israel all the days of his life”** (1 Samuel 7:15).

Lesson 717

ISRAEL ASKS FOR A KING

MEMORY VERSE: “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us” (1 Samuel 8:19).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 8:1-22

The previous chapter of the book of First Samuel ended on a victorious note with Samuel raising an Ebenezer to God. Under God’s leadership and Samuel as the last judge in Israel, the Philistines, who were the arch-enemy of Israel, were subdued. Israel also recovered lost territories and enjoyed a period of peace with her neighbors. Samuel was able to carry out an itinerant ministry of teaching, which took him in circuits from Ramah to Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpeh on a yearly basis. Indeed, it was a period of rest and relative peace in the land.

However, the present chapter records the unfortunate turn of events in Israel, especially as Samuel began to show signs of old age. The Israelites approached him and requested him to choose a king who would govern them like other nations. Though Samuel protested, pointing out the dire consequences of having a king like other nations, the people insisted on having their way. God then told Samuel to overlook their rejection of Him and assent to their request. This study encapsulates an example of God’s permissive will to pacify a presumptuous and obstinate people, the perversion of the sons of Samuel, the prediction of the nature of human kings, and the pre-eminence of God as the only true King.

Question 1: *What do you understand by the expression, “God’s permissive will”?*

THE PRESUMPTION OF ISRAEL IN ASKING FOR A KING (1 Samuel 8:1-5; 10:19; 12:17; Deuteronomy 17:14-20; Hosea 13:9-11; Acts 13:20-22; Psalm 78:29-35; 106:15)

The elders of Israel approached Samuel requesting a king who would lead them like other nations. On

the surface, they predicated their request on the evil ways of Samuel's sons. As he grew feeble with age, Samuel had appointed his two sons – Joel and Abiah – as judges to assist in the administration of justice in Israel. It was obvious he could not maintain his routine itinerary among the people. But his sons deviated from the path of righteousness; they **“turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment”** (1 Samuel 8:3).

Question 2: *Why do children of godly leaders walk contrary to the faith of their parents and how can believers help them?*

They did not follow the footsteps of their father who was free from covetousness or bribery (1 Samuel 12:1- 5). It could be recalled that a similar thing happened between Eli and his sons. Highlighted in these instances is that faith and righteousness are not genetically transferred or inherited but obtained from the Lord on individual basis. Each person has to personally decide to serve the Lord. The sons of Samuel chose to walk in their own way despite the godly example of their father. Children of great leaders often wander away from the faith of their fathers probably because of the failure of their parents to give sufficient time and attention to their training and supervision. Samuel's itinerary and long absence from home to teach the Israelites God's word certainly took its toll on his family. The same is true about busy ministers and workers today. Satan targets their children in order to weaken their faith and ministry (Revelation 12:4). While Christian leaders must ensure that charity of soul-winning and discipline begins at home, the entire church who benefit from the ministry of these men of God must accept the responsibility of interceding fervently for the conversion and preservation of their children.

Question 3: *Why is it dangerous for the people of God to desire to be like others who do not know God?*

The children of Israel ostensibly used the perversion of Samuel's sons as excuse to demand a king. But

their hidden motive was revealed in their request: **“now make us a king to judge us like all the nations”** (1 Samuel 8:5). Whereas, God’s plan was that **“the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations”** (Numbers 23:9), they preferred to be like other nations. Before this time, they had made an attempt to enthrone Gideon as king, but he rejected the idea.

Israel seemed not to value their being under a theocracy – the direct rule of God as King. They desired a system that would not demand faith and obedience to the word of God, but a human government full of pomp and colourful displays, comparable to those of the surrounding nations. However, they did not realize that by their action, they had rejected the Creator and would replace Him with mortal man. The implication was that they would rather trust man whom they could see, no matter his weakness, than the Almighty whom they could not see. They had forgotten that they defeated many nations in battle despite their kings; neither did they realize that God wrought great victories for them in all manners of challenges they had faced without a king. Why then would they want to change a winning formula without direct instructions from God? They wanted the presence of a charismatic leader, yet it was the presence of God that they needed and that was what they rejected.

Question 4: What can believers learn from Israel’s demand for a king?

Israel’s request for a king portrays a number of lessons for believers today. First, we must realize and cherish God’s reign in our lives. We should ensure He is enthroned as King over us and not allow anyone or any pursuit to dethrone Him. We must never see anyone as a worthy alternative to God’s rule over our lives. His message to Israel on this matter of asking for a king is very instructive: **“O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes?”** (Hosea 13:9,10).

Second, believers must beware of sinful imitations and carnal comparison. Israel was fond of comparing themselves with other nations and looking down on the great heritage they had. The danger of comparing ourselves with the world is that we may end up losing focus of our peculiarity and the eternal purpose of God for our lives. Third, we must avoid the error of belittling what we have because of secret envy for what others have. Believers are sons of God and are peculiar, holy, separated and sanctified. Fourth, as believers, we must not have any desire to be like the world around us. A believer is called out of the world to belong to God.

PREDICTION OF THE TYRANNY OF HUMAN RULERS: (1 Samuel 8:6-18; 10:25; 14:25; 2 Samuel 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5; 4:7,22-28; 9:22,23; 10:26; 12:4; 21:7; 2 Chronicles 26:10-15)

The request of Israel grieved Samuel and he was sorrowful, but he took the matter to God in prayer. He was displeased not so much because they rejected him as their leader but that their request signified a rejection of God's rule. His response showed he was a good leader. He was not primarily concerned about his own personal honour, neither did he attempt to defend or make excuses for his wayward children; rather, he prayed. Good leaders pray when they are criticized or assaulted by those they are leading or when the people go astray. Samuel was a man of prayer worthy of emulation (1 Samuel 7:5-10; 8:6; 12:16-23).

In answer to Samuel's prayer, God told him to listen to the people because their request was another facet of their self-will. **"And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them"** (1 Samuel 8:7). However, God instructed Samuel to announce to them what to expect from an earthly king. In essence, Him told them that instituting a monarchy would bring about a form of tyranny and oppression which Israel had not known

before. Their kings would conscript their men and women for personal profit (1 Samuel 10:25; 14:52; 1 Kings 9:22,23; 10:26; 12:4). This would be inevitable because of the need to maintain an army, personal security and guard and who else would do that but their young men and women who were used to tilling the field? Besides, God predicted that the rule of kings would also bring oppression in form of forceful acquisition of property, forced labour, taxation and loss of personal liberty. All these eventually came to pass (2 Samuel 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5; 4:7,22-28; 21:7; 2 Chronicles 26:10-15).

When Israel asked for a king, obviously they did not consider the negative consequences and responsibilities associated with it. Human kingdoms inevitably lead to tyranny, selfishness, injustice and unfairness. Only those who fear God and rule others according to His precepts can overcome the pitfalls associated with human authority. No believer should rule like an earthly monarch whenever they are placed in a position of authority. Jesus taught that leaders should comport themselves as servants. **“And he said unto them, the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve”** (Luke 22:25,26).

THE PERMISSIVE WILL OF GOD IN GRANTING ISRAEL A KING (1 Samuel 8:19-22; 12:1,13-19; Isaiah 66:4; Hosea 13:9-11; Psalm 106:15)

Despite the disadvantages in having a human king, the children of Israel insisted that Samuel should choose one for them. **“Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us”** (1 Samuel 8:19). The people were determined to have their way and God told Samuel to agree with them. **“And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city”** (1 Samuel 8:22). Here,

we see God again granting the desire of a difficult people. He had done so before when the children of Israel lusted for meat in the wilderness (Numbers 11:31-34; Psalms 78:29-31; 106:15). God gave them their desire but sent leanness to their soul. They got what they wanted but there was no blessing of God in it. Failing to learn from their past missteps, they fell into the same error again.

Question 5: *Point out the dangers of living in God's permissive will.*

Believers should recognize the dangers of living in God's permissive will. It gives a false sense of security and deceives a person into a fake assurance of God's favor. Though Israel got their desire, God was not pleased with them. Later, He said concerning this event: **"I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath"** (Hosea 13:11). Most of the kings in Israel were evil and a stumbling block to the nation rather than a blessing. They regretted their obstinacy and learned the hard way.

If Israel had remained patient under God, He would still have given them a king after His own heart. It had been part of God's plan for Israel to have a king. He promised Jacob that kings would be among his descendants (Genesis 35:11). There were other instances when God spoke about kings coming up in Israel (Genesis 36:31; 49:10; Numbers 24:7-9; Deuteronomy 28:36). But it was presumptuous of Israel to initiate, rather than wait for God to appoint a king for them. God's perfect will also has a perfect timing attached to it, for He makes all things beautiful in His time. However, if we rush ahead, we may mar or complicate matters and the consequences may be dire. We must learn to wait for God.

Concluding this important study on Israel's demand for a king, we are instructed: one, to avoid the terrible mistake of Israel which many people are repeating today by rejecting the rule of Jesus Christ over their lives. Two, we must also check our motives and desires to ensure that even when we seek to make Jesus the King of our lives, we are enthroning Him for

the right reasons. In the sixth chapter of the gospel of John, certain Israelites attempted to force Jesus to be their King, so He could supply them bread. But when He told them that He is the Bread of life, they rejected Him. Three, the attempt and tendency to force God's hands over any matter pushes a person out of God's perfect will and should be avoided. Four, it is presumptuous to insist on receiving, before due time, what God intends to keep in trust for us till an appointed time. Five, learning from Israel's mistake, the best step a person should take is to enthrone Jesus Christ as King over one's life. He is the only worthy King who is able to fight our battles without exploiting us.

Lesson 718

SAUL SEEKS THE LOST ASSES

MEMORY VERSE: “And the asses of Kish Saul’s father were lost. And Kish said to Saul his son, Take now one of the servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses” (1 Samuel 9:3).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 9:1-27

In the preceding chapter, the elders of Israel had demanded a king from Samuel to judge them like other nations. This turn of event represented a dislike of God’s supreme reign in their national life. However, God granted their request but on a permissive note.

In this lesson, God chose Saul, Kish’s son, who was “**a Benjamite, a mighty man of power**” to be Israel’s first king. Saul was “**a choice young man, and a goodly; and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people**” (1 Samuel 9:2). He was a responsible young man prompting his father to commission him to search for his lost asses. His dutiful discharge of this responsibility circumstantially led to his meeting with Samuel and consequent choice as Israel’s first king. Obviously, believers’ prompt response and commitment to the great commission to rescue lost souls of men gladden God’s heart and attract His blessings.

SAUL’S SEARCH FOR THE LOST ASSES (1 Samuel 9:1-10; Jeremiah 50:6; Luke 15:3-10; Matthew 10:5-7; 15:24; Luke 16:1,2,10-12; Mark 16:15)

The asses of Saul’s father had wandered away from Kish, their owner. This informed his commission to go find them. His command was, “**arise, go seek the asses**”. Saul accepted the commission to seek the lost asses. Though Kish had other children (1 Chronicles 23:22; 24:29; Esther 2:5), it was Saul’s sense of responsibility that made his father to entrust this all-important task into his care. With the attitude of prompt obedience,

he **“passed through mount Ephraim, and passed through the land of Shalisha, but they found them not: then they passed through the land of Shalim, and there they were not: and he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they found them not”** (verse 4). He searched at different places and mobilized his most dutiful servant to assist him with the task. He was determined to find them at all cost. His doggedness to find the lost animals is worthy of emulation.

Question 1: What challenge does Saul’s persistence to find the lost asses pose to us as Christians?

The entire human race is lost and damned eternally. It is the lost condition of the souls of men that informed Christ’s advent into the world to seek and save us. He reveals that the value of one lost sheep is enough reason to send a search party or go to **“the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray”** because **“it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish”** (Matthew 18:12-14). He further clarifies that searching for a lost sheep will continue **“until he find it”** (Luke 15:4). It was for this reason His Father **“sent”** Him to find the lost sheep and bring them into the fold under one Shepherd (Matthew 15:24; John 10:16; Luke 4:43). Like Kish, Christ has commissioned all believers to **“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15). Like Saul, all believers must arise and leave no stone unturned to ensure that lost sinners are found, converted and established in the Kingdom. We must deploy all our resources and commit the best manpower to this Great Commission.

“And when they were come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us” (verse 5). Although Saul’s persistence yielded no fruit, he was mindful not to let a worse thing happen to his father as a result of their delayed return.

Meanwhile, Saul's servant suggested that they seek counsel from a prophet on the way forward.

Question 2: *Mention some lessons from Saul's disposition in their search for the lost asses.*

From the disposition of Saul and his servant, they were dependable, obedient and willing to endanger their lives to find the lost asses. Two, they were determined to go the extra mile. Three, they were dogged and willing to find solution to the challenge rather than throw in the towel. Four, Saul was resolute to take counsel only from a genuine man of God.

SAUL SEEKS GUIDANCE ON RESCUING THE LOST ASSES (1 Samuel 9:11-14; Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 19:20,21; 1 Samuel 30:8; 1 Kings 12:6-19)

After a little persuasion, **"Then said Saul to his servant, Well said; come, let us go. So they went unto the city where the man of God was. And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here?"** (1 Samuel 9:10,11). As soon as they arrived the city, they found some young maidens who directed them to the residence of Samuel, the prophet. True, the steps of a good man are directed by the Lord. The Lord knows the way of man and He will direct it to fulfil His purpose and program. From the events that followed, it was true that God was in the affairs of Saul to direct him to the place of the fulfilment of His program for his life.

Moreover, the decision of Saul and his servant to seek counsel and direction is commendable. Sometimes, life may present us with challenges and decisions that we need to seek direction from our leaders. At such times, wisdom dictates that we have recourse to mature godly leaders and pastors. The Scripture says, **"Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety"** (Proverbs 11:14). Unlike other people who would rather seek counsel from sorcerers, false prophets or diviners, Saul was determined to seek a true man of God for directions.

Question 3: *What should be our attitude when seeking counsel?*

In seeking counsel, it is important to examine the character and values of the counsellor. Is he/she godly, spiritually sound and mature? Seek advice from people who know and love God and His word (1 Kings 12:6- 19). Two, evaluate the merit of their counsel from the word of God. Any counsel from any person, no matter their status or position – pastor, bishop, overseer, apostle, etc. – contrary to the word of God should be discarded. Three, although seeking counsel is a sign of maturity and humility (Proverbs 1:5), the counsellee should be willing to do the will of God.

Reference is made to **“high place”** five times in the text (verses 12,13,14,19,25). This repetition shows the sanctity of the sacrifices made to God at the appointed place. Worthy of note is the obedience and patience of the children of Israel when dealing with a priest as they **“will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that he bidden”**. More so, Samuel’s humility to come down from the high place to meet Saul and his servant is worthy of emulation. Note that neither Kish nor Saul had any inkling that God was using this challenge of finding the lost asses to unwittingly bring the latter to the knowledge of his divine appointment as king. Obedience, indeed, brings blessings.

SAMUEL DIRECTED TO ANOINT SAUL KING (1 Samuel 9:15-22; 16:1,4-13; Exodus 30:30; 1 Kings 1:32-34,39; Acts 8:26-31; Genesis 12:1-4)

“Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel...” (verses 15,16). God spoke directly to Samuel that he should anoint the person He would send to be captain over His people. God was unmistakable about the timing and details of the individual for anointing. Though Kish and Saul did not perceive any divine operation in the loss of the

asses, the turn of events to seek advice from the seer and God's directive to Samuel showed that they were divinely arranged. The Scripture affirms that God rules in the affairs of men and that all things work together for the good of His children.

As Saul approached Samuel, the Lord ministered to Samuel that His choice for anointing as king had arrived. The meeting, orchestrated by God, proves that He truly leads His own.

Question 4: Mention instances in the Scripture where people received divine directives from God.

The Scripture is replete with instances where God led His people. Abraham received instruction from God to go to an unknown land where he would be blessed and become the father of many nations (Genesis 12:1-4). Jacob was instructed to go up to Bethel to make an altar unto God (Genesis 35:1; 32:30). God spoke to Moses frequently on how to lead the Israelites to the promised land (Exodus 33:11). Samuel was called by God as a child and was showed what would befall Eli's household (1 Samuel 3:1-14). The wise men from the East received divine direction on the birth of Christ and where He would be found (Luke 2:9-12). Philip was instructed to join an Ethiopian eunuch's chariot where he led him to salvation (Acts 8:26-31).

In response to Saul's enquiry, Samuel introduced himself but also instructed him to go up to the high place to dine with him. He promised to release him the following day to his people. He also comforted Saul about the plight of the lost asses after which he spoke of the matter of his divine appointment.

“And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house? And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?” (1 Samuel 9:20,21). The words from the man

of God relieved Saul in no small way. Benign words from ministers comfort the dejected and discouraged (1 Samuel 1:17,18). This conversation revealed the humble disposition of Saul and the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit by Samuel. While humility qualifies the believer for elevation, spiritual gifts help Christian servants to be effective in spiritual service.

SAUL DINES WITH SAMUEL (1 Samuel 9:23-27; Matthew 22:4)

To authenticate Saul's appointment as king, Samuel took him to the high place **"and made [him] sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons"**. Before Saul's arrival to the city, Samuel had made necessary arrangements to honour him among the divinely favoured. **"And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee ...And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day"** (verses 23,24). Samuel was a good planner who ensured that proper arrangements were made before their meeting. Planning and preparation (physical or spiritual) are paramount if we want to succeed.

The discreetness with which Samuel communicated the matter of the kingdom to Saul is noteworthy. He communed with him **"upon the top of the house"** where there would be no interruption. While accompanying him to the outskirts of the city the following morning, Samuel made Saul to send his servant forward as discussion on his divine appointment continued. Where necessary, Christian leaders must give sensitive counselling sessions the privacy required.

Question 5: As Christians, why is it necessary to be discreet when handling sensitive matters?

Lesson 719

SAMUEL ANOINTS SAUL KING

MEMORY VERSE: “Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?” (1 Samuel 10:1).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 10:1-27

The event recorded in the text is significant in Israel’s history. It marks the nation’s transition from theocracy to monarchy and highlights the encounter between Saul and Samuel which culminated in anointing the first king for the nation. It also throws light into the personality of the new leader, his selection process, its implications for a nation founded by the Lord Himself and the conflicting reactions of stakeholders to the emerging king.

Saul’s anointing was obviously in answer to the nation’s request for a change in leadership. Though God did not foreclose an eventual institution of the monarchy, the nation’s demand was ill-advised (Deuteronomy 17:14-17). Owing to the unyielding posture of the elders of Israel, Samuel was instructed to anoint Saul. God still answers prayers, but whether the answer agrees with His perfect will is a different thing altogether. There are times an answer to a person’s request negates His perfect will (Numbers 11:4-6, 18-20, 31-34; Psalm 106:15; Ezekiel 14:4; Hosea 13:9-11).

With reference to the incident under consideration, it is clear that the Lord’s consent was purely permissive. In making our request, we should not be “**unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is**” (Ephesians 5:17). It is as we make scripturally acceptable requests that we shall be able to receive enduring answers and be spared the pains of future regrets.

SAUL’S PRIVATE ANOINTING BY SAMUEL (1 Samuel 10:1-9; 16:13; 24:6; 26:11; 2 Samuel 1:14; 2 Corinthians 1:21)

The emergence of Saul as king was in phases. The first was between him and Samuel alone. This secret anointing was to personally intimate Saul of God's interest in him ahead of his unveiling to the public. **"Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?"** (1 Samuel 10:1). This act was in obedience to divine directives and set Saul above others, made him commander-in-chief of the army, and a representative of God to enforce righteousness in the nation.

Question 1: *State the purpose of Saul's anointing.*

Saul's anointing was proof of his divine selection and approval. Anointing a person or thing was a practice in ancient times to set such apart and as a mark of honour (Exodus 29:7; Leviticus 8:12). It was to show that the individual or thing thus anointed had a special and sacred purpose to fulfil. Two, they became sanctified vessel and perhaps untouchable for harm or malevolence (1 Samuel 24:6; 26:9; 2 Samuel 1:14). Three, it was believed that the act transferred the holiness and virtue of the deity in whose name the individual was anointed. Therefore, Samuel's act was to affirm that Saul was now a different person. Four, it was also believed that anointing a person in the name of the Lord imparted a special presence of the Spirit of God on the recipient (1 Samuel 16:13; Isaiah 61:1). Five, New Testament saints enjoys this privilege through the coming and outpouring of the Holy Spirit on believers (2 Corinthians 1:21; 1 John 2:27).

To support this divine selection and approval, Samuel gave Saul three signs which were designed to enhance his faith in his new estate, encourage his heart and prepare him to conform to the arrangement of God for his administration. While the first sign was to confirm Samuel's earlier declaration that the lost asses had been found, the second was to confirm his anointing (verses 2- 4). He was to receive what was offered as homage in recognition of his new status

as the Lord's anointed. The third was to prove to him that God was with him to divinely empower him for the task ahead (verses 5,6).

Samuel further instructed Saul to **"tarry"** till his coronation was complete. He was not to run ahead into his new office without proper directive and leadership. Those who lay claim to calls into the spiritual ministry should be patient and wait for the Lord's, lest they be guilty of running ahead of Him; **"...he that believeth shall not make haste"** (Isaiah 28:16).

"And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart: and all those signs came to pass that day" (1 Samuel 10:9).

Question 2: What was the significance of the fulfilment of the signs Samuel gave to Saul?

The fulfilment of the signs was proof that Samuel was a true prophet of God (1 Samuel 3:30; Deuteronomy 18:22). Secondly, they were to encourage Saul to earnestly depend on God for every enablement required to execute the divine purpose of his appointment and new assignment. Thirdly, to set Samuel as a worthy mentor who must be accorded utmost deference.

SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT FOR THE NEWLY ANOINTED (1 Samuel 10:10-16; Joel 2:28; Acts 1:8; 9:3-17; Numbers 27:15-20; 2 Kings 2:9,10)

Aside of those devoid of godly fear, every leader appointed by God had always been sealed by His Spirit. Saul was no exception. **"And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them"** (1 Samuel 10:10). In fulfilment of Samuel's prophecy and divine confirmation, Saul took on a new heart and spirit in preparation for leadership. A new zeal, passion and aspiration were needed to lift him above the ordinary Israelite. Saul was no longer concerned about the mundane asses; there was now a nobler cause, something sublime and more honourable – the challenge of leading a great

nation like Israel. His world-view changed from that of a mere shepherd or ass-searcher to a statesman.

God-ordained leaders must not be bugged down with mundane affairs of life that conflict and hinder their calling to serve. Those who will serve the Lord and fulfil His program must of necessity purge themselves from the love of the things of this world. **“No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier”** (2 Timothy 2:4).

Saul’s experience also emphasises the importance of the Holy Ghost baptism for effective ministry. The work of the Kingdom cannot be done in the energy of the flesh but through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Christian ministers need to be endued with the Spirit’s power and endowed with divine gifts in order to excel. God promises to pour His Spirit upon His children (Joel 2:28,29; Acts 1:8).

Question 3: Why is it important for Christian leaders to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

The influence of the Holy Spirit was also to endow Saul with divine wisdom and direct his thought pattern, ability and response. However, his encounter and display with a prophetic company in singing, worship and eulogy of God was incredible. The reaction of his acquaintances revealed that Saul was not hitherto inclined to such religious expressions. **“And it came to pass, when all that knew him beforetime saw that, behold, he prophesied among the prophets, then the people said one to another, What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?”** (1 Samuel 10:11).

In spite of his unenviable past, the Lord chose to exalt him to the highest office in the land and favoured him with an indisputable encounter of His Spirit. This is reminiscent of the later grace poured on Saul of Tarsus in the New Testament (Acts 9:26). The incident underscores what grace can accomplish in a person’s life. Moses was picked from the backside of the desert to lead the children of Israel to the

Promised Land. David was a shepherd boy when God anointed him to be king over His people. Amos said he was not in the lineage of the prophets, but a fruit gatherer before God's lifting hands picked him to be a prophet in Israel (Amos 7:14). Regardless of how irreligious, corrupt or sinful a person may be, an encounter with Jesus brings a great change (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:17). The vilest of sinners who truly believes will become a specimen of godliness. Likewise, a weak and spiritually anaemic believer can be empowered to do exploits for God.

Question 4: Highlight specific lessons from the fact of Saul's choice for the exalted office in Israel.

Like Saul, no one qualifies on his/her own merits. Everyone chosen by God for any privileged position is a product of grace (1 Corinthians 1:26).

As Saul eventually headed home, he met his uncle who **"...said, Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said unto you"** (1 Samuel 10:15). Though the questions were directed at the duo (Saul and his servant), Saul wisely took the lead to respond. His answer revealed divine wisdom and circumspection. He revealed only the part that was needed to answer the question. While a believer must not be evasive or deceptive, we should be discrete to keep classified information until they are due for public use. Since the inquiry was not directly about the issue of the kingdom, divulging it would be unwise and self-serving. **"A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards"** (Proverbs 29:11). Besides, his response might be a reflection of his humility and modesty. After all, he hid himself among the people when he was to be unveiled to the whole nation (1 Samuel 10:21,22).

SOLEMN NOMINATION AND ACCEPTANCE OF SAUL (1 Samuel 10:17-27; Numbers 17:2; Judges 7:14-26; Proverbs 18:18; Romans 13:1,2)

"And Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpeh" (1 Samuel 10:17). The purpose of this convocation was to present the new monarch

to the nation. Samuel's initial protest against their wrong choice hinted that God was not happy, though He appeared to have consented. It only showed that the consent was a permissive will which carry dire consequences (1 Samuel 8:6-20; Psalm 78:29-31; Hosea 13:9-12). The Lord reminded them of His numerous benevolence: His deliverance from Egyptian bondage, conquest of enemy kingdoms, freedom from their oppressors, salvation from all adversities and tribulations, and supply of their needs. He added, but **"ye have this day rejected your God... and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us"** (1 Samuel 10:19). Believers should be grateful to God always, **"Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's"** (Psalm 103:3-5).

In spite of the attitude of the children of Israel, God led Samuel to solemnly guide the selection process of a king and the lot fell on Saul who withdrew to hide among the stuff.

Question 5: *What can we learn from Saul's withdrawal from the general assembly?*

Though already sure that the lot would fall on him, Saul did not present himself. When he considered his lowly background, social status and perhaps, his wealth of experience, he felt inadequate to lead a nation like Israel with so many challenges. This is always the attitude of people who understand that leadership is about service and not exploitation; it is to minister and not be ministered unto (Exodus 3:11; 1 Kings 3:7-10; Mark 10:45). However, the New Testament believer needs not shrink from a call to service since Christ had promised to abide with us and strengthen us with the power of the Holy Ghost to do the will of God (Acts 18:10; Philippians 4:13).

When he was eventually sought out from the stuff, Saul's physique coupled with Samuel's commentary won the applause of the majority who prayed:

“God save the king” (1 Samuel 10:24). Believers should continually make **“supplications, prayers, intercessions ... for kings, and for all that are in authority... (1 Timothy 2:1,2).**

Samuel proceeded to tell the people the terms of the new leadership and kingdom: the kings’ rights and limitations as well as the people’s duties and obligations. Thus, Israelite kings were not to be absolute rulers but theocratic monarchs, recognising the supremacy of God over the king and his subjects. After the pronouncement, Saul returned to Gibeah with a band of men induced by God to offer themselves to honour and protect him.

But there were some people, properly described as **“children of belial”** who despised Saul. But he displayed such magnanimity that is commendable to all leaders: that they are not to use their power and authority to oppress others. His reaction also showed that not everyone would be in agreement with us at all times, yet we should be fair to all. Humility, self-abasement and desire to serve should characterise us at all times; thus, shall we be able to go far with God and fulfil His purpose for our calling.

Lesson 720

VICTORY OF JABESH OVER AMMON

MEMORY VERSE: “And it was so on the morrow, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the host in the morning watch, and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together” (1 Samuel 11:11).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 11:1-15

The request of the children of Israel for a king who would lead them like other nations was granted in the preceding chapter. Saul was thus anointed king over Israel to lead and defend them against external aggression. Shortly after his selection, the Ammonites laid siege on Jabeshgilead, a territory of the Israelites. As it were, this challenge and the accompanying victory confirmed the choice of Saul as divine. God appoints leaders to solve problems, fight and win battles and lead His people on the path of righteousness.

Question 1: *Why does God appoint leaders over His people?*

Jabesh-Gilead, a town on the east of Jordan, was located within the portion of the half tribe of Manasseh (Judges 21:8; 1 Samuel 11:1; 31:11; 2 Samuel 2:4; 21:12). This town, it could be recalled, was sacked by the Israelites' punitive expedition for refusing to join in chastising the tribe of Benjamin at Gibeah for shielding some rapists from being penalized. After its sack, four hundred virgins were captured from there and given to the surviving Benjamites as wives so their tribe might not suffer extinction (Judges 21:8-25). Now bereft of valiant men that could defend it, Jabesh-Gilead was thought to be an easy prey by Nahash, king of the Ammonites who laid siege on it. An irony however played out at this time of siege: the people of Jabesh-Gilead who did not see any reason to join forces with other tribes previously, now rode to

victory on the strength of a united force of the entire tribes of Israel. Living in isolation brings defeat. Believers should unite forces to win souls before the devil destroys them.

NAHASH’S SIEGE ON JABESH-GILEAD (1 Samuel 11:1-3; Revelation 12:9; 1 Peter 5:8; Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; John 10:10)

Question 2: *What can believers learn from the unprovoked siege of Nahash and the Ammonites on Jabesh-Gilead?*

“Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabesh-Gilead...” Nahash, which means serpent, was the king of the Ammonites at the time Saul was anointed king over Israel. Like a real serpent, he was cruel and oppressive. He attacked Jabesh-Gilead unprovoked. He behaved like Satan, the age-long serpent that has been terrorizing and oppressing humanity. This unprovoked attack and siege shows the present-day believer that the world is a battleground; that the devil, like a roaring lion, is seeking whom he may devour. And it does not matter whether you provoke him or not. In any case, your decision to make Christ your Lord and serve Him the rest of your life, which brought peace and other blessings into your life and family grieves him.

Meanwhile, the discipline meted out to the people of Jabesh-Gilead by other tribes of Israel left them weakened and defenseless. To forestall hostility and destruction, **“all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee”**. Unfortunately, their offer of voluntary servitude based on their acknowledged weakness was rejected. It was wrong in the first place to suggest making a covenant to serve a heathen king. God does not want His people to serve their enemies (Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8). And when that happens, He intervenes to deliver His people.

Perhaps, the men of Jabesh-Gilead thought the other tribes would be unwilling to help, in retaliation for

their previous uncooperative attitude. They made concession without knowing their enemy would not stop at making them slaves but also inflict a permanent injury on them. With no milk of mercy, Nahash stoutly gave a tall order, **“On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel”**. To make all the people one-eyed was a most awful condition for a covenant of ‘peaceful slavery’. This condition was as grievous as it was dehumanizing. It also revealed a broader perspective of the intent of the Ammonites: to bring **“reproach upon all Israel”**.

Question 3: *From the real purpose of the siege in our text, what is Satan’s aim of attacking believers today?*

Many people still live in similar horrible conditions today contrary to the word and will of God. Sin and Satan have enslaved them. **“Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”** (John 8:34; Ephesians 2:2). These twin enemies blind the mind of sinners and prevent them from seeing their wretchedness and from seeking the Savior for freedom. The devil’s attack, siege and oppression are designed to steal, kill and destroy, and thereby bring reproach to God and His people.

Unwilling to accept this affliction, the people of Jabesh-Gilead requested seven days of respite that **“we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel: and then, if there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee”**. Many people are suffering one form of oppression or the other today having not heard or read the words of Jesus who said: **“I am the way...”** (John 14:6) out. In a bid to find solution, some wanderers get initiated into occult groups while others accept dehumanizing conditions in life. Every believer, therefore, needs to make

themselves readily available to give the message of hope and deliverance to all people.

SAUL PREPARES ISRAEL FOR BATTLE (1 Samuel 11:4-8; Ephesians 6:12; Proverbs 21:31; Acts 13:6-12; 16:16-18; 1:8; 2:38,39; John 14:16)

The elders of Jabesh-Gilead sent messengers to Gibeah of Saul and the people wept since none of them could challenge the enemy. It was this agony and weeping that drew the attention of Saul who was returning from tending his flock. Since he was anointed king by Samuel, he had not been confirmed and installed as king. The confirmation was necessary because some of the people did not agree that he was the best choice for the throne.

Question 4: *From the text, state the purpose and power of the Holy Spirit in a believer?*

Saul's confirmation came with the descent of the Spirit of God upon him. He was filled with holy anger at the cruel conditions the Ammonites gave. God's Spirit also inspired him to assemble three hundred and thirty thousand men at Bezek in preparation for battle. Following his invitation to the people to come **"after Saul and after Samuel", "the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent"**. The Spirit did not only inspire fear and unity among them but also the strategy for battle.

Without the Holy Ghost, the stoutest of Christians with the best spiritual credentials will suffer defeat in battles of life. And if the Spirit of God helped them to win victory over their foes in physical battle, we have greater need of Him because ours is a spiritual battle. Without the Holy Ghost, how would Paul have overcome the demon-infested activities of sorcerers like Barjesus and the damsel that confronted him on the field of soul-winning? Christ commanded His disciples to tarry for the Pentecostal power before launching out to win souls. He has promised to grant every believer baptism with the Holy Spirit. **"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto**

me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). With faith, heart-hunger and earnest prayer, every believer will be filled and indwelt by the Spirit, unlike His occasional decent on Old Testament saints for a specific task.

CONQUEST OF THE AMMONITES (1 Samuel 11:9-11; Galatians 6:2; 1 John 3:16; Isaiah 53:4,5; 1 Corinthians 15:57; Luke 1:19; 8:9; Acts 8:5-8; Malachi 3:6)

Question 5: *How can people win victory in life’s battle today?*

Saul sent a message to the people of Jabesh-Gilead concerning their readiness to rescue them. They were overjoyed and “**glad**” to receive mercy and promised intervention from other tribes who had previously commissioned a punitive expedition against them. The Scripture commands believers to bear one another’s burden and so fulfil the law of Christ. We could not conquer the devil, our age-long adversary but Christ conquered him through His crucifixion. He procured and promised divine intervention and victory to everyone who becomes a child of God. He is the Savior from every form of slavery and oppression. This is the “**glad tidings**” that everyone needs today. Believers must urgently take this message of deliverance, salvation and freedom from bondage to sin and Satan to their communities. It is the gospel that liberates and brings joy to people and communities under demonic siege (Acts 8:5-8).

While rejoicing for the promised deliverance, the people of Jabesh-Gilead sent a sarcastic message to the Ammonites that they were going to surrender to their cruelty. This message must have made the enemy soldiers not to prepare to fight anymore. Unknown to them, the scheduled day of surrender would be the day of deadly defeat of the cruel enemy.

Prior to the victory over the Ammonites, Saul divided the entire army into three operational groups. In a pre-dawn surprise attack, “**they came into the midst of**

the host in the morning watch, and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together". From this victory over the Ammonites, we learn the need to establish a relationship with God so that His Spirit can continually help us overcome temptations and battles the devil may bring our way. Two, oneness and unity among brethren enhance victory (Ecclesiastes 4:9). Three, it is important to bear one another's burden. Four, faith and dependence upon the Spirit of God in spiritual warfare is non-negotiable. Five, it is important to participate in prayer vigils of the church: the timing of the surprise attack was "**the morning watch**". Six, the need for strategy cannot be ruled out. We need to establish prayer and evangelism groups to rescue souls. Seven, it is godly to forgive those who oppose our promotion/elevation and not to seek opportunity to revenge. Following their victory in battle, the people wanted to kill those who questioned the eligibility of Saul to reign over Israel. But Saul objected to taking vengeance. Eight, it is good to ascribe victory in life's battle to providence. God's Spirit was involved. Acknowledging this, Saul said: "**for to day the LORD hath wrought salvation in Israel**".

KINGDOM RENEWAL AT GILGAL (1 Samuel 11:12-15; 1 Corinthians 15:57; Hebrews 13:15; Psalm 103:1-3; Philippians 4:4; 2 Corinthians 5:14,15)

Question 6: *What should be the believer's attitude when God grants him victory in battles of life?*

After this victory, Samuel, who had been part of the rescue team, called the people to celebrate it in God's appointed place of worship. It was a call to renew the kingdom before God. Three things happened at Gilgal. First, all the people made Saul king. Second, they offered sacrifices of peace-offerings. Third, Saul and all the people rejoiced there greatly.

When God grants us victory in life's battles, we must not abandon the fellowship of believers but return to praise and worship Him. It is pertinent to offer

sacrifices of praise to God for granting us deliverance and peace. Believers need to rejoice in the Lord for His care and intervention and further show gratitude by rededicating their entire lives to serve Him.

The people of Jabesh-Gilead did not only praise God but also appreciated Saul's efforts at mobilizing the entire tribes to rescue them. In fact, they showed this gratitude forty years later by taking down the dead bodies of Saul and his three sons from the walls of Bethshan, cremated and buried the bones under a tree near the city (1 Samuel 31:11-13; 2 Samuel 2:5). As Christian servants, we will only be remembered by what we have done.

Lesson 721

BELIEVERS' ENRICHMENT THROUGH CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

TEXT: Ephesians 1:1-14

This epistle was written by Paul during his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:16). Though a prisoner, he was free to write letters. He began this epistle to believers at Ephesus by introducing himself as “**an apostle of Jesus Christ**”. This was to establish his credibility in the readers’ minds that he was not a self-styled or man-made apostle (Ephesians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1).

The key thought in this chapter is the Christian’s wealth of blessings in Christ. While believers may be separated by geographical locations, they are all positioned “**in Christ**” spiritually. As such, each member of the universal Church has access to all spiritual blessings in Christ.

Prior to Paul’s evangelistic efforts at Ephesus, the city was a popular one known for the goddess Diana, “**whom all Asia and the world worshippeth**” (Acts 19:27). On his first visit, Paul made a significant impression on them and they besought him to stay (Acts 18:19-21). Though he could not oblige to their request, he promised to visit them again. When he did, he spent about three years ministering and teaching (Acts 20:31).

While in Ephesus, some of John the Baptist’s followers received the Holy Ghost (Acts 19:1-7). He preached in the synagogue for some time and later in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10); special miracles occurred (Acts 19:11,12) and the natives as well as the strangers received the gospel, and even many occult people were converted (Acts 19:17-20). This positive

impact of the gospel made Demetrius to galvanise the people to protest the potential loss of their business interests should they sit by and allowed Paul to fill the whole city with the message of Christ (Acts 19:23-41).

Without gainsaying, Paul's missionary activity in Ephesus wrested the city from years of idol worship and occult practices. This proves that the gospel of Christ can lighten the darkest vestige of idolatry and break down the most formidable obstacles in the way of reaching men's heart for salvation. As he wrote this epistle, the Apostle wanted the believers to be conscious of their status in God and lead a Christ-like life regardless of the prevailing circumstances around them.

CATALOGUE OF BELIEVERS' BLESSINGS IN CHRIST (Ephesians 1:1-10; John 1:12; Acts 13:48; Romans 9:23,24; Galatians 3:9; 2 Peter 1:3,4; Revelation 21:7)

“Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 1:2). The initial addressees of this epistle were the saints. The Apostle here corrects a wrong notion on the issue of sainthood. Becoming a saint is not a posthumous honour but a spiritual state of freedom from sin (Ephesians 2:1-10). That saints, people who are saved by grace and have peace of God in their hearts, could be found in Ephesus is a glowing testimony to the operation of the love and power of God through the gospel of Christ.

Paul wrote about blessings, inheritance, possession and riches in this epistle against the background that Ephesus was considered a depository of wealth and the bank of Asia. Some of the greatest art treasures of the ancient world were housed in Diana's temple. In this letter, Paul compared the Church to a temple and explained the great wealth that Christ has bestowed on it.

Question 1: Outline specific blessings a believer enjoys by virtue of his faith in Christ.

The blessings God “**our Father**” and “**Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**” has bestowed upon us are numerous. One, He appointed us to salvation in Christ. This is a special favor. Through His death on the cross, Christ bought us from slavery to sin and cancelled the penalty and power of sin. Those who abide in Him shall also have a future redemption when He returns at the rapture to restore us to the full benefits lost in Eden. He chose us to have a part in His kingdom not because of who or what we were, but by grace and virtue of our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14; John 6:37). Two, He has adopted us into His family and made us joint-heirs with Christ, His only begotten Son (Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:15,17; Galatians 4:4-7). This privilege should in no way evoke frivolity or pride in the believer but an eternally appreciative and humble reverence for Christ who accomplished it. Three, He has accepted us as His dear children on the merit of Christ despite the fact that we were odious, wicked and unworthy (Ephesians 1:6; Romans 3:22-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Four, He has revealed God’s “**mystery**” to us (Ephesians 1:8-10; 1 Corinthians 2:8-10). Ignorance has been responsible for many people’s death and perdition in sin, but Christ is the Light that brought the knowledge of God and His salvation to us. Five, God has also given us His Spirit to keep us as His precious possession. The Holy Ghost thus approves, certifies and identifies us as belonging to God (John 3:33; 6:27; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Revelation 7:2; 9:4).

Question 2: *What are the implications of divine blessings for a believer?*

The inestimable volume and value of the eternal treasures in Christ make believers not to feel inferior to unbelievers whose earthly possessions are perishable. Unbelievers should be pitied because earthly resources are limited but spiritual blessings are unlimited. Besides, the tenure of enjoyment of earthly resources is transient while spiritual blessings

are timeless and eternal. And, no matter how wealthy a sinner may be or how long he subsists on earth, he will end up in hell if he does not repent. It is also obvious that earthly wealth is vulnerable to attacks by nature, demons and robbers, but spiritual blessings are secured by the blessed Trinity (Psalm 37:16-19; 84:11; Isaiah 32:17,18; Matthew 19:29). Though we may have moments of pain or lack, God has given us all blessings for a successful, satisfying Christian life. Therefore, whatever our present condition, we should rejoice that we are not spiritual orphans, pitiable objects or ridiculous creatures. Rather, we should rejoice at all times (Philippians 4:4-7,19).

BENEFITTING FROM CHRIST'S TREASURES
(Ephesians 1:8,9; 1 Corinthians 9:27; 2 Corinthians 6:1; Galatians 2:15-21; Ephesians 4:27-32; 2 Timothy 1:13,14; 2 Peter 1:3-10)

“Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself” (Ephesians 1:9). God’s plan for the world could not be fully understood until Christ rose from the dead. His purpose for sending Christ was to unite Jews and Gentiles in one body with Christ as the Head. Just as God predestined Old Testament Israel to be His people by virtue of His covenant with Abraham, even so are New Testament saints adopted as His children through Christ. In a practical sense, no one becomes a member of God’s family by nativity but by faith in Christ (Galatians 2:15,16). Therefore, regardless of parentage, nationality or religious background, anyone can partake of these benefits as soon as he meets the terms and conditions.

Question 3: *Highlight the conditions for partaking in Christ’s provision.*

The blessings of God through Christ are not for nominal professors of religion. Partaking of them is not based on regular church activities, righteous deeds, fervent labour or morality (Galatians 1:13-16). They are meant for those who possess genuine experience of salvation. Though our reconciliation was initiated by God, everyone must key into God’s provisions in

Christ through repentance from all sins and faith in the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

Besides, those who have appropriated God's grace must be diligent to preserve it. To avoid losing the salvation experience, carelessness, over-confidence, compromise, and sinful attitudes that grieve the Spirit must be kept at bay. Believers must live and serve God with fervent love in constant readiness and expectation of the Master's return (Matthew 24:45-47).

CONSEQUENCE OF BELIEVERS' ENRICHMENT IN CHRIST (Ephesians 1:11-14; Isaiah 43:21; Luke 2:14; 1 Corinthians 4:1,2; Philippians 1:11; 1 Peter 2:9; 4:11)

"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ" (Ephesians 1:11,12). Christians must take cognisance of the nature, source and purpose of God's blessings. They are not expressible in terms of currency of any nation. Though it is not unscriptural for believers to physically prosper here on earth, the Apostle's emphasis in the text is on spiritual enrichment.

God is the Source of true riches and His purpose is that **"we should be holy and without blame before him in love"** (Ephesians 1:4). It is to reveal the possibilities of grace to the world so that God might be praised and men might submit to the offer of His grace.

"To the praise of his glory" appears to be a consistent refrain in the text. It is meant to extend the grace that transformed us to others to the intent that unbelievers too may be illuminated, liberated and justified to the glory of the Lord.

Question 4: *How can contemporary believers profitably deploy the riches of Christ?*

As the Ephesian believers were **"...faithful in Christ..."**, so should contemporary Christians be. We should be

faithful to keep the whole doctrine of the Bible and contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. As stewards of the manifold grace and riches of God, we should hold all we have in trust for Him.

Therefore, our primary concern must be to use our whole being and resources to project His purpose. We should give financially and materially to sponsor programs that will expand God's kingdom. We should also communicate our wealth of knowledge of His love, mercy and provision to others by participating in soul-winning activities.

Lesson 722

INTERCESSION FOR BELIEVERS’ SPIRITUAL GROWTH

MEMORY VERSE: “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” (Ephesians 1:17).

TEXT: Ephesians 1:15-23

As a divinely-ordained apostle, Paul was always in the habit of interceding for the church. He never hid his care and concern for the physical and spiritual welfare of the brethren. This is revealed in many of his epistles to the churches, and it forms the thrust of our text of study.

The Apostle’s intercession for the spiritual welfare and growth of believers at Ephesus was not out of place when viewed against the backdrop of the city’s history. Ephesus was the capital and leading business centre of the Roman province of Asia Minor (now part of present-day Turkey). It was a hub of land and sea transportation and ranked with Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt as one of the great commercial cities on the Mediterranean Sea. It was said to be a centre of black magic and occult practices. The people sought spells to give them wealth, happiness and success in marriage and business. Superstition and sorcery were commonplace. The temple of Diana or Artemis, the great goddess of fertility and one of the seven wonders of the ancient world was domiciled in Ephesus. In spite of these damning features, when Paul “**assuredly** [gathered] **that the Lord had called** [them] **for to preach the gospel unto them**”, he set sail and became an apostle to the Ephesians (Acts 19:1-20).

Through Paul’s ministry, the Ephesian disciples were taught the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20); they experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7); from Ephesus, the word of God spread through Asia Minor (Acts 19:8-10); special miracles were wrought,

deceivers were exposed and confounded (Act 19:13-17); great revival, characterized with a tremendous growth of the word, broke out in the city (Acts 19:18-20).

Question 1: *Why was Paul's intercession for the Ephesian believers' spiritual growth paramount to him?*

THE CONSOLATION AND CONCERN OF THE APOSTLE FOR BELIEVERS' SPIRITUAL GROWTH: (Ephesians 1:15,16; 1 Corinthians 1:4-6; 2 Corinthians 1:2-7; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2)

"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:15,16).

The Apostle was comforted to know that his labour was not in vain at Ephesus. Having heard of the brethren's faith in Christ, he was glad that the word of God they preached had produced **"fruits meet for repentance"**. These fruits were evidenced in their **"love unto all saints"**. Love is one of the proofs of genuine conversion and the fulcrum of true Christianity. No one can lay claim to genuine conversion to Christ without proof of Christ-like love. 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 provide a fitting resumé of the properties of Christ-like love.

Paul was glad at the news of the Ephesian brethren's conversion, steadfastness and faith, and these caused him continual thanksgiving and prayer to God. He was moved to make specific mention of them in his prayers.

Question 2: *What challenge does the Apostle's lifestyle pose to present-day leaders and ministers?*

Interceding for the brethren was part of Paul's ministry style. For the Corinthians, he said, **"I thank God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given to you by Jesus Christ"** (1 Corinthians 1:4).

For the Philippians, he prayed, **“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy...”** (Philippians 1:3,4).

Question 3: Point out how believers can be concerned for the spiritual welfare of fellow believers.

Rather than spend precious time gossiping and backbiting over the shortcomings of fellow brethren, believers should spend time to pray for one another. The devil and the world are at war against believers and the kingdom of God and the only way we can defeat them is to pray. We should spend quality time to wage spiritual war against the kingdom of darkness than busy ourselves doing the devil’s business. Through prayer, we will not only ensure constant victory for the body of Christ, we will also be better armed for end-time harvest of souls.

THE COMMUNION AND CONTENT OF THE APOSTLE’S PRAYER FOR BELIEVERS’ SPIRITUAL GROWTH (Ephesians 1:17-23; 3:14-19; 2 Thessalonians 3:1)

Having taken it as a personal responsibility to pray for believers in Ephesus, succeeding verses of our text delve into the specifics of the Apostle’s prayer and desire for the church, **“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him”** (Ephesians 1:17). Wisdom is a necessity in the Christian walk. We need wisdom to defeat the enemy to his antics and escape his snares. Wisdom helps us to prioritise our lives and put emphasis on things that matter, both here and for eternity. It ensures that believers **“walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise”** (Ephesians 5:15), redeeming the time because the days are evil. Those who lack divine wisdom may take certain foolish decisions that may be injurious to their faith. We need to be indwelt with the spirit of wisdom. Wisdom is the principal thing (Proverbs 4:7).

Two, Paul speaks of a growing revelation of the knowledge of Christ. Believers need to grow in grace

and in the knowledge of Christ. Deeper insight into the truth and mysteries of the kingdom will lead to deeper communion with Christ. It will ensure that we are stable, steadfast and sound, not deceived or led into error.

Three, there is need for enlightenment. When the eyes of our understanding are enlightened, we shall be able **“to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God”** (Ephesians 3:18,19). This will lead to knowledge of the hope of God’s calling and riches towards His children. It will further help us to understand the depth of spiritual power at our disposal.

Four, the Apostle prayed for an exposition of the saint’s inheritance in Christ. If only believers understood their exalted place and position in Christ, a privilege that places them far above principalities and powers, gives them dominion over situations and circumstances, grants them unfettered access to the commonwealth of Israel, admits them into the presence of the Almighty and offers them the benefits and blessings of Abraham, they would do greater exploits for God.

Five, building confidence in the exceeding greatness of the Saviour’s power (verse 19).

Question 4: What lesson can we draw from Paul’s pattern of prayer?

From the content of the Apostle’s prayer, we understand that emphases and priorities are misplaced today in the volume of prayers emanating from many pulpits. Our emphasis should be on the spiritual, not the mundane. We should desire more of the knowledge of Christ, not on mysteries of the kingdom of darkness which hold little profit. Revelation of the power, grace, glory and riches of Christ will imbue believers with strength, power and authority to run the race that is set before them. Knowledge of the workings of dark powers only engenders fear, timidity and cowardice. Christians should seek to know more of Christ than of Satan.

CHRIST'S EXALTED POSITION AND THE CHURCH'S STABILITY (Ephesians 1:20-23; Philippians 2:9; Colossians 1:16-19; 2:8-10)

Christ's resurrection from the dead placed Him **"far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come"** (Ephesians 1:21). He became the mediator between God and man, in which state of exaltation He transacts all the affairs of His Church and rules the universe. He is set at God's own right hand in the heavenly places. This right hand is a place of honour, power and authority. **"All things are under his feet"** and the Father has given Him **"to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all"** (Ephesians 1:22,23). Christ is the Head of the Church. Through Him, every believer receives life and light. Saints must then be fully attached to Him in order to survive temptations, trials and challenges of life (John 15:5).

Question 5: *In the light of this truth, how can the believer grow spiritually and become stable in Christ?*

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is applicable to believers today. We can experience the contents of his desire if we abide in Christ, knowing that without Him we can do nothing. The Lord expects us to abound in the knowledge of His will, walking daily according to the revelation of His word, remain faithful, serving in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives. As believers in God's economy of grace, we are expected to grow in all ramifications and His abiding Spirit working in us to fulfil His will and purpose for our lives.

Lesson 723

SALVATION BY GRACE

MEMORY VERSE: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

TEXT: Ephesians 2:1-22

The truth that Christ is the Source of all spiritual blessings the believer enjoys in life and in eternity was the focus of the last chapter of the book of Ephesians. Without His sacrifice and subsequent resurrection, humanity would have been lost. It is obvious that no one can enjoy or be enriched with spiritual blessings without the foundational experience of salvation.

Salvation, in a general sense, means deliverance from evil, danger and destruction. The Scripture refers to the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage and servitude in Egypt as salvation (Exodus 14:13). In a spiritual sense, it is deliverance or freedom from sin, its pollution, guilt and consequences (present and eternal) accomplished by Christ’s sacrifice at Calvary (Hebrews 2:3). Though the Scripture talks about a future, final salvation when redeemed people will be taken to heaven (Acts 15:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 9:28; Matthew 10:22), our focus in this study is salvation as a present experience (Luke 1:69; 2:30; John 10:9; Acts 4:12; Hebrews 5:9).

Question 1: *Explain the meaning of salvation and grace.*

Paul the apostle emphasized repeatedly in the text that God’s salvation is by grace. Grace means the infinite love, mercy, favor and goodwill God has shown to humanity by giving Jesus Christ His Son to die for our salvation. Though accomplished by Christ’s unmerited love for all people, salvation is an instantaneous experience that God grants only to those who genuinely repent of their sins (Acts 15:11; Romans 3:24; 5:15; 11:6; Ephesians 2:5; Titus 2:11; 3:7). His word, the gospel, is the means of grace

that brings salvation to everyone in the world (Titus 2:11,12; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 15:2; 2 Titus 3:15).

THE PITIABLE PLIGHT OF SINNERS IN THE WORLD: (Ephesians 2:1-3,11,12; John 8:34; Luke 15:24)

The Scripture states clearly that a sinner is spiritually dead and separated from God. This is different from physical death. Physical death is the cessation of all vital functions or processes in an organism or cell. And when this occurs, the dead is separated from loved ones; all means of interaction and fellowship are cut off. The father of the returning prodigal son affirmed this truth that one can be alive but spiritually dead. **“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”** This is how God still considers all sinners today. **“But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth”** (1 Timothy 5:6).

Question 2: *How can believers identify people who are spiritually dead?*

People who are spiritually dead live in sin; they indulge in habits that hurt them. Christ describes such people as servants or slaves to sin. **“Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin”** (John 8:34). As slaves, they are controlled by the lifestyle of the world dictated by Satan, the god of this world. He, the **“prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”**, inspires evil thoughts, controls and influences them to act contrary to the will and word of God. This spirit of disobedience at work in the spiritually dead makes sinners see sin as good and pleasurable, having been blinded from seeing the deadly consequences ahead. Their minds have been infiltrated with ungodly passions and pursuit of the mundane things of life that they hardly think about God. Prior to salvation, Paul the apostle affirmed the universal sinful state of all men that: **“we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature**

the children of wrath, even as others". Sinners lust after the flesh, indulge in fleshly pleasures and mind self as "**children of disobedience**" who will, without repentance, become the "**children of wrath**".

Worse still, sinners live without any hope of a blissful eternity. Their hopelessness stems from the fact that they live in this evil world without having God as Helper, Healer, Deliverer, Provider and Refuge in critical times of life. What a pitiable life of misery at the mercy of the cruel prince of this world!

SALVATION THROUGH GOD'S GRACE (Ephesians 2:4- 10,13; Romans 5:6,8;6:1,2,18,20)

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)" (Ephesians 2:4,5).

The dead do not have power of life to resuscitate themselves. The same applies to those who are dead in sin. It was in this state of spiritual incapacitation, "**when we were yet without strength**" that divine love and benevolence manifested to revive us. "**God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us**". Through His death and resurrection, He provided for the spiritual resurrection, quickening or regeneration of people who are dead in sin. The power that raised Christ to life is the same that enlivens sinners from deadness to life.

Considering the utter impossibility of the spiritually dead to free themselves from the power of sin and Satan, he concluded that "**by grace are ye saved**". Grace has been spelt as *God's Riches At Christ's Expense*.

Question 3: Why is salvation by the grace of God?

Salvation is a gift fully paid for by Christ for everyone (Isaiah 55:1; John 3:16; 4:10; Romans 3:24; 5:15; 6:23; 8:32; 2 Corinthians 9:15; Ephesians 2:8; Revelation 22:17). He invites all people irrespective of religious affiliations, social strata and race to receive

it by faith. No one can save himself from sin and Satan; neither can the combined efforts of men achieve it. No sacrifice can appease Satan to release his captives.

Besides, there is no other sacrifice that can atone for man's sins and fulfil the demand of God's justice. Religious rites – partaking of sacrament, tithing, attending fellowship regularly, singing in the choir, preaching the gospel, almsgiving, helping the needy, etc. – are works that cannot save anyone. It is only God that has power to save. **“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else”** (Isaiah 45:22). All He requires is for the sinner to come the way he is, repent of sin, accept Christ's sacrifice for our salvation, ask for pardon and cleansing by the blood of Christ and invite Him into his heart as personal Lord and Savior. Then, God will save him and lift him from the life of sin to the limitless liberty and privileged position in Christ. Though everyone needs it, it is only those who ask for the experience that will have it (1 Chronicles 16:35; Psalms 31:16; 54:1; 86:7; 106:4; 119:41; Acts 16:30).

Question 4: *Explain the benefits of being saved by grace.*

Saved by grace, God lifts the believer into a privileged position of freedom, favor and fellowship with Christ. **“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”**. He grants grace to those who are saved not to continue in sin and defeat but to live victoriously in Christ. Recipients of God's grace reign in righteousness; they do not have remnants of sins they give excuses on why they could not overcome. United with Christ, believers sit in the exalted heavenly places in Him. They **“seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God”** and **“Set [their] affection on things above, not on things on the earth”** (Colossians 3:1,2).

THE PURPOSE OF TRANSFORMATION BY GRACE (Ephesians 2:10; Matthew 5:16; John 10:32; Acts 10:38; Titus 2:14; 2 Timothy 3:17; Titus 3:8)

Paul the apostle enlightened the Ephesian and present-day believers that God has a design for freeing people from bondage to sin and Satan. God “**created [us] in Christ Jesus unto good works, which [He] hath before ordained that we should walk in them**”. Everyone whom God saves by grace He empowers to do good works. He expects all believers to unceasingly do good works as evidence that they have tasted of His grace.

Question 5: *What is God’s purpose for saving us by grace?*

Christ teaches that all believers should show good works so that men will be overawed by the power of grace and light and give glory to God. He demonstrated His message by showing us “**many good works**” (John 10:32; Acts 10:38). He died to redeem and purify us to be zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). The Scripture was given to make all servants of God perfect, “**thoroughly furnished unto all good works**” (2 Timothy 3:17).

Lest anyone claim ignorance of what constitute good works, Christ shows in Matthew 25:35-40 what God expects us to do. These include feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty physically and spiritually. It includes providing shelter for strangers and the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and prisoners and ministering to others.

In this regard, Dorcas was a model “**full of good works and almsdeeds**” (Acts 9:36). All women and widows who profess godliness must prioritize on showing good works such as upbringing of children, lodging of strangers, washing the saints’ feet and relieving the afflicted (1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10). Wealthy believers are not exempted; they are to “**be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate**” (1 Timothy 6:18). Ministers like Titus are admonished to be “**a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity**” (Titus 2:7).

No believer is excluded. In fact, Paul the apostle who also did good works specifically instructed Titus to **“affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men”** (Titus 3:8).

Believers need to challenge one another to love and good works which they must show with attributes of meekness, wisdom and knowledge (Hebrews 10:24; James 3:13). All believers must **“learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful”** (Titus 3:14). Without good works, the Christian life will be unattractive, abstract, barren and useless.

CHRIST’S SACRIFICE AND BELIEVERS’ SPIRITUAL PROGRESS (Ephesians 2:13-22; Romans 10:9,10,13; 5:9; Colossians 3:1-15; Acts 10:28; 20:32; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Romans 12:1,2; Hebrews 12:14)

Since the grace and salvation of God are for all people irrespective of tribe, race, gender and social status, Jews and Gentiles are now being saved only by faith in Christ. They are also cleansed by **“the blood of Christ”** and brought into relationship and fellowship with Him.

Question 6: *Explain the meaning and implication of the “middle wall of partition” which Christ has broken down.*

In God’s past dealings, the Gentiles were considered distant, alien, **“far off”** while the Jews were close or **“nigh”** (Ephesians 2:1,12,17). Divine dealings with the patriarchs yielded the covenant of circumcision regarded as a mark of their peculiarity which, albeit, foreshadowed the better covenant in Christ. Besides, the law God gave the Jews distinguished them from other nations of the world. In line with this divine prescription or ‘middle wall of partition’, the Samaritan woman acknowledged while talking with Christ that **“the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans”** (John 4:9). Peter the apostle also affirmed to congregants in Cornelius’ house **“...that it**

is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28). But now, God has collapsed the dividing line between the Jews and Gentiles. The point is that the long-standing physical, religious or spiritual wall of partition had been abolished by Christ. Furthermore, *all* redeemed believers have access to the Father by the same Spirit of Christ. Affirming the equal status of Jews and Gentiles on the same platform in Christ, he declared: **"ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God"** (Ephesians 2:19). Once a person receives salvation by grace, he has the privilege of being built up. As he continues with regular intake of **"the word of his grace, which is able to build [him] up..."** (Acts 20:32), he grows to become **"an holy temple... for an habitation of God through the Spirit"**. God saves us by grace to make or build us up as holy temples He will indwell and empower to fulfil His purpose on earth.

Essentially, people who have experienced the grace of God are no longer dead in sin; they are elevated into a privileged position in Christ where it is natural to live a righteous life and show good works; where peace, love, fellowship and unity reign; where there is unhindered access to God in prayer by the Spirit; and where it is possible for the believer to grow in holiness and be built up as a spiritual temple of God.

Lesson 724

MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH REVEALED

MEMORY VERSE: “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:8,9).

TEXT: Ephesians 3:1-21

Paul the apostle established the truth that salvation is by God’s grace and can be obtained by both Jews and Gentiles through faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8,9). As an erstwhile persecutor of the early church, he only merited God’s wrath. But after his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus, he obtained mercy and became His servant. Though there were disciples and apostles before his conversion, God chose to reveal hidden truths of the Church to him. Obviously, God’s eternal purpose is always accomplished through whosoever He chooses.

Question 1: *What can believers learn from Paul’s frontline position in the knowledge of the gospel?*

Paul’s experience shows that our heavenly Father holds the prerogative of choice. He alone decides who to assign to fulfil His purpose on earth. He may appoint the younger to lead the elder if He deems it fit. Accordingly, the vilest sinner who repents and comes to the knowledge of Christ can aspire to become the best of His saints.

SELFLESSNESS AND TENACITY OF A DEDICATED APOSTLE (Ephesians 3:1, 14; Romans 5:3; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 2:25; Titus 3:8; Matthew 6:33)

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (verse 1). The phrase **“for this cause,”** is a reference to what the Apostle had been saying in the preceding chapter concerning the new position

of privilege which believing Gentiles now occupy as a result of their faith in and union with Christ. By introducing himself as a **“prisoner of Jesus Christ”** instead of a prisoner of Rome, the Apostle portrays his unconditional loyalty to Christ and acceptance of the suffering his commission would bring. Christian workers who sometimes grumble because of the sacrifices their calling in Christ imposes on them should learn from the Apostle. **“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake”** (Philippians 1:29).

Question 2: From Paul’s example, what should be the attitude of Christian servants who are suffering persecution?

Though written from a Roman prison, Paul’s letter does not portray any feeling of self-pity or defeat. On the contrary, it is an expression of a growing concern and prayer for the Ephesian believers. While under harsh conditions, he busied himself praying that the church might be enabled to live and behave as those who had received God’s grace. **“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (verse 14; Romans 1:9; Philippians 1:4; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2). His example teaches us that when we suffer persecution or other adversities, we should not quit praying for the spiritual well-being of fellow believers. The Apostle knew that all instruction, preaching or teaching would be ineffective and fruitless without God’s grace and power in the hearers. Therefore, those who would excel in winning souls for the Lord must excel in fervent prayers.

Sadly, the emphasis the word of God places on Christ-like conduct and character is not reflected in the ambition and prayer of many believers today. The craving for material blessings, financial prosperity, promotion, marriage, having children, etc. has taken over the place of priority in prayer that Jesus and Paul reserved for deep-seated spiritually and righteous character. Christ’s command is, **“seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all**

these things shall be added unto you”(Matthew 6:33).

While in prison, Paul also used the opportunity to communicate the gospel through his epistles, not only to his immediate audience, but the world. That was why he said, **“Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound”** (2 Timothy 2:9). Believers suffering intense persecution should maintain their love and loyalty to Christ, pray for grace to maintain Christ-like disposition, intercede for other believers and communicate the gospel.

REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH:
(Ephesians 3:2-6; Isaiah 49:6; 56:6,7; Genesis 22:18; Acts 10:9-45; 11:118)

“How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery... That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs and of the same body, and partakers of his promises in Christ by the gospel”(Ephesians 3:3,6). Almost everything recorded in the Old Testament centres on God’s dealing with Israel. They had an unrivalled privilege and advantage over other nations. To think that God would have as much interest in the Gentiles was inconceivable to any Old Testament Jew. Though there were types and pictures of the universality of God’s concern for man, His plan to bring both Jews and Gentiles on equal platform of salvation by grace through faith in Christ was kept hidden.

Some Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah, did predict the call of the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6; 56:6,7) but it was not so clear that the Gentiles would be joint members of the same body with the Jews. The equality of the Jews and Gentiles in Christ was not an afterthought by God but was designed in His eternal counsel from the beginning. This all-inclusive purpose of God in Christ was part of God’s promise to Abraham. **“And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice”** (Genesis 22:18). It however remained a mystery as the fact, manner, means and time of its fulfilment was not revealed until the New Testament dispensation.

Question 3: *In your own words, explain the mystery of the Church.*

The mystery of the Church is also called the mystery of Christ because it was revealed by Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:12). It is **“the unsearchable riches of Christ”, “the manifold wisdom of God” and “the eternal purpose which [God] purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord”** to make Gentiles beneficiaries of His unmerited favor and grace. The conversion and incorporation of the Gentiles into the body of Christ is a privilege for which we must be eternally grateful. For a people who had been sold to dumb idols, without God and hope, groping in darkness, to have a privilege of relationship with God is marvelous.

This mystery is the will and pleasure of God for which Christ died, rose and ascended to heaven (Ephesians 1:9; 1 Timothy 3:16). Its practical fulfilment is in sinners hearing and receiving the universal gospel and having Christ dwelling in them as Lord and Savior by faith (Colossians 1:27), living a godly life (Colossians 2:2; 1 Timothy 3:9,16), preaching the gospel to others (Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:3); and readiness for glorification through death or rapture (1 Corinthians 2:7; 15:51-53).

The crux of the revealed mystery is that every Jew who receives Christ is an equal member and equal partaker of God’s promise in Christ; **“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him”** (Romans 10:12).

It is interesting to note also that Paul did not claim that he was the only person in the New Testament to have received this revelation. Concerning it, he says: **“Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, ...is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit”** (verse 5). It would be recalled that Peter’s visit and preaching at Cornelius’ house was predicated on the revelation from God that he should not call the Gentiles unclean and deny them the privilege of salvation through the gospel.

However, he was at the forefront in transmitting it to the Gentiles of his day and to succeeding generation through his preaching and epistles.

MINISTRY OF A COMMISSIONED MINISTER: (Ephesians 3:7-13; Acts 9:4-6,15,16; 26:13-20; 1 Timothy 1:12,16; 1 Corinthians 15:3,4; Mark 16:15,16)

The Apostle describes his ministry to the Gentiles and the special revelation he was given as a “**gift of the grace of God**”. He sees himself as highly favoured in being selected for this revelation and for disseminating its truth. His appreciation of the greatness of the grace of God led him to see himself as “**the least of the apostles**”. Paul’s sense of unworthiness and humility was deepened when he remembered his past misdeeds as a persecutor of Christ’s disciples (Acts 9:4). As he explained in his epistle to Timothy, this undeserved favor was to serve as a pattern of God’s willingness to save the vilest of sinners who genuinely repents (1 Timothy 1:16).

Question 4: *What responsibility does knowledge of the mystery of Christ bring upon believers today?*

The Apostle clarified that the mystery, now revealed, should no longer be hoarded or kept secret but be made known unto all men - Jews and Gentiles alike. Those who have received the revelation have a responsibility to share it with others. The Apostle said he was called by Christ, “**that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ**”.

Like Paul the apostle, every believer has been commissioned to spread the good news of God’s mercy and grace to people of all races (Mark 16:15,16).

INTERCESSION FOR IMPACT OF THE REVEALED MYSTERY ON BELIEVERS (Ephesians 3:14-21; Galatians 4:19; Philipians 1:4,9-11; Colossians 1:9-11; 4:12)

Concerns for the fruit of God's grace and power of the gospel in the lives of believers in Ephesus drove the Apostle to his knees for intercession. From the content of his prayer, the following lessons are obvious. One, we can stand, kneel, sit or walk while praying provided our hearts are bowed in humility and reverence before God (verse 14).

Two, God has just one family comprising blood-washed saints in heaven and on earth. Three, prayer is made to God through Christ by His family members. Thus, the universal Church has a common dependence upon Christ, **"Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named"** (verse 15). Spiritual blessings are to be more earnestly sought after in prayers.

Four, spiritual strength that makes new converts endure adverse situations and overcome temptations should form part of our intercession. Five, faith of believers grow with the consciousness that Christ dwells in their hearts if we pray for them (verse 17). Six, the need for believers to grow in knowledge of the broad dimensions and depth of love of Christ is a crucial point of prayer (verse 19).

Seven, the abundant life **"filled with all the fulness of God"** is the reason Christ died and rose again. The desire and prayer of Christian ministers for their flock should be that they possess all spiritual experiences and blessings of genuine salvation, sanctification, Spirit baptism, gifts of the Spirit, utterance and boldness in evangelism, etc.

The Apostle's prayer ended with the assurance that however great our needs or requests are, God is able to grant answers that surpass our expressed or unexpressed desires by His generosity, power and love. With this assurance, **"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"**(Hebrews 4:16). The assurance of receiving answers to prayer should also make us to rejoice in God's great power, praise and glory.

Question 5: *What do we learn from apostle Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church?*

Lesson 725

BELIEVERS' UNITY AND MINISTRY GIFTS

MEMORY VERSE: “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

TEXT: Ephesians 4:1-16

The epistle of Paul the apostle to the Ephesians reveals some striking metaphors about the church of Christ. He likened the church to a body (Ephesians 1:23), a temple (Ephesians 2:21), a new man (Ephesians 4:13, 24), a bride (Ephesians 5:25), and a soldier (Ephesians 6:11). The church consists of believers who are called out of the world to be like Christ and to belong to Him. This is the invisible church in our text illustrated with the human body to aptly explain unity in diversity and inter-dependence of all members.

In the first three chapters of the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul dealt with the doctrinal foundation of the new position and privileges of believers in Christ. But, as his usual practice, he shifted from doctrine to issues of practical lifestyle and responsibilities. He began by exhorting believers to endeavor to maintain unity despite their obvious and inevitable differences. In a normal body, all the members are not similar but they are connected and interdependent. Every part contributes something to the well-being and wholesome growth of the entire body.

In this study, the Apostle pointed out that the body, though composite in nature, gains its strength and maturity from the unity and contribution of its different parts.

Question 1: *Mention some metaphors Paul used to describe the Christian church.*

EXHORTATION TO A WORTHY WALK AND UNITY AMONG BELIEVERS: (Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:10; 3:14; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

The chapter begins with ‘therefore’. This is obviously in connection with the doctrinal revelations of the previous chapters where Paul explained God’s riches through Christ. In view of who believers are and what they have in Christ, they are exhorted to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called. Believers have a new position and relationship in Christ. They have redemption, forgiveness of sin, adoption, sonship, nearness to God and they are now joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. But all these would avail them nothing except they manifest a corresponding lifestyle of godliness. Doctrinal truth must result in a practical life of Christ-likeness.

A man’s calling or vocation refers to his trade through which he is known and obtains his daily bread. Believers are called out of sin, slavery to Satan, sentiments of society into salvation and service of the Savior. This calling is described as a holy calling (2 Timothy 1:9); high calling (Philippians 3:14), and heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1).

Question 2: *What are the marks of a worthy walk by believers?*

The Scripture shows that believers are to walk worthy of their calling by manifesting the virtues of lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance and love. Lowliness is humility and meekness; it is synonymous with gentleness. Both virtues are opposed to pride and insistence on one’s rights (Proverbs 16:19; Psalm 138:6). Walking worthy before God demands freedom from pride and the tendency to insist on one’s rights. A lowly and meek disposition makes a Christian willing to submit to others without struggling for position or recognition. It makes a person happy and content even when he is not the one leading the pack or when things are not going his way. In the world, lowliness and meekness are associated with weakness and timidity but in Christ, they are evidences of inner strength; proofs that one has his ego under control and deliberately chooses to avoid chaos and division in the body of Christ. A lowly and meek believer

will never overestimate his own contribution nor underestimate the contribution of others in the body of Christ.

Another characteristic of the worthy walk of believers is the virtue of longsuffering or patience with others. It goes hand in hand with tolerance and readiness to forbear with the wrongs or shortcomings of others. In the church, offences are inevitable because of individual differences of the members. We are different because of cultural, racial and social background. Our functions in the body of Christ are also different in some ways. Yet, the friction that could result from these differences would be overcome if the members are patient and tolerant. The virtues of longsuffering and forbearance are essential ingredients of unity in the church because they enable believers to live and function together without grudges or retaliation. An eminent Christian leader defined longsuffering as “the Spirit that has the power to take revenge but never does”; rather it forgives and forbears with the offences of others. In order to walk worthy, believers must have genuine love for one another, including those that appear to be unlovable simply because they are different or opposed to us. Love is the bond of perfectness and it is the binding force of lasting unity in the church. It covers a multitude of personal faults which would have resulted in fighting and division among the brethren. With the true love of Christ in the heart, believers can maintain the unity that promotes growth and effectiveness.

Question 3: *Mention some forms of unity that are contrary to the Scripture.*

When the Apostle enjoined believers to maintain unity of the Spirit, he is obviously not referring to unity in evil (Judges 20:12-14); unity in false doctrine and superstition; unity in achieving self-motivated goals, like at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9); unity in rebellion, like Korah, Dathan and Abiram; unity in political ambition or goals (2 Samuel 15:12); unity in covering sin like the family of Achan (Joshua

7:20-24); physical or artificial unity; or ecumenism – gathering all visible churches as one, regardless of creed.

The unity of believers is that which is based on truth, motivated by the Holy Spirit, in true love of God and for the fulfillment of His redemptive purpose. Unity that is borne out of love for God will never breed sin or division in the church. It is only when one member is pursuing a selfish ambition that wars, divisions and chaos come up (James 4:1).

To maintain scriptural unity in the church is compulsory and will require the effort and sacrifice of every member. To endeavor means effort must be exerted. There are many obstacles that will attempt to hinder unity but, without compromising the truth, we must pay the price to maintain spiritual unity.

Question 4: What are the seven reasons for unity mentioned by Paul in Ephesians 4?

Paul explained that there are strong reasons believers must remain united in Christ. First, **One Body**: The church is the body of Christ and each believer must be joined to remain a member of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27; Ephesians 5:30; John 15:1-5). Second, **One Spirit**: The same Holy Spirit saves and indwells every true believer (1 Corinthians 12:4). If we are indwelt and led by the same Holy Spirit, then we must be united. Third, **One Hope**: The ultimate hope of the believer is to be with the Lord forever and that should motivate us towards the same goal.

Fourth, **One Lord**: We serve the same Lord, Jesus Christ and there should be no conflict in service (1 Corinthians 12:5). Fifth, **One Faith**: All believers contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints and, as such, they should be on the same side with Jesus (Jude 1:3; 1 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Timothy 4:7). Sixth, **One Baptism**: Every believer is baptized into the body of Christ (Romans 6:3,4; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27,28). Seventh, **One God** who is the Father of all (Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 12:6). Children of the same Father belong to the same family and must be united.

EXPLANATION OF MINISTRY GIFTS AND THEIR PURPOSE (Ephesians 4:7-12; Psalm 68:18; 1 Corinthians 12:27,28)

The Apostle continued the exposition on unity of believers by pointing out that God appointed some ministry gifts in the church for the specific purpose of growing and maturing the body of Christ. He alluded to the victory of Jesus and His glorious ascension to heaven as the basis of the gifts He shared to believers. It was customary for victorious army commanders to distribute gifts to their soldiers after a conquest. Jesus conquered His foes and released those whom Satan held in captivity. He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. In this case, the gifts are actually ministers who are endowed with special abilities to nurture and develop the body of Christ.

Question 5: *State the purpose of the ministry gifts in the church.*

The ministry gifts are somewhat different from personal spiritual gifts. They are often referred to as the five-fold ministry gifts – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. These gifts are ministers and offices which the Holy Spirit gives to the church to develop the members and help them discover and use their personal spiritual gifts. The apostle, evangelist, prophet, pastor, teacher are gifts to the church for the purpose of edification, equipping for the work of the ministry, growing and maturing so they will no longer be spiritual babes, and fostering unity among believers.

The gift of an apostle refers to certain men called directly by Jesus Christ and they are given special authority to lay doctrinal foundation in the church. The basic qualification is that such must have ‘seen’ the Lord and received a direct commission from Him (Acts 1:21,22; 1 Corinthians 9:1). The original twelve apostles occupy a special class. But there were other apostles also (Acts 1:26; 14:14; Romans 16:7). An apostle manifests virtually all the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12; 15:7.

The prophet basically is a person who is gifted to speak unto men to edification, exhortation and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:1, 3-6; Romans 12:6). But in addition, prophets have supernatural ability to receive and declare a revelation from God about future events. So then, the ministry of a prophet includes speaking forth and foretelling (Matthew 13:14; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Revelation 1:3; Acts 11:28-29; 21:10,11). The ministry of a prophet should not be confused with clairvoyance, fortune-telling, and predicting future events by guess work or merely looking at the possible turn of events.

The evangelist is specially gifted to point sinners to Christ and challenge fellow believers to win souls. Though, evangelism is the ministry of every believer, the evangelist stands out in this area of ministry. They are more passionate, extraordinary and more successful in soul-winning (2 Timothy 4:5; Acts 8:4-12, 26-40; 21:8).

The pastor/teacher is endowed with a supernatural ability to communicate and clarify the details of God's word very clearly, and to lead the flock of God (2 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28). A pastor-teacher combines the qualities of a shepherd and the extra-ordinary skills of a trainer. He cares. He is able to teach and not likely to give upon any believer under his care. All teachers may not necessarily be pastors, but all pastors must be teachers.

EXPERIENCING GROWTH AND MATURITY THROUGH UNITY (Ephesians 4:13-16; Colossians 1:28; 2:4-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-5; 14:20; 2 Peter 3:18; 1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 John 4:1; Hosea 14:5-7)

The ultimate purpose of God is for every believer to grow and become mature in faith and in the knowledge of God. That is why He appointed the ministry gifts and endowed each believer with spiritual gifts for mutual edification. The gifted ministers are appointed to nurture, motivate and consolidate believers in the faith. Clearly then, the ministry gifts are not intended for showmanship or to promote

rivalry among ministries; neither are they meant to throw up certain individuals as super heroes in the church. God's plan is that the apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors and teachers will edify the believers and prepare them to do the work of the ministry. In other words, the believers are the ones to do the work of the ministry, while the ministers are to facilitate or lead them to discover, develop and use their gifts. Every member of Christ's body should function and contribute something to the growth and maturity of the entire body. No believer is useless, except those who refuse to discover or use their gift to benefit the church.

Question 6: What are the signs of spiritual immaturity and how can believers grow or mature in the Lord?

The evidences of immaturity are clearly implied in our text and stated in other parts of the Scripture. They are: inability to do the work of the ministry, disunity with other believers, instability, shallowness in the knowledge of God, indecision, lack of discernment and following every religious fad, blown by every wind of doctrine. When believers who ought to be teachers are still in need of tutelage, divided over mundane things and unnecessary traditions; or are unable to receive strong doctrine of God's word, they are manifesting spiritual immaturity (Ephesians 4:12-14; 1Corinthians 3:1-5; Galatians 4:1-3; Hebrews 5:12).

But God wants His people to grow and come to **“the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”** (Ephesians 4:13). The goal is that we all attain the full stature of Christ-likeness and become productive members of Christ's church. This growth will be achieved when the members unite in love, and stop deceiving or tearing one another down. **“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that**

which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:15,16).

No member can grow by remaining individualistic or severed from the body. Growth and maturity will take place only when believers remain united and contribute their own quota to the welfare of the Church.

Lesson 726

VISION FOR MISSIONS

MEMORY VERSE: “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

TEXT: Acts 16:1-15

The need for vision for missions is great in the Church today. A church without a vision is a church without a mission. A man of vision is the hope of the mass of lost sheep who await the good news of salvation.

Question 1: *Why do we need vision for missions today?*

All members of the church should be thoroughly and explicitly taught the subject of missions. We need to have a vision for missions today. The church needs to be a missionary church. The work of the church is not restricted to its immediate environs. It extends to “wherever there’s sun...”. Jesus died for the whole world; and the gospel is for the Greek, the Jew as well as the Barbarian. God wants every nation and culture reached. He expects converts from “**all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues**” (Revelation 7:9).

Question 2: *What place should missionary outreach occupy in the ministry of the church?*

The church should be a missionary church. God expects every Christian to be a missionary either involved with home or foreign missions. The church should be a witness of the saving power of Christ all over the world. The Christian faith is born out of missions, spread through missions and advanced through missions. A church that relegates missions to the background is without doubt in the woods as regards what constitutes the whole counsel of God.

Real Christianity is expansive not exclusive. The church that is not missionary will only succeed in building an empire around itself; it cannot grow. A church that has no vision for the salvation of the world cannot enjoy the full blessings of the Lord. The

church that reaches out to foreign field is the church that knows and does the perfect will of God. Obviously, not all may be called to the mission field but all can participate in the church's missionary project.

A MISSION'S COMMISSION (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19; Acts 9:15; 26:16,17)

Question 3: *How central is a mission to the Great Commission?*

Central to the ministries in the Bible is missions – a cross-cultural ministry to people in their own cultural and geographical setting. Mission is central to the charge of the Lord, generally called the Great Commission. The Church is commissioned to **“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations... Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature... ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”** (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8).

God recognises no national boundaries. He commands the Church to seek the lost either far or near. The Lord, before His ascension, was deeply concerned for His sheep who were outside the fold. He looked ahead to a fold composed of all people, races and tongues under one Shepherd. Paul, a man of no mean commitment, evinced a missionary spirit when he said: **“I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel... at Rome also”** (Romans 1:14,15). Today, there are “Macedonian calls” from Africa, America, Europe, Asia and Australia. And the Lord is saying, **“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”** (Isaiah 6:8).

THE CHURCH ON MISSION (Acts 10:9-22,34,35; 13:1-3; 15:40,41; Galatians 2:8)

In the early Church, the Lord showed His commitment to mission. He sent principal workers or key leaders out on missions. Paul's call and commission portray a strong bias for missions. Right from his conversion, the Lord unequivocally directed his mission to the

conversion of the Gentiles. **“But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel... But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee”** (Acts 9:15; 26:16,17).

Paul was sent as a veritable missionary to the Gentiles. The call was revitalised when later an angel of God appeared to him in a dream and directed him to go to Macedonia and there preach the gospel unto them (Acts 16:10).

Peter the Apostle, one of the pillars of the early Church also had a missionary call. Though he exclusively spent his life and ministry amongst the Jews, the Lord appeared to him in a vision and directed him to a Gentile community of Caesarea, the house of Cornelius. God has expressly shown His burden for missions by directly sending one of the apostles to the Gentiles.

Christ, in His post-resurrection manifestation, displayed great burden for souls outside His immediate geographical environment. He sent the Church not only to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria but also to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). When the Holy Spirit spoke to the Antioch church and asked for the separation of Saul and Barnabas, it was for the purpose of mission.

Paul was essentially burdened for the churches scattered all over the Gentile world and he mentioned this time and again. The unevangelised are yearning for an opportunity to hear the gospel message. The field is ripe and ready for harvest. Two thousand years after Jesus had shed His blood, billions of people are still in darkness. Will the church therefore sit on a rocking chair and fold her arms? That would be costly!

Communists, for example, do not shrink from making great personal sacrifices in the light of their assured future victory. They believe that they are seeking the good of mankind and therefore, are prepared to sacrifice anything for the realisation of their ambition. Ruskin, a secular art critic and writer, struck the right cord when he said: "He who has knowledge that is essential to the welfare of his fellow men is under solemn obligation to convey that knowledge to them. It makes no difference who those men are, or where they live, whether they are conscious of their need or how much inconvenience or expense he may incur in reaching them". What a challenge!

A truly spiritual church generally sees beyond her local borders. The Scriptures clearly teach that the gospel message should be taken to the whole world. Every recipient of the redemptive grace of God is indebted to those who are yet unevangelised. "Saved to serve" should be the slogan of every member of the church.

PLANNING FOR MISSIONS (Acts 9:3-9,15-20; 11:22-27; 13:1-3; 16:15)

The need for a carefully planned and wisely executed missions program cannot be over-emphasised. There is need for a comprehensive and vigorous missionary strategy in the church today.

A good proportion of the church's fund should be expended on missions. A church's vision for missions will determine its missionary burden and its missionary burden will determine its missionary budget. Christians who have been in their home countries all their lives may have to sacrifice leaving family, friends, acquaintances and bright prospects. The church too may often be faced with the choice of either retaining workers who have proven ability and dependable personality in their headquarters church, or sending them sacrificially to the mission field. Whatever is given for the cause of missionary outreach cannot be too costly. God had an only Son, yet He sent Him to the world as a missionary. When the church's vision for mission is brightened, God will

begin to direct the leadership of the church to set apart men for the work of mission as He did in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:2-4).

Question 4: *List important qualifications potential missionaries must possess.*

The believers who will bear the gospel to the ends of the earth should be people of deep commitment and persuasion. A true missionary does not go to another land out of desire for adventure, travel, new experiences or for the praise that comes to those who make unusual sacrifices. These motives will not sustain a missionary for a long period. Those who give to support missions should not be motivated by a spirit of competition or desire for praise. To do consistent and enduring missionary work, one needs to be committed to God, His cause, His Word and the Church. It is not enough to go out as a result of ecstasy or excitement about going to a foreign land. There is need for an unwavering purpose, a definite call and a Christ-centred motive in order to go through the vicissitudes of the mission field.

CALL TO THE MISSION FIELD (Acts 13:1-3; 16:9,10; 11:22-26; 2 Corinthians 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:5; Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17)

Question 5: *How can a believer receive the call to the mission field?*

A believer could receive God's direct call to the mission field. Observe the Lord's dealing with Paul who was one of the greatest missionaries in Church history. **"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them"** (Acts 16:9,10).

Another method of perceiving a missionary call is through the church leadership (Acts 13:2-4). The Lord can direct the persons that are to go to mission field through spiritual church leaders. Beside personal

revelation and the Spirit's leading through church leadership, one can have a persistent desire for or conviction as regards being called to the mission field. God can use any of these methods in calling us to the mission field.

Question 6: *What are the consequences of neglecting missions?*

The commitment to missions cannot be traded off. The Lord cannot tolerate a church that despises mission. There are grave consequences for neglect of missions. Jonah typifies one who neglected missions. He had no compassion for souls beyond his national borders. But God insisted on a missionary outreach to the over one hundred and twenty thousand souls at Nineveh. He showed Jonah that if he would go out on missions, the heathen will turn to Him in repentance. However, where His Church or ministers drag their feet or refuse outrightly, God frowns at it. A whale swallowed Jonah and only spewed him out after three days. Today, neglect of missions attracts the frown of God and unanswered prayers.

To faithfully carry out the work of missions, the Church should be committed to a consistent systematic and well-rounded missionary program. God will bless the church that has a worldwide vision towards reaching millions of people on the mission fields.

Lesson 727

FOLLOW-UP AND DISCIPLESHIP

MEMORY VERSE: “And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do” (Acts 15:36).

TEXT: Acts 14:21-28; 15:35,36,41

Follow-up is an important and an inseparable part of the Great Commission. Yet, many believers do not appreciate the depth of Christ’s command to “**go ye therefore, and teach all nations**” (Matthew 28:19). According to authorities in the Greek language, the original translation actually reads “**go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations**”. This Great Commission does not terminate with winning souls; rather, it continues with teaching and training them until they become mature enough to stand and teach others.

New believers must be completely cared for and helped until they are brought to spiritual maturity and fruitfulness. If every believer will resolve to respond to the Lord’s command to the Church, the work will be done within a short time. Indeed, the Great Commission demands that new converts, who have just come to the kingdom, be nourished and trained in the Scriptures for the establishment of their faith and full integration into the body of Christ.

What then is follow-up? Follow-up has been described as the conservation, maturation and multiplication of the fruits of evangelism. It is an essential part of church planting aimed at conserving new converts through consistent exposure to the truth of God’s word. It is affirmed to be the “spiritual paediatrics” of parenting in soul-winning, that is, the parental care given new converts to bring them up to spiritual maturity and fruitfulness. During follow-up, soul-winners are able to stand side by side with their converts and teach them the fundamentals of the Christian faith until they grow to maturity.

Question 1: Explain what is meant by ‘follow-up’.

NECESSITY OF FOLLOW-UP (Matthew 28:19; Acts 15:36; 14:21,22)

The new-birth experience is, no doubt, a marvelous one. But just as natural babes need feeding for growth and training for maturity, so do babes in Christ require the milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:2; Proverbs 4:11-13). For new Christians to attain the spiritual height that the soul-winner yearns for, they need to be **nourished** (John 21:15) with the word of God. It is the responsibility of the soul-winner to feed these “**lambs**” and “**sheep**” of Christ. Another is **encouragement** (Acts 14:21,22) during persecutions, because of their decision to follow Christ and times of harsh realities of life. They also need **guidance** and **instruction** (1 Corinthians 8:1-13) on how to overcome temptations. Although most of the converts’ questions may sound childish to mature believers, the soul-winner should be around to answer them. New converts also require **training** (Proverbs 22:6) on the fundamentals of the Christian faith and how to develop good Christian habits. One of the characteristics of new converts is the tendency to seek clarifications on various subjects regarding their new-found faith in areas such as choice of friends, restitutions, time- management, etc. They need to be guided appropriately because “**Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety**” (Proverbs 11:14).

Moreover, new converts need **intercessory prayer** (Luke 22:31,32; Colossians 1:3,4,9-11), an aspect of follow-up that must never be overlooked. Prayers must be offered without ceasing for these new babes. Paul’s letters to the new churches reveal the importance he placed on personal intercession. “**We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers... Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?**” (1 Thessalonians 1:2; 3:10). If we fail to pray for new converts, the enemy may take advantage of their ignorance. Finally, they need **fellowship** (Acts 2:42) even after they are established in the faith.

Follow-up takes time, attention and love. Each soul-winner is expected to give whatever it takes to conserve, mature and integrate each soul won to Christ. Every believer is called into the ministry of soul-winning and must not only win souls but also disciple them to become truly mature Christians.

Question 2: Why is follow-up very important to Christ and the Church?

METHODS OF FOLLOW-UP (Mark 3:14; Acts 14:21,22; Philippians 2:19-22; 1 Thessalonians 3:10)

Jesus Christ, the greatest soul-winner, evolved the best follow-up and discipleship methods. He kept His converts for a period of three-and-a-half years and taught them the word of God. Moreover, He trained them on various methods of evangelism. By this, we understand that after conversion, the soul-winner must endeavor to teach and train new converts so as to mature them and turn them to vessels for the expansion of God's kingdom. He or she can delegate the work of the ministry to them in areas they can be involved, but with close supervision to ensure that they do not derail.

Paul, the great soul-winner and church-planter, declared: **"But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us"** (1 Thessalonians 2:7,8). From his follow-up and discipleship training methods, we observe, first, his use of personal contact (1 Thessalonians 2:7,8; 3:10). He knew, like a parent to a new-born babe or a shepherd to the flock and a teacher to his students, that personal contact is essential. The closer the soul-winner is to his converts, the safer they are and the farther the wolves will be from them.

Second, intercessory prayer was another method adopted by the early church (Acts 12:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-6; 3:10). In his ministry, Paul spent much time interceding for new believers. Also, as Jesus prayed for

Peter that his faith should not fail (Luke 22:31,32), we should pray for new converts. A man of God once said that it is better to spend ten minutes praying for them everyday than to spend one hour praying for them in their crisis situation. Third, personal representatives (1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:19-24) can be sent to new converts where the soul-winner, their spiritual father or mother, is not able to personally reach them. For example, whenever Paul was unable to personally visit new believers, he would send a trusted personal representative, like Timothy, to help him do the necessary follow-up. The representative must be someone who shares the same vision and can convincingly pass the message to the young converts. However, that there could be delegation does not mean that the soul-winner should abdicate his or her responsibility. Fourth, in these days of information and communication technology, we can reach our converts through the electronic mail (e-mail), Internet, telephone, short-message-service (SMS), social networks and so on. Finally, letter-writing can be used to encourage, teach, warn and guide new converts (Acts 15:20,23-29; 2 Corinthians 13:10; 2 Peter 3:1; Luke 1:3,4). As parents are responsible for loving, feeding, protecting and training their children until they reach the age of maturity, so should soul-winners and church-planters handle new converts.

ESSENTIALS OF FOLLOW-UP (Matthew 25:34-40; 1 Thessalonians 2:7,8,11)

Shallow spiritual life and low standard of Christian living are the products of dearth of doctrinal teaching in many Christian assemblies. There are marked differences between a convert and a disciple. Our visitation therefore, must be purposeful and goal-oriented.

To instruct, nurture and mature new converts in the faith, firstly, we must make them understand the word of God that their sins have been forgiven and that they are now children of God if they have sincerely repented and accepted Christ (1 John 1:9; Romans 8:16). Secondly, we must teach them

how to live the new life and the principles of spiritual growth (Matthew 4:4; 1 Peter 2:1-3). Thirdly, we need to guide them on how to maintain a personal, private devotion (Quiet Time) everyday (Mark 1:35; Joshua 1:8). Fourthly, we need to encourage them to share their testimony with others (Mark 5:19; John 1:40-46; 4:28-30). Fifthly, we need to show them the importance of attending church services regularly (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 2:42-47). Moreover, we need to teach them the importance of maintaining a regular prayer life for strength and victory (Luke 18:1- 8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18).

Besides, follow-up progresses on the wheels of visitation and caring. It should not be done only when new believers come to church. Rather, we are to meet them where they are – home, work place, hospital wards or prison – and show genuine love and concern for their spiritual growth and physical welfare (Matthew 25:34- 40; 1 Thessalonians 2:7,8,11).

As soon as the salvation of the new convert is ascertained, he must be shown the importance of getting baptized in water. The new believer must be taught the significance of water baptism from the Scriptures. He must be made to realize that it is God's ordinance and command to be observed after conversion (Matthew 28:19; 3:13-17; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 8:38,39; Romans 6:4,5). Every new convert therefore should be enjoined to yield to this important injunction.

Question 3: *Why is it important to baptize new converts as soon as possible?*

CHURCH GROWTH THROUGH FOLLOW-UP AND DISCIPLESHIP (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2:1,2; Acts 11:25,26)

Follow-up and discipleship training have multiplier effects on the church; they equip members for the task of rapid evangelization. The urgent call for world evangelization will be mere day-dream without giving serious consideration to discipleship training. Only well- taught, serious-minded and heart-committed

disciples can shoulder the responsibility of leading others and pastoring the church. We cannot have capable hands to handle our new church locations except we give serious attention to the subject of discipleship.

Follow-up, if properly done, will lead to the multiplication of disciples. If, for example, each of us wins a soul and trains the convert to go out and win another soul every six months, in five years we would have evangelized our communities for Christ. If a hundred dedicated Christians in a community individually and devotedly preach the gospel to just one person and follow-up the converts vigorously for six months, at the end of the sixth month, there would be two hundred dedicated believers. If these two hundred dedicated Christians would, as well, get one convert each and disciple the same within six months, at the end of one year, there would be four hundred devoted Christians in that community. If this process of one person winning and discipling another person in six months were continued, at the end of the five years, the number would have grown to 102,400 membership without embarking on expensive religious crusades. Although souls that may be won from this method of evangelism might not seem to be many initially, the growth will be phenomenal if it is sustained. In the Scripture, John the Baptist led Andrew to Christ (John 1:35-40), and Andrew, in turn, led Peter to Christ (John 1:40-42), and Peter, at Pentecost, led 3,000 to Christ (Acts 2:37-41), and those converts of Peter led multitudes to Christ (Acts 11:19-21). It is only when we get to heaven that we will be able to ascertain the number of converts that came into the Kingdom through the ministry of John the Baptist.

Question 4: *What are the benefits of follow-up and discipleship?*

The mission of multiplication, evangelization, and gospel saturation can only be realized through the vision of disciple-making. Apostle Paul in his missionary endeavours, exemplified the challenge

of discipleship and breakthrough in evangelism (Acts 19:9,10). Spiritual training is a lifelong process. After the disciple has been integrated to the service of the Lord, this should not be seen as an end in itself. Further training for constant improvement will definitely be necessary.

Lesson 728

THE GREAT TRIBULATION AND THE ANTICHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21).

TEXT: Matthew 24:14-30; Daniel 9:24-27; Revelation 6:1-17; 13:1-18

The signs of the coming of Christ and the end of the world have been clearly revealed in the Scripture. In the whole body of truth on “the last things”, the teaching on the tribulation and the reign of the Antichrist stands out as an important event which all earnest Bible students should be thoroughly familiar with.

The Great Tribulation which will precede the final coming of Christ will not begin until after the Church has been raptured. In view of this, some believers may see no reason to be interested in the details of the Tribulation period. But the fact that not all professing believers will be raptured and that those who miss the rapture of ready and earnest saints will go through the throes of the Great Tribulation should make us eager to know the suffering that await such careless believers. Again, acquaintance with the troubles that await unsaved men and women (among whom are our country men, neighbors, friends and loved ones) should move us to rise up and rescue the perishing while we may.

Question 1: *What do you understand by the Great Tribulation?*

DESCRIPTION OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION: (Matthew 24:14-30; Revelation 6:1-17; Jeremiah 30:6,7; Joel 2:11,31; Zephaniah 1:14; Revelation 13:2)

The Great Tribulation will be the most awesome event in human history. It is crystal clear from biblical evidence that the event will witness the most intense

suffering in the history of the world. World wars I and II, inter-tribal wars, civil wars and all other wars in the history of human existence as well as all kinds of cataclysmic occurrence since the creation of man will fade into insignificance when compared with the Great Tribulation. It will be a period of unparalleled suffering, dreadful woe and frightening destruction. Although it is a time of universal trouble, yet the epicentre will be in Jerusalem and Palestine, which is why prophet Jeremiah referred to it as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7). It will be the climax of God’s cumulative and catastrophic judgment upon the world. The period is peculiarly the time when God’s wrath and judgment will fall upon the earth. It is also a time when Satan and the Antichrist will unleash woe and wickedness upon the inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 6:2-9).

The Great Tribulation has been called by Jeremiah, “**the time of Jacob’s trouble**” and it will indeed be a time of great trouble for the Jews and all the inhabitants of the world. No one will be able to buy, sell or earn a living without relinquishing all independence to the Antichrist. All will submit themselves before him in awe and wonder. The Great Tribulation will be a time of intense persecution for Israel and those who will stand for God and against the heresy of the Beast. However, the Great Tribulation will usher in a time of triumph for the Lord and His people.

PERSONALITY OF THE ANTICHRIST (Daniel 8:23-25; Thessalonians 2:8,9; Revelation 13:2-4)

The Antichrist will be the great personality behind the Great Tribulation. He is a personality that has been mentioned in several portions of the Scripture. Way back in the Old Testament, Daniel says: “**And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people.**”

And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand” (Daniel 8:23-25).

In the New Testament, we are told that the: **“Wicked [shall] be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders”** (2 Thessalonians 2:8,9). John, the apocalyptic seer, was given a glimpse of the man of sin, the ultimate and the final Antichrist who will be controlled by Satan. **“And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority”** (Revelation 13:2). Again, it says: **“they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?”** (Revelation 13:4). The power of the Antichrist will make him the idol of the world; **“and all the world wondered after the beast”** (Revelation 13:3).

DANIEL’S PROPHECY OF SEVENTY WEEKS
(Daniel 9:24-27; Nehemiah 2:5; Ephesians 3:5,6; Colossians 1:25-27; 2 Thessalonians 2:6-11)

The period of the Great Tribulation falls within Daniel’s seventieth week. Daniel’s prophecy spans a period of seventy weeks. A week in Daniel’s prophecy means seven years. Daniel’s seventy weeks therefore means four hundred and ninety years. The seventy weeks of Daniel’s prophecy are clearly demarcated into three; 7 weeks or 49 years for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25), 62 weeks or 434 years from the completion of the building of Jerusalem (at the end of the 49 years or 7 sevens) to the time the Messiah is revealed, and the last or seventieth week of the last seven years which has also been divided into two periods.

Daniel's prophecy concerning the seventy weeks shows the accuracy of biblical revelation on the teaching of eschatology. In the seven weeks or forty-nine years, Jerusalem was to be reconstructed or built again. In the sixty-two weeks or four hundred and thirty-four years, the Messiah would be cut off (that is, die or be crucified). Again, it was prophesied that the (wicked) prince that shall come shall destroy the city of Jerusalem. This happened in 70 A.D. when Roman soldiers under the leadership of General Titus invaded Jerusalem. Sixty-nine weeks (483 years) were to transpire between the edict to rebuild Jerusalem (after the Babylonian captivity) and the first advent of the Messiah. This prophecy was exactly fulfilled. From 445 B.C. (Nehemiah 2:5) when Artaxerxes issued a decree concerning the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, at the appeal of Nehemiah, to the time of the public advent of Christ the Messiah was exactly 483 years.

Question 2: Explain the three periods of Daniel's prophecy of seventy weeks.

Sixty-nine weeks out of Daniel's seventy weeks have been fulfilled while the last one (or the seventieth week) is yet to be fulfilled. The age in which we live, that is, the Church age, intervenes the time of the Messiah being cut off (or the sixty-ninth week) and the seventieth week. It is important to know at this juncture that the Church age was not directly predicted in the Old Testament. God's own program for the New Testament Church was unknown to the Old Testament prophets. The Bible calls the Church age program a mystery (Ephesians 3:5,6; Colossians 1:25-27). There are many prophets in the Old Testament that predicted the two advents of Christ without throwing any light on the intervening of the two events between them. However, this does not make this present age less significant. This age is significant in the heart of God and it was known to Him from the foundation of the world (Acts 15:18).

God's program with the Church will terminate at the time of the rapture and His program with Israel will continue until the Second Advent of Christ.

Question 3: *Describe the events preceding Daniel's seventieth week.*

It is clear therefore, that the Church age will usher in Daniel's seventieth week. Again, this shows the Rapture will usher in the period of the Great Tribulation and the revelation of the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:6-11).

Though the period of the Great Tribulation will be the darkest hour in human history, we should remember that "it is always darkest before the dawn". The man of sin will be allowed to do his work before God's day of righteousness and glory dawns. Sin and evil will be highly promoted and enhanced during the Great Tribulation. But they will not last forever. We must not forget that the Lord will come to catch away His people before the Great Tribulation begins (Isaiah 26:20; Revelation 4:1-6,7). This is why the Lord is seeking to save sinners and restore backsliders into fellowship with Him so they can escape this period of the Great Tribulation.

At the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation period, the Antichrist will enter into covenant with Israel. In the midst (middle) of this period, he will break the covenant to fulfil Daniel 12:11 and 2 Thessalonians 2:3-11. Thus, the Great Tribulation will start in earnest. The Beast will then persecute the Jews in the Great Tribulation for three and a half years: **"it shall be for a time, times and a half"** or **"a thousand, two hundred and ninety days"** (Daniel 12:7,11).

Question 4: *Why should everyone strive to make the Rapture and escape the Great Tribulation at all costs?*

The suffering of the Tribulation will be so gruesome that no believer should go through it. However, the Bible teaches that backslidden and careless believers who miss the Rapture will go through the Great Tribulation (Revelation 7:14). Although the tribulation saints will eventually be saved, it will depend on their ability to endure untold sufferings of the Tribulation period without compromise or denial of Christ. Those

who are watchful today will be part of the bride of Christ and they will be enjoying the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, while those who fail to make the Rapture but still profess faith in the Lord will languish in the tribulation here on earth.

THE ANTICHRIST AND THE APOSTATE CHURCH

(Daniel 11:36; 2 Thessalonians 2:4-12; Revelation 13:11-14)

Question 5: Who is the Antichrist and what will be his activities during the Great Tribulation?

The Antichrist will set himself as the only God and will demand worship of the people of the earth. Daniel prophesied: **“And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods...”** (Daniel 11:36). Paul the apostle also predicted that the Antichrist **“opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God”** (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

At the time of the Tribulation, the apostate (backslidden) church will succumb to the Beast’s regime. The false prophets will force the earth and all that dwell therein to worship the Antichrist (Revelation 13:12) in order to identify his followers and let the world know that he is being worshipped as God. The Antichrist will also compel them to have his inscription stamped on their right hands or foreheads. Some may say that they will never receive the mark of the Beast, but the Scripture tells us that those who reject the gospel now will be deceived by the Antichrist and will accept the mark of the beast. **“And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness”** (2 Thessalonians 2:11,12).

THE PRIORITY OF THE CHURCH (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; 2 Peter 2:10-14; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Revelation 14:15)

Question 6: *What responsibility has the knowledge of the Great Tribulation imposed upon the believer in Christ?*

True believers will not be present on the earth when the beast arises in full terror of his diabolic dictatorship. We are not looking for the coming of the Antichrist, but for the coming of Christ. The Second Coming of Christ is at hand. When sin has run its course, when mankind's cup of iniquity is full and when Satan has done his worst, then God will unleash fiery judgment on all workers of iniquity and the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our God (Revelation 11:15).

In view of all these, the Church should accelerate its evangelistic programs as never before to prepare saints for the coming of the Lord, to bring backsliders back into the fold and to usher multitudes of hopeless, perishing souls, who are at the valley of decision into the church. Now is the time to prepare for the Rapture – live the Christian life, pray and join the Lord in the harvest of souls.

Lesson 729

SAMUEL REPROVES ISRAEL

MEMORY VERSE: “...I will call unto the LORD, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king” (1 Samuel 12:17).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 12:1-25

Following the conquest of the Ammonites in the previous chapter, all the children of Israel approved and installed Saul as their king at Gilgal. While they and their new king rejoiced and offered peace offerings in that gathering, Samuel knew that all was not well with them. He knew the carnal and self-willed could have no true and lasting peace. Foreseeing the deadly consequences of their carnal choice, he made bold to reveal His mind to them even if that would interrupt their joy.

Question 1: *What can believers learn from Samuel's disposition towards Israel at Gilgal?*

Beginning with their ill-advised request for a king, Samuel reminded Israel at Gilgal that the institution of kingship was not as a result of any misdeed on his or God's part. Making allusion to God's constant response to their cry since the time of their fathers in Egypt, he reproved them for rejecting the kingship of God over them by demanding a king like other nations. Therefore, he counselled them and their king to fear, serve and obey God to avoid divine judgment. In order to convince them that they had displeased the Lord by their request, he prayed and God sent thunder and rain from heaven, even though it was time of harvest when the rains would have stopped. This made them to tremble and see the foolishness of their action. Believers should realize that self-will attracts divine displeasure. They should continue to put their trust in God, follow and obey Him wholeheartedly.

TESTIMONY OF CLEAR CONSCIENCE AND PURE LIFESTYLE (1 Samuel 12:1-5; John 14:30; Matthew

3:17; Mark 3:11; 5:7; John 18:38; 1 Corinthians 4:4; Acts 24:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:10; 1 Timothy 1:5,6,19; Hebrews 13:18; 1 Peter 3:21)

Samuel lived a righteous life from childhood after his dedication to the Lord by his parents. Having been taught by Eli on the proper manner of responding to the voice and instructions of God, he continued to walk consistently before Him (1 Samuel 3:9,10). At the time of this account, he had become old and grey-headed and was able to defend his innocence, clear conscience and godly lifestyle before them. **“...I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day”** (1 Samuel 12:2). With a clear conscience, he placed his life before them to be examined using some criteria that would leave many Christian servants laden with guilt should similar scrutiny be conducted on their character. He challenged them to bring out evidence of extortion, fraud, oppression and bribery against him. In fact, he was ready to make restitution if he had inadvertently defrauded,

oppressed or taken bribe from any of them.

Samuel believed in the necessity of having a clear conscience and making restitution where necessary. Like him, believers should live transparently and holy so that they can boldly stand and witness before anyone and anywhere (1 John 4:17; Proverbs 28:1). God wants our lives to be epistles of godliness and a pattern for others to emulate.

Question 2: *Why is it important for a believer to have a clear conscience towards God and man?*

Samuel possessed a simple, sincere and godly conscience free of offence and condemnation (Romans 2:15; 8:1; 2 Corinthians 1:12). Thus, he could call God and the new king (Saul) as witnesses. A good conscience is capable of assuring someone of good deeds or convict him of sin against God or man (John 8:9). Though it is possible to have a conscience of sins, a conscience of idols, a defiled conscience and a seared conscience (Hebrews 10:12; 1 Corinthians 8:7; Titus 1:15; 1 Timothy 4:2), believers are enjoined

to obtain and maintain a good and pure conscience void of offence toward God and man (1 Timothy 1:5,19; Hebrews 13:18; 1Peter 3:21; 1 Timothy 3:9; 2 Timothy 1:3).

The children of Israel affirmed the claim of Samuel that he had not defrauded, oppressed or taken bribes from them (1 Samuel 12:4). The testimony of Samuel challenges Christians to conduct themselves in a way that others can attest to their transparency. In leadership as well as daily relationships with others, believers should be unblameable and above reproach.

Christ teaches that He saves us to have godly lifestyles, not only in the secret but also in the open. He, therefore, commands that believers lead brighter lives that reprove as well as dispel the darkness of sin and evil (Matthew 5:14-16). Aside Christ's own testimony, the Father, demons and men declared our Lord was sinless and pure. Also, Paul the apostle lived a Christ-like life with a conscience void of offence toward God and man. Like Samuel, he called God and believers of his day as witnesses of his holy lifestyle. God expects believers to be **"...blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world "** (Philippians 2:15). If Samuel could be steadfast in righteousness from childhood till old age, present-day believers must pray for grace to be steadfast in holiness and service till the end of their lives. They must also commit themselves to winning children to the Lord.

SAMUEL REPROVES ISRAEL FOR INGRATITUDE TO GOD (1 Samuel 12:6-13; 1 Samuel 8:6-9; Psalm 103:1-5)

After testifying and obtaining affirmation that he led a righteous life before Israel, Samuel went further to prove that God had been gracious to them. He reminded them of the great mercies of God from the time of their preservation from famine in Egypt, to point out that their demand for a king was the height of ingratitude to God. Bidding them to **"stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD of all**

the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers” (1 Samuel 12:7), he rehearsed how Jacob with his descendants entered Egypt presumably on account of famine and was preserved. While in bondage in Egypt, their fathers cried unto God and He delivered them with a mighty hand through Moses and Aaron. Between their exodus from Egypt to settlement in Canaan, Samuel noted that they had been inconsistent in their relationship with God; they were fond of forgetting Him and consequently made the enemy nations to oppress them. Each time they realized and repented, God showed mercy and delivered them.

As part of God’s great mercies, Samuel enumerated leaders that He raised to deliver Israel and lead them on the part of righteousness. They included Moses, Aaron, Jerubbaal, Bedan, Jephthah and Samuel. He, therefore, reasoned that if God could deliver them from those mighty nations and from troubles, how would He not deliver them from Nahash? This reminiscence was to show God’s great kindness and unmerited favor towards Israel which they were not mindful to reciprocate. Believers sometimes behave like the children of Israel by taking decisions and actions on some important issues without prayer and counsel, which may have dire consequences.

Question 3: How should a believer handle rebuke from leaders?

Forgetting the past mercies and help of God, some believers complain, murmur and turn to human alternatives, like the children of Israel. Believers should show wholehearted gratitude and appreciation to God for the great and manifold blessings He gives us every time. Surely, our God is good.

Everyone can appreciate God by surrendering their lives to Christ and making Him their King. They can feed on His Word and give priority to living for Him all the days of their lives. They can also serve Him by showing love to other people, giving special offering for the progress of His work and winning souls into His kingdom. Israel cried to God when they were in

pains but rejected Him in their ease. Believers are to trust God and depend on Him at all times (Psalm 103:1-5).

Question 4: *In what ways can believers show gratitude to God?*

CONDITIONS FOR CONTINUED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (1 Samuel 12:14-25; Deuteronomy 10:21; 28:1-14; Psalm 126:2,3; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14)

After rebuking them for their ingratitude, Samuel prescribed the conditions for Israel's continued relationship with God. **"If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him and obey His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God: But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers** (1 Samuel 12:14,15).

Having a king over them did not exempt them from being loyal to the King of kings. Israel was to fear, serve and obey God with all their heart. The purpose of the rebuke was to make them see their folly so they could repent and wholeheartedly follow the Lord. Believers learn here that acknowledgment of one's sinful state often precedes repentance. The prodigal son first realised the error of running away from his father before returning home to seek forgiveness and restoration (Luke 15:17-20). Preachers should endeavor to make sinners and backsliders see their folly of rebelling against God and how to reconcile with Him. Everyone who reconciles with Him should recognize God's supremacy over their lives, submit to and obey Him in all things.

To confirm that their action was sinful and displeasing to God exceedingly, Samuel enjoined them to wait for a sign **"that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of God, in asking you a king. So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder**

and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel" (1 Samuel 12:17). God is committed to confirming the words and prayer of His servants who serve Him in holiness and righteousness.

It is cheering to note that the children of Israel responded quickly by repenting of their evil (1 Samuel 12:18). It is the same response God demands from those who have sinned against Him or done contrary to His will (Acts 17:30). We should not wait for Him to send "thunder and rain" before responding to His bidding. Sinners and backsliders should respond to God's call to salvation by repenting of their sin and mending their ways.

Following Israel's repentance, Samuel exhorted them not to fear but continue to follow and serve God with all their hearts. He specifically told them not to turn aside from following Him but refrain from vain things which do not profit. He further assured them that God would not forsake them (1 Samuel 12:21). Though God is always faithful to keep His words, we must abide in Him to enjoy divine preservation.

Samuel opined that it is sinful to fail to pray for and teach the laity. **"Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way"** (1 Samuel 12:23). Leaders should employ the weapon of ceaseless intercession for the congregation if they wish to see the presence and power of God in their lives. Prayers will open their eyes to the necessity of obtaining the basic Christian experiences of salvation, sanctification, Holy Ghost baptism, etc. The people of God should also be taught His undiluted Word so they could be built up and established in the grace of God and prepared for heaven. They must give themselves to prayer and ministry of the word so the church could be transformed and grow spiritually and numerically (Acts 6:4; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Question 5: *What impact would ceaseless prayers of leaders have on the work of the ministry?*

The kernel of the right way Samuel taught the children of Israel was: **“Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you”** (1 Samuel 12:24). They were required to fear the Lord. The reverential fear of God would make them depart from evil. The fear of God makes a person to hate and depart from evil (Proverbs 3:7; 8:13). They were also required to serve Him in truth; which means to always obey, love, speak and live by the truth of God’s word (1 Peter 1:22; Ephesians 4:15; Zechariah 8:16; Psalm 51:6; John 18:37; Psalm 119:30). Samuel also pointed out to Israel the way to reciprocate God’s great kindness towards them.

God has not changed: He requires wholehearted commitment and service from everyone He has saved. Anyone who reneges on his profession of repentance or fails to meet the conditions for continued relationship with Him risks divine wrath and judgment (1 Samuel 12:25).

Lesson 730

SAUL DISOBEYS THE LORD

MEMORY VERSE: “And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever” (1 Samuel 13:13).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 13:1-23

Samuel had reproved the children of Israel for rejecting God’s rule over them by demanding a human king like other nations, in the previous chapter.

In our text, the new king Saul found himself in a war situation and was expected to obey the Lord according to the words of Samuel. But he yielded to pressure and forced himself to offer sacrifices that should have been handled by Samuel. This marked the beginning of his fall as divine judgment was pronounced upon him. From his experience, believers learn that disobedience to divine directives has dire consequences while obedience attracts His blessings.

Question 1: *Mention the danger of disobeying God?*

SAUL’S DISOBEDIENCE (1 Samuel 13:1-12; 10:8; 12:14,15; 15:17-23; Psalm 118:9; Habakkuk 2:3; Hebrews 2:1-3)

The text opens with Israel’s military condition under the reign of Saul. He had an army of 3,000 that he and Jonathan, his son commanded. But at this time, the Philistines had supremacy over Israel and had built military outposts at the centre of Israel’s territory. Jonathan attacked and conquered them at Geba and, in response, the Philistines mobilized their chariots and horses against Israel. Saul also blew the trumpet to mobilize the Israelites in what could be considered a war of independence.

The Philistine army was very organized and well equipped, whereas the fighting men of Israel were only a little better than a militia with inferior weapons. The Israelites were clearly outmatched and the people were distressed. Some deserted their commander and many even relocated across Jordan. But a few men remained with Saul and waited fearfully for Samuel in Gilgal.

Question 2: *Why is it wrong to place our trust in man or human institution?*

Here, we see the total weakness of Israel's king and the limitation of human institutions in times of emergency. **"As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling"** (1 Samuel 13:7). The Israelites had chosen a king so he could fight their battles and free them from their enemies. They concluded Saul would be their ideal champion in time of war because he had led them in victory over Nahash and the Ammonites. They were shortsighted to foresee the existence of a well organized army that might overrun them. When confronted by a more formidable Philistine army, they realized they needed more than a human leader to defeat the enemy. This confrontation with the Philistines taught Israel that **"it is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes"** (Psalm 118:9).

Question 3: *What lessons can we learn from Saul's disobedience?*

In preparation for the battle, Samuel instructed Saul to wait seven days at Gilgal until he would come and offer the prescribed sacrifice and the way forward. This directive, which was given after Saul had reigned for two years over Israel, was similar to what was given before his coronation (1 Samuel 13:8; 10:8). The instruction was very clear: Saul should wait for seven days at Gilgal until Samuel came to offer sacrifices. While Samuel delayed to come, he became desperate because the few people with him had begun to leave. Therefore, he 'forced' himself and offered the sacrifices. As soon as he finished, Samuel arrived.

There are important lessons from Saul's disobedience. First, Samuel's delay turned out to be a test of patience and obedience to God, but he failed. God often uses little things to test our virtues of obedience, faith, patience, humility or generosity. We need to be very watchful in stressful situations. Second, God is pleased only when our obedience is total and complete. Though Saul waited till the seventh day, he did not wait till the end of the day.

Third, deviating from God's commandments by adding to or subtracting from His clear instructions is always counted as disobedience. Fourth, Saul's disobedience reveals the general tendency of the natural man. Saul was humble and non-retaliatory at the beginning of his reign (1 Samuel 10:21-27; 11:11-13), but afterwards manifested pride and self-will. He felt he could do without Samuel and presumed to help the situation, whether it was right or wrong.

Fifth, he was more concerned about his own success in battle than an eye for God's glory and obedience to His command. We should not be desperate about our own welfare at the expense of God's glory.

Sixth, believers must learn to wait for God even when there is an apparent delay in the fulfillment of His promises. God told Habakkuk, **"though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry"** (Habakkuk 2:3). The proper attitude to maintain when under pressure is to be patient and allow the peace of God to rule our hearts and minds. Seventh, the waiting of Saul for Samuel may be likened to that of believers waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should not be moved by any pressure from the world to turn away from Him while He tarries.

GOD'S SENTENCE ON SAUL'S DISOBEDIENCE (1 Samuel 13:13-15; 15:22-29; Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 1:16-20; Ecclesiastes 8:11-13)

Samuel rebuked Saul for his rashness and disobedience. He told him, **"Thou hast done foolishly"**. His excuse that the men were scattering from him was a lame one. But his greatest folly was his belief

that he could actually obtain God's favor through a sacrifice offered in disobedience. If Saul had obeyed God, his kingdom would have been established, but he ended forfeiting his kingship.

The sins of Saul consisted of self-will, presumption and disobedience to God's plain command. On account of these, God rejected him and terminated his dynasty. Rather than repent, he gave excuses and blamed Samuel indirectly for coming late. Thus, he aggravated his sins by trying to justify his disobedience. Even when Samuel spoke of the kingdom being taken from him, he did not show any remorse. Genuine sorrow for his sin and a determination to turn from the path of disobedience could have prevented his total rejection by God.

Question 4: *Point out one major difference between Saul and David in matters of transgression.*

Justifying a sinful action, making excuses for wrong-doing, blaming others and trying to make them responsible for our own blunders are signs of weakness, hard-heartedness and impenitence. This is a major weakness in Saul that differentiated him from David, **"a man after his own heart"** (1 Samuel 13:14). In David, we see the qualities of humility, genuine repentance, patience and faith. When he sinned and was confronted with it, he repented and was forgiven (2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 51). We learn that genuine repentance will always avert God's judgment upon a sinner or backslider, but the impenitent will experience His judgment (Isaiah 1:16-20; Proverbs 28:13; Jeremiah 3:12,13; 1 John 1:9). While rebuking Saul, Samuel hinted that God had found a replacement for him. He said, **"the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people"** (1 Samuel 13:14). Though David was still very young at this time and Saul would still occupy the throne for a considerable period of time, his continuity in that position is no proof of divine approval. When God speaks, it may take a long time to come to pass, but His words will be fulfilled.

King Saul seemed not to accept God's verdict that terminated his dynasty. Much later, he tried to kill David to pave way for Jonathan his son to succeed him, but this plot failed (1 Samuel 20:30,31). In effect, Saul fought against the divine sentence.

ISRAEL'S OPPRESSION BY THE PHILISTINES (1 Samuel 13:2-7,16-23; 7:13,14; 2 Corinthians 10:4-6; Ephesians 6:10-18)

The chapter closes with a description of Israel's military condition under their chosen king. While waiting at Gilgal, Saul's army had reduced from 3,000 to 600. The Philistines had also dislodged Saul's camp from Michmash and forced him to relocate and join Jonathan at Gibeah (1 Samuel 13:2,16). Meanwhile, the Philistines sent three bands of raiders that spoiled Israel along three major routes. In this way, the Israelites were hindered from mobilizing more troops at Gibeah. To compound their problems, the Philistines employed a policy of disarmament to keep Israel from making metallic weapons. They barred Israelites from having smiths and kept them totally dependent on the Philistines for the maintenance of their farm tools. This way, they would monitor and exploit them economically and render them vulnerable in battle.

It is an irony that the military condition of Israel under their chosen king deteriorated than at the time Samuel was left in full control. Samuel had led the nation to conquer and subjugate the Philistines to the extent that they were not able to invade the coasts of Israel (1 Samuel 7:13,14). But under Saul, the nation was disarmed and rendered greatly dependent upon their enemies. They must have realized that God's presence was needed and not the influence of a king. Though Saul eventually won some victories in battle, his end and Israel's spiritual fortune under his reign were undesirable.

Like the Philistines, Satan tries to disarm believers or keep them from using the weapons God has provided for them. Just as battles believers fight are now spiritual, God has equipped us with spiritual weapons of faith, the word of God, prayer, the name of Jesus,

the blood of Jesus, the truth of the gospel and the helmet of salvation to overcome the enemy. But we must be strong in the Lord, put on the whole armour of God and use the spiritual weapons to defeat the devil and his cohorts and destroy their works (2 Corinthians 10:4- 6; Ephesians 6:10-18).

Victory in spiritual warfare is based on the truth that Jesus has disarmed principalities and powers and made an open show of them. Through His death and resurrection, He took away Satan's power, thereby making him vulnerable to defeat from true believers. Now we can conquer the powers of darkness and rejoice in Christ who has already **“spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it”** (Colossians 2:15). The obedient child of God will always be victorious.

Lesson 731

JONATHAN TRIUMPHS OVER THE PHILISTINES

MEMORY VERSE: “And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few” (1 Samuel 14:6).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 14:1-52

Looking at the build up to this crucial battle against the Philistines, Israel's situation was really critical and it appeared they were in for total defeat. Apart from the strategic location of the Philistines in their territory, there were other factors why the hope of victory appeared dim. One, they were already dispirited and low in morale. Majority had deserted their commander due to fear. Many residents had either gone into hiding or gone across Jordan to seek refuge. Two, Israel's army had inferior weapons because the Philistines placed embargo on metal work in Israel; only Saul and Jonathan had swords or spears made of metal while others probably held whatever they could. In contrast, the Philistines had chariots, horses, and deadly weapons at their disposal. Three, the size of the Philistine army was frightening. They were uncountable, whereas Israel's three thousand special squad had dwindled to only six hundred. Four, Saul had disobeyed and displeased God by offering a presumptuous sacrifice in preparation for the battle. The situation was such that Israel could not confidently count on God for support as they went into the battle.

Question 1: *From the viewpoint of both armies in this battle, why is it wrong to put our confidence in man?*

Our text shows that despite their extremity, the children of Israel won a resounding victory over the Philistines because Jonathan acted in courage and

faith. It shows that God does not require carnal weapons or human skills to win in battle. It is also clear that as one sinner does much evil, a single man of faith, courage and wisdom can do much good. Whereas, Saul failed God, Jonathan his son decided to be different.

But it is most remarkable to note how overconfidence and dependence on man ultimately lead to defeat and disappointment. The Philistines were overconfident because of their military skills, superior weapons and numerical advantage over Israel, but they were defeated. Also, the Israelites who put their trust in Saul whom they had requested to be king over them and fight their battles, were humiliated even before the battle started. They were distressed and had to hide in caves, thickets, rocks, high places and pits (1 Samuel 13:6). Our confidence should be in God who is able to save, no matter what extremities we may find ourselves. **“They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever”** (Psalm 125:1).

COURAGE AND FAITH OF JONATHAN (1 Samuel 14:1- 23;13:3; Deuteronomy 20:1-4; Joshua 1:5,9; 2Chronicles 32:7,8; 20:15-24; Psalm 33:16-17; Mark 9:23,24)

The Israelites encamped in Gibeah while the Philistines encamped at Michmash. In the meantime, Saul sat under a tree, surrounded by trembling soldiers and they were undecided what step to take. The Philistine raiders had cut off any hope of reinforcement from the northern tribes and the situation looked hopeless. But Jonathan decided to take an extraordinary step of faith. He sneaked out of Israel’s camp with his armourbearer and initiated an attack against the Philistines without telling his father.

Jonathan’s action was unconventional and at variance with military tactics and discipline. But Jonathan must have taken the risky step because God inspired him to do so. He probably knew his father would have hindered him if he discussed the plan with him.

Question 2: *Why is it often necessary to separate ourselves from doubters and unbelieving people?*

Most times, believers need to act like Jonathan and come out of doubting and unbelieving people who are given to fear, doubt, superstition and mere tradition. No one will ever do extraordinary things for God until he steps out of the crowd transfixed by fear, failure and defeat. Fear and unbelief are contagious. That is the reason God instructed the Israelites not to allow those who were fearful go with them to battle. In the battles of life, there are occasions when we have to take a step of faith.

Jonathan told his armourbearer his plan and expressed his faith in God's power to save, whether with few or many. Although Jonathan included a clause that looked like doubt or uncertainty, he allowed his doubt to be overruled by his faith in God's omnipotence. He trusted God and took a bold step to smite the Philistines. In approaching the Philistines, Jonathan had to crawl up the mountain. Then he asked to know God's mind by a sign. If the Philistines invited them to come over, that would be a positive sign that God had given them the victory; but if they barred them from coming over, that would be a negative sign.

It was not out of place for Jonathan to ask for guidance from God with the aid of a sign. The practice was in agreement with the dispensation in which he lived, and others had used it profitably (Genesis 24:13; Judges 6:17-21,36-40). But believers in the New Testament dispensation cannot take these as precedents. We are to walk by faith and not by sight. We do not depend on signs for guidance but on the word of God and the Holy Spirit. Whenever we need God's leading over any issue of life, the proper step to take is to pray, find what the Scripture says about the subject and follow the principles or precepts shown. One reason the Holy Spirit was sent to fill believers is that He might guide them into all truth. **"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God"** (Romans 8:14).

God honoured the faith of Jonathan and his armourbearer. The Philistines invited them to come over to their camp and Jonathan decided to act with courage. He must have killed the first soldiers he came in contact with and that unexpected boldness probably surprised the Philistines who were caught off guard. Then, God struck the Philistines with terror and they began to kill one another and many of them fled. In addition to the supernatural terror upon them, God also caused the earth to quake in the camp. The confusion in the camp of the Philistines was quickly noticed by Saul and the few men with him. His immediate response was to inquire from God, but he later changed his mind and suspected that some soldiers must have sneaked out to stage a surprise attack against the Philistines. A quick check revealed that it was Jonathan and his armourbearer. Thereafter, Saul and the Israelites rallied together in pursuit and defeat of the Philistines. **“So the LORD saved Israel that day”.**

CURSE FOR DISOBEYING SAUL’S RASH OATH
(1 Samuel 14:24-52; Judges 11:30-35; Ecclesiastes 5:1-5; Mark 6:21-27)

After God had confused the Philistines and Israel set to overrun them, Saul displayed a kind of religious zeal that was without wisdom. He commanded that no one should taste any food until evening and placed a curse on anyone who violated this oath. Ostensibly, Saul consigned the fighting men to a total fast in an attempt to get them fully committed to the plunder of the Philistines, but it was a needless and counter-productive decision.

Question 3: *Why was Saul’s oath unnecessary? Give examples of similar rash oaths in the Scripture.*

Already God had given Israel the victory and all they needed was to pursue the Philistines and plunder them. Definitely, the fighting men would need food to replenish their strength but Saul’s oath denied them this basic need. It was tantamount to placing a heavy yoke on the people who were just coming out of their

demoralized condition. God never commanded Israel's soldiers to fast at the war front, but Saul added his own self-imposed idea to God's prescription. Clearly then, this rash oath was another manifestation of Saul's self-will and religious hypocrisy. He wanted to take credit for a victory he did not initiate or execute. He wanted it to appear as if the victory came about because of the fast he imposed. However, the absurdity of the oath becomes more obvious when we consider its consequences: the people were distressed, fainting, and complaining. It also limited the victory of Israel because some of the Philistines were able to escape. But the most appalling effect was the risk of Jonathan being put to death because he ignorantly violated the oath. He was not present when Saul placed the curse on anyone who tasted any food; so he found honey in the field and ate whereas other soldiers felt restricted by the oath. It was a terrible anti-climax that Jonathan, whom God had used to achieve victory for Israel, had to face the prospect of being executed by his own commander, just because of an irrational oath. Worse still, the people were so hungry to the extent that they killed their prey contrary to God's commandment, and ate the meat with blood because they could not wait to cook it. Thus, the people of Israel were placed in a situation where they kept the commandment of a man but broke God's law (Leviticus 3:17; 7:26,27; Deuteronomy 12:16; Mark 7:6-13).

The life of Saul shows some basic contradictions which are also observable in many religious people today. Saul who had earlier disobeyed God was very eager to enforce his own command, even if it meant killing his own son. Many people disobey God's law but are so strict in enforcing their own rules and demanding total submission from others. In addition, Saul sat under a pomegranate tree, unable to initiate any step against the Philistines; but no sooner had Jonathan taken the initiative through God's help, Saul took over, attempting to play the hero (1 Samuel 14:12; 16-24; 13:3). Taking the credit for what others accomplished is not a virtue and it should not be attributed to believers. Saul was eager to claim the credit due to

Jonathan but was unwilling to accept responsibility for his own wrongdoing. Also, he placed more emphasis on outward religious observances such as sacrifices, fasting and oaths more than obedience and humility before God (1 Samuel 13:9- 14; 14:24; 15:9,13-25).

Question 4: *How can leaders avoid the kind of counterproductive decision taken by Saul?*

Saul's attempt to kill Jonathan because he violated his oath pitched him against the people and almost rubbished what should have been a great victory celebration. But Saul could have avoided this unfortunate situation if he had consulted God first. Believers can avoid Saul's error in leadership and decision-making by seeking God's guidance in everything. Second, by consulting with others and taking counsel from Spirit-filled leaders or colleagues. Third, if they take thought to appraise the effect the decision would have on others – children, youths, married people, etc. Fourth, be flexible and make provision for unforeseen circumstances and exceptions to the rule. Fifth, prepare to change when the decision is found to be wrong or becomes counter-productive.

COOPERATION AND FAITH IN GOD FOR VICTORY

(1 Samuel 14:6,7,12,45; Psalm 37:5; Proverbs 3:5; 27:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Mark 9:23; 11:22-24; 10:27; 16:20)

Israel's victory over the Philistines came about as a result of divine-human partnership. Jonathan and his armourbearer cooperated to initiate the attack against the Philistines despite the risk involved and the great odds against Israel. They took a step of faith and trusted God to give them the victory. God also worked with them and honoured their faith by terrifying the Philistines, causing them to kill one another. To win battle in any area of life and ministry, believers need to partner with God and trust Him. But they also need the cooperation of other people too. Though Jonathan initiated the attack, he and his armourbearer could not have won the victory without the cooperation of other Israelites.

Question 5: *Why is cooperation an essential ingredient for victory in life?*

Jonathan and his armourbearer cooperated and were united in faith. Their kind of cooperation is what believers need to achieve victory in life, family and ministry. When Jonathan suggested his plan, his armourbearer said, **“Do all that is in thine heart: turn thee; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart”** (1 Samuel 14:7). Leaders need such workers who can support and follow them in faith as they pursue the vision of world evangelization. Fellow-workers must also be of the same mind and purpose. Two are better than one because we cannot fight the battles of life alone. Our foes are formidable and we are weak in ourselves except God helps us. We need to cooperate with Him and with one another. All of life is about God working with men. In the field of evangelism, as we preach the gospel, He works with us by confirming the word with signs following.

Lesson 732

GOD REJECTS SAUL

MEMORY VERSE: “And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 15:1-35

Saul, the first king of Israel, was a valiant soldier. His exploits as a military leader began from the time he was anointed king and it is summarized thus: **“So Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them. And he gathered an host, and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them”** (1 Samuel 14:47,48). But these exploits appeared to have built in him a strong carnal confidence. He seemed to have transferred his confidence in the living God to his military tactics and experience; **“...and when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him”**. His strength soon became his weakness, as this study shows. His experience became more important to him than divine instruction. The desire to please people overtook the necessity of pleasing God. Believers should be more interested in the Lord of the work than the work of the Lord. We should remain humble, giving attention to details of divine instruction lest we derail into self-will, self-management and disobedience, thereby losing the favor of God. It is the neglect of the above safeguards that caused Saul’s rejection as king in Israel.

Question 1: *What should be the attitude of those called by God into leadership positions or particular assignments?*

GOD'S COMMAND TO SAUL TO DESTROY AMALEK

(1 Samuel 15:1-9; Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

The Almighty God usually has a specific purpose for calling people into His service. His servants are His battle axe to fight and fulfil His purpose on earth (Jeremiah 1:10,8; 51:20,23). No one called by God should therefore pursue a personal agenda or fashion out a job description different from what God prescribed (Isaiah 10:15).

God gave king Saul a definite command to destroy Amalek. **“Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass”** (1 Samuel 15:3). The command to destroy Amalek came out of the Lord's sense of retributive justice. The story goes back to Rephidim when Amalek bitterly contended with the newly redeemed people of Israel on their way from Egypt. It was a tense battle in which the Lord used Joshua and Moses to fight Amalek and ensured Israel's victory. While Joshua led the physical army, Moses engaged in spiritual warfare by interceding on the mount with Aaron and Hur sustaining his hands. At the end, Amalek was thoroughly discomfited. But they had incurred divine wrath: **“And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven”** (Exodus 17:14). Moses obeyed God and reiterated it during his farewell messages to Israel with a strong caveat: **“thou shall not forget it”** (Deuteronomy 25:19).

The case of Amalek teaches us that God does not take wickedness and evil lightly. If He proclaims judgment, it will come to pass except the evil doer repents and receives mercy. On the other hand, when God promises to bless His children, He will not forget. He will watch over His word to perform it. While this fact should encourage believers waiting for the fulfillment of His promises to be patient and to

persevere, it is a warning for sinners and backsliders to quickly repent lest they partake of His indignation.

Question 2: *What can we learn from the fact that God does not forget His word?*

It is important to note the details of God's command concerning the destruction of Amalek. One, the nature of the destruction had been prophesied. Two, God wanted it to be total and permanent. Third, the instruction was different and peculiar from the normal practice of war in Israel. God permitted the Israelites to enjoy the spoils of war and in some cases, a certain percentage of the spoil was to be dedicated to God (Numbers 31:21-54; Deuteronomy 20:1,19,20; Joshua 11:14). Even in Jericho, God permitted some things to be spared for His treasury (Joshua 6:19). However, God reserves the prerogative to dictate what He wants His people to do. Essentially, in our dispensation, He has revealed His will in His Word.

Question 3: *Mention some things that tend to compete with obedience to God's written word in a believer's life?*

In the case of Amalek, however, God wanted everything destroyed and He made it very clear. This is where the believer needs to be careful. Using mere mental knowledge and experience in God's service in place of His clear directives can be dangerous. We must be wary of distractions through dreams, revelations, false prophecies, predictions, personal opinions, circumstances, feelings, counsels, books, messages or sermons that tend to undermine God's word. The young prophet from Judah lost his life when he permitted a false message from a so-called angel to tamper with his obedience to God's direct instruction. Satan's long-held trick to pervert God's word and derail His servants has not changed. We have been sufficiently warned in the Scriptures not to allow him distract us from doing the will of God (Jeremiah 23:16-18,22; Galatia 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18,19).

Like the treasures of Amalek, sinful habits are to be discarded and destroyed. Any part that is preserved

will only remind and entice the seeker back into bondage. Believers are commanded to **“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry”** (Colossians 3:5). Believers in Ephesus destroyed costly artifacts of curious false religion so as to burn the bridge behind them (Acts 19:19).

However, we need to appreciate Saul’s sense of gratitude and fairness to the Kenites for their **“kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt”**. For this, they were spared and not destroyed with the Amalekites. One good turn truly deserves another. Besides, far be it of the Lord to destroy the righteous with the wicked (Genesis 18:23,25).

Unfortunately for Saul, in carrying out God’s command concerning Amalek, he allowed commonsense and the desire to please the people derail him from obeying the Lord implicitly. **“But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly”** (1 Samuel 15:9). This action sealed his strings of disobedience and signaled an end of his reign.

GOD’S JUDGMENT AND REJECTION OF DISOBEDIENT SAUL (1 Samuel 15:10-29; Proverbs 21:3; Hosea 13:11; 1 Kings 11:31)

In spite of the clarity of God’s instruction, Saul actually disobeyed God by infusing his own preferences into the assignment. Two, he saw things that were good in what God had already condemned. Three, he spared the king of Amalek for no apparent reason other than the excitement or perhaps the vainglory of bringing home a captive king. Four, he confidently but falsely asserted to Samuel. **“...I have performed the commandment of the Lord.”** Five, he quickly resorted to blame-shifting and excuse-making, claiming that it was the people he led who spared

“the best of the sheep and of the oxen” to sacrifice to God. Six, he elevated sacrifice above obedience, covering his sin with a veneer of worship. Seven, by his own confession, he feared men above God. It is very easy to blame Saul, but the errors that he fell into are with us today. Many so-called Christians disobey God in clear violation of His revealed will concerning covetousness, marriage, association with the world, faithfulness in service, and easily besetting sins. It is very easy to fall into the danger of self-will, over-familiarity with God and presumptuous sins. These are evils which soldiers of the cross may fall into when their service is corrupted by the insidious stains of self-will and covetousness. Therefore, we should carefully take to heart the great lessons of Saul’s misadventure in divine service and pray like the psalmist: **“Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer”** (Psalm 19:13,14).

Question 4: What steps can the believer take to avoid falling into Saul’s error?

To escape this great danger, believers and servants of God must remain humble and teachable whatever the length of years they have put into the service of the Lord; pay greater attention to details when handling divine instructions; eschew self-interest, self-praise and self-aggrandizement; do nothing out of pride, vainglory or desire for praise; disallow sense of duty from crowding out personal devotion and study of God’s word for personal edification. Moreover, when anything lower than the expected standard is discovered, repentance and restitution should be embarked upon immediately. The pronouncement of God’s judgment on Saul showed clearly he was no longer **“little”** in his own eyes; he was no longer humble as he was when God chose him to lead Israel. Secondly, he did not obey the voice of the Lord but rather his own will and that of the people. Thirdly, he

“flew upon the spoil”, that is, he sought personal material advantage which God did not permit on this occasion. However, the event also gave the Lord opportunity to teach us that obedience is better than sacrifice. **“To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice”** (Proverbs 21:3). He considers disobedience and stubbornness as evil as witchcraft and idolatry.

SAUL’S FALSE REPENTANCE AND FATE (1 Samuel 15:30-35; Exodus 9:27-34; 10:16; Numbers 22:34; Joshua 7:20; Proverbs 28:13; Luke 15:18,19; Isaiah 57:15-21)

“Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God” (1 Samuel 15:30). The response of Saul to his glaring disobedience fell short of God’s expectation. It showed that he was not sincerely repentant though he acknowledged his folly: **“I have sinned”**. The same words were recorded concerning Pharaoh, the hard-hearted king of Egypt. He said it three times (Exodus 9:27,34; 10:16) without any fruit of true repentance. Balaam, the false prophet of Midian, when confronted by the angel of God, also said, **“I have sinned”** (Numbers 22:34). Achan, the troubler of Israel said the same words (Joshua 7:20). But none of these people really repented; if they truly and sincerely did, God would have forgiven them. He says, **“...I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works”** (Revelation 2:23). Confession of sin alone without readiness to forsake them cannot bring the mercy of God (Proverbs 28:13).

In Saul’s case, he was still bargaining for honour, although he was caught red-handed in sin. When the prodigal son realized his error, he emptied himself of all self-glory and dignity, sincerely acknowledging his unworthiness before his father (Luke 15:18,19). This is a great lesson to those who refuse to confess their sin because they are afraid to lose the honour and privilege attached to their position in the

church. Rather than have the peace and healing that follow forgiveness, such people struggle with inner restlessness and fear, when humility and contrition would have secured them God's favor (Isaiah 57:15-21).

Question 5: *How genuine was Saul's repentance?*

It is shocking that in the face of such heavy judgment and rejection, Saul could still request for honour. Since that was more important to him, Samuel obliged. He yielded to his pressure to be honoured **"before the elders of my people, and before Israel"** (1 Samuel 15:31). Rather than being broken down by the proclamation that the kingdom has been removed from him, he insisted on having honour from men. How some people would prefer exchanging the prospect of getting to heaven to having honour from men! God forbid.

Without further delay, prophet Samuel performed the divine judgment upon the king of the Amalekites by slaughtering him. If Saul would spare Agag, Samuel would not be an accomplice. He left Saul to gratify himself with his spoils of war: sheep, oxen and the honour of men. But he went back home to weep for Saul while God regretted that He ever gave Saul the privilege of being king. What a lost privilege!

Lesson 733

DAVID ANOINTED KING

MEMORY VERSE: “Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah” (1 Samuel 16:13).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 16:1-23

The previous chapter ended with God’s rejection of Saul as king and Samuel’s severance of relationship with him. Though he separated from Saul, he still mourned at the negative turn of events. Samuel manifested a godly attitude that should characterise every true believer when a fellow child of God falls (Hebrews 13:7; 2 Samuel 1:5-27). God dissuaded him from grieving any further over Saul but proceed to Jesse’s house to anoint his successor to the throne. The failure of one person cannot hinder the progress of His work and cause in the world.

Question 1: *What can believers learn from Samuel’s disposition towards Saul and God’s instruction to him?*

In the chapter under study, God guided Samuel to anoint David king. The details of this transition in Israel’s leadership show the superiority of God’s wisdom over man’s judgment and how He chooses the lowly and despised to fulfil His purpose. God chose David, an unlikely and unexpected candidate, to become Israel’s next king; and by the end of the chapter, the shepherd boy had grown to become a valiant warrior who could also use his gift to relieve Saul of his spiritual affliction.

GOD GUIDES SAMUEL (1 Samuel 16:1-10; Psalm 147:10,11; Proverbs 31:30; Isaiah 55:8,9; Luke 16:15; John 7:24; 1 Peter 3:3,4)

God told Samuel to move to Bethlehem and anoint one of the sons of Jesse in place of Saul. But Samuel expressed fear about Saul’s reaction if he heard. Samuel’s fear, though legitimate, was unfounded

because God would not send His servant on an errand without preserving him. Though it was treasonable to appoint another king while the incumbent was still reigning, Samuel was only sent to privately anoint David and not to publicly coronate him. David's anointing at this time was symbolic of God's choice and served the purpose of setting him apart and to endue him with power for service. The anointing was not intended to set David on the throne immediately but a token of divine covenant and revelation that he had an important responsibility to carry out in the future.

To allay Samuel's fear, God instructed him to take an heifer and call Jesse to the sacrifice. Samuel eventually went to Bethlehem and did as God instructed him. The elders were surprised to see him because Bethlehem was not part of his normal itinerary. After the offering, Jesse brought his sons as required by Samuel. The first son was Eliab. His stature was similar to Saul's and his outlook made Samuel to conclude that **"surely the LORD's anointed is before him"**. But God said, **"Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart"** (1 Samuel 16:6,7).

Question 2: *Why is it necessary to pray and be guided by God when choosing people for important assignments?*

Like Samuel, people are prone to making choices on the basis of physical or outward qualities, skills or intellectual capabilities, but God places emphasis on the condition of the heart. Only He can reveal what is in the heart of a person. He knows the intentions, thoughts and state of every heart. Therefore, there is the need to pray and depend upon the Lord for guidance whenever we want to choose people for any assignment in the church. In the choice of workers, marriage and business partners, we should emphasize spiritual qualities and pray to be guided by God. Most people cover their inward unfitness with impressive outward appearances. Rather than place emphasis on

educational qualifications, exceptional skills, appearance, oratory, and other outward qualities, we should allow God to show us the state of the heart and its hidden qualities of faith, humility and yielded disposition (1 Peter 3:3,4).

We learn from Samuel's mistake that there is no level of spiritual growth that precludes the possibility of error in judgment. No doubt, he was old and experienced in spiritual matters. He was used to receiving and transmitting messages from God before this event. On this occasion however, he would have poured the anointing oil on the wrong head if God had not corrected him. The lessons from this are very obvious: every Christian must remain humble and never overestimate the soundness of their personal assessment of others. In making choices, believers should rely on God to give guidance. Spiritual leaders should also be held up in prayers before God so that they would be guided to make right decisions at all times. If we judge by outward appearance alone, we may inadvertently choose those whom God has rejected or overlook those He has chosen.

THE PROMOTION AND ANOINTING OF DAVID (1 Samuel 16:11-13; 2:7,8; Psalms 89:20-37; 75:4-7; 113:7,8; Isaiah 55:8; James 4:6,10)

Jesse assembled seven of his sons before Samuel, leaving out David. When none of them was chosen, Samuel inquired if he had another son. The answer showed that he did not reckon with David as being considered by God for any divine assignment. This proves that God's ways are different from man's. Samuel commanded David to be brought from the field where he tended the flock and anointed him.

Question 3: *Point out some lessons from the anointing of David.*

David's anointing plays up a number of truths. First, he was the last born of the family but God preferred him above his elder brothers. God's choice is not always according to rank or position of birth, but in line with His own principles. Second, the seven sons

had their good qualities and talents but God did not choose them. Natural talents are not sufficient when it comes to spiritual service.

Third, David was engaged in a very humble duty and did nothing by way of campaign for kingship. God promotes the humble. It is not necessary to solicit or struggle for position in the church. Fourth, the anointing of David at this time took place long before he ascended the throne.

Fifth, David's anointing here was not the final one; it had three phases: the initial private one in Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:12,13), his anointing as king over Judah (2 Samuel 2:4) and the one over all Israel (2 Samuel 5:3). Believers should not be puffed up because of their initial spiritual promotion and manifestation of God's hand upon their lives. Greater things will yet come if they remain humble, obedient and focused on God.

DAVID'S MINISTRY BEFORE SAUL (1 Samuel 16:14-23; 2 Chronicles 20:21-24; Matthew 12:43-45; Acts 16:25,26)

After his anointing, the Spirit of the Lord came upon David to empower him for his future role. In contrast, the Spirit of God departed from Saul and an evil spirit troubled him. Like Samson, when the Lord left him, he became powerless and exposed to torment by the enemy. It is a tragedy when a leader forfeits the presence and power of God and has to struggle in the flesh to keep on in ministry. Though Saul's condition was frightening, David was called to minister before him. He was not afraid of the difficult assignment because the Lord was with him.

Question 4: *Explain the expression "an evil spirit from the LORD".*

God permitted an evil spirit to torment Saul since he had rejected Him and decided to follow his own devices. The phrase, "**an evil spirit from the LORD**" means that He allowed or permitted an evil spirit to gain access to Saul's life because of his continual disobedience and impenitence. God has ultimate

control over the universe and many deeds are attributed to Him though He may not be primarily responsible for them. Since nothing happens in the universe without His permission, religious people often attribute all activities to Him, both good and bad. But, God cannot be tempted with evil and He tempts no one with evil (James 1:13).

Lack of prompt acknowledgment and confession of sin opened the door for demonic oppression in Saul's life. He carried a guilty conscience and was full of guilt. He was also afraid of the future because Samuel had pronounced that his kingdom would not continue. Saul was also afraid of being exposed. He wanted Samuel to cover up his weakness and failure lest he lost honour before the people. Despite the divine sentence on him, he was more concerned about retaining honour before the people (1 Samuel 15:30).

Meanwhile, the servants of Saul suggested an immediate remedy for the torment of their master. They suggested the use of music to soothe and relieve Saul anytime the evil spirit tormented him. It shows that ancient men recognized the therapeutic effect of good music. Godly music has healing power. It refreshes and edifies. But ungodly music has evil influence. It promotes ungodliness. Nebuchadnezzar used evil music to promote idol worship, but David, Jehoshaphat, Elisha, Paul and Silas employed godly music to achieve great things for God. Believers are admonished to use music in a positive way (2 Kings 3:14,15; 2 Chronicles 20:21-24; Daniel 3:4-7; Acts 16:25,26; Colossians 3:16).

Question 5: *From our text and other scriptures, state the benefits of good music.*

Saul accepted that a skilful player of harp be sought and brought to him. Consequently, one of the servants recommended David. Eventually, Saul loved David and retained him to become his armourbearer. Thus, David progressed from being a mere rural shepherd boy to a palace hero. His gift made a way for him and his training for kingship was on course.

The description of David, at this time, indicated that he had grown and developed physically in skill and grace since his initial anointing by Samuel. He was described as skilful in music, a mighty man of valour, a man of war, prudent, handsome and had the presence of God with him. But above all, God said he was a man after His own heart (1 Samuel 16:18; 13:14).

Whereas Saul was a king chosen by popular demand, David was God's own choice against all human parameters. Saul ended in disaster and his kingdom was terminated, but David's kingdom continued.

Lesson 734

THE NEW LIFESTYLE OF BELIEVERS

MEMORY VERSE “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).

TEXT: Ephesians 4:17-32

The Scripture identifies two separate kingdoms in this world – the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light – and they are mutually exclusive. Satan and his children belong to the kingdom of darkness. At the other divide are Christians, called out of the world and translated into God’s kingdom through Christ. By virtue of their translation, they become the light of the world.

Christ said, “**Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid**” (Matthew 5:14).

To come into God’s light, sinners need to acknowledge their guilt, repent and forsake the works of darkness. Such must believe the gospel so that the light of Christ’s glorious gospel can shine in their heart. They must renounce every fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness and come out of every evil relationship. All associations with ungodly people, workers of iniquity, demonic social clubs, criminals, and occult groups must be renounced. The result will be a life cleansed from sin and brought into light and conformity with Christ. Consequently, God’s divine nature will be imparted and implanted in the heart while the converted sinner begins a new life in Christ.

Question 1: Describe the life of citizens in the two kingdoms.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OLD LIFE (Ephesians 4:17-19; Colossians 1:13; Ecclesiastes 2:1; Jeremiah 4:22; Proverbs 4:19; Acts 26:18)

Our text begins with a portrait of the old life. “**This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the**

vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Ephesians 4:17,18). Sinners, backsliders and workers of iniquity have their manner and way of life. Every unconverted person carries the nature of sin which tends to do evil naturally. They are under the influence and dominion of Satan who remote-controls their behaviour and dictates their lifestyle. Until Christ comes in, every sinner is a slave to sin and Satan and subjected to life in the kingdom of darkness.

The Scripture says, they walk **"in the vanity of their mind"**. All that catches their fancy is vanity upon vanity. They are filled with the lust of the eyes, the pride of life and pleasure. Their lives are occupied only with things that gratify self, the flesh, Satan and the world. Like Solomon of old, captured and conquered by things of this world, they are preoccupied **"with mirth"** and **"pleasure"**; which amount to **"vanity"** (Ecclesiastes 2:1). Two, they have the understanding darkened and cannot comprehend spiritual things. Darkness is a symbol of sin, misery, ignorance and death, and sinners are under the power of darkness and dominion of sin. **"The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble"** (Proverbs 4:19). An individual whose understanding is darkened cannot appreciate the truth about morals, godliness and righteousness. Such would rather grope in delusion and stumble into perdition.

Third, they are aliens to godliness and the godly nature because they are separated from the life of God. Ability to do good like our heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ is lacking in them. **"The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit: he hath left off to be wise, and to do good"** (Psalms 36:3). **"For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge"** (Jeremiah 4:22).

Fourth, the text also says that they are ignorant; not that they are unaware of the grace of God that brings

salvation (which has appeared to all), but after they had heard, chose to remain ignorant of the saving grace of Christ. Fifth, the Apostle talks of the “**blindness of their heart**”. Greek scholars said, ‘hardness’ is a better word for the word translated ‘blindness’. This means sinners became blind due to the hardness of their heart.

Sixth, they are “**past feeling**”. Due to the hardness of their heart, they have lost every feeling of empathy, love, kindness and care. Their consciences have been seared with hot iron . Seventh, they are given to lasciviousness, carnality, sensual lust and wantonness. They are sold “**to work all uncleanness with greediness**”. Such are the characteristics of people still living the old life of sin.

Question 2: What should sinners do to be translated from the old life to the new?

Until Christ comes to dwell in the heart of man, such would remain in total darkness. At conversion, sinners are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. There will be no more “**fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness...**” (Ephesians 5:11). They become citizens of a new kingdom under a new King with new rules, laws, principles and practices. This change occurs at the new birth, by which the repentant sinner passes from the empire of sin, ignorance and misery to that of righteousness, holiness, godliness and knowledge of the truth. There will be a transition, a translation and a transformation.

CALL FROM THE OLD LIFE INTO THE NEW
(Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 3:8,9; Romans 12:2; 8:5-9; John 8:12)

After describing the nature of the old life of sin, Paul the apostle goes on to call the believer’s attention to the new life. “**But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus**” (Ephesians 4:20,21). Now that the believer has been transformed through the truth that resides only in Christ, he or she is expected

to **“put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of”** their mind. Our old life of sin is pictured as a garment that we had worn since birth; now that the miracle of conversion has taken place, we can no longer wear it. It must be put off, discarded and destroyed. **“But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds”** (Colossians 3:8,9).

The Christian who is indwelt by Christ, the Light of the world, must separate from all works of darkness and radiate the light of Christ. He cannot afford to continue in the old way of life. His holiness of life must be unmistakable. Daniel shone like a star in a dark sky, so clearly, that his adversaries could not find any fault in him (Daniel 6:4). The children of Israel could not establish any offence against Samuel when he called them to witness against him (1 Samuel 12:3,4).

Moreover, the believer is called to be renewed in the spirit to keep the mind fresh and to guarantee the currency of the Christian experience. True believers cannot afford to rely on the experience of yesteryears because the grace of yesterday cannot survive the challenges of today. We must renew our commitment and refresh our convictions until the day of Christ. **“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”** (Romans 12:2).

Question 3: *Mention the works of the flesh that the converted sinner is expected to put off.*

Afterwards, the believer is called on to **“put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness”** (Ephesians 4:24). The new nature is recreated to reflect righteousness and genuine holiness. To the outside dark world, a believer is a beacon.

Christians are to reflect the gospel light in a world where there is moral darkness and spiritual ignorance. Our light must not be put under the bushel but must be made visible for all to see. Jesus commanded **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”** (Matthew 5:16). It behooves every child of God to lighten their environment and neighbourhood with their godly lifestyle. To everyone, we must show mercy, kindness, humility, forgiveness and love. As we relate with our associates, fellow citizens and mingle with the people of the world in business transaction, in schools, or on duties of citizens, we must let the light of our new lifestyle shine for all to see.

Question 4: *Point out some differences between the old man and the new man.*

CONTRAST BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW LIFE AND SUNDRY EXHORTATIONS (Ephesians 4:25-32; Mark 3:5; Psalm 7:11; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Psalms 37:8; Proverbs 4:18)

In order to reinforce his admonition to the believers, the Apostle Paul states in practical terms what the new life ought to be in contradistinction to the old. When we come to Christ, He makes us brand new creatures. It is not an old life refurbished or redecorated but a complete change. **“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another”** (Ephesians 4:25). The new man has done away with old works of sin and switched over to another life befitting his profession. Speaking the truth should be his hallmark as against former practice of lying; he must not lie in any form.

Then it says, **“be ye angry and sin not”**. If a believer is to be angry at all, let it be against sin and the appearances thereof. Christians are not expected to be inflamed by the evil passion of indignation, as such will be tantamount to committing sin. We sin when anger leads us into violent, vehement, outrageous and mischievous disposition. Sinful anger seeks to gratify the brutish passion and show our resentment. It is usually followed with a vengeful spirit to seek

the hurt of those we are displeased with. It is hatred in the bud which culminates in murder. If there is any occasion to express displeasure at wrong doing, it must be done without committing sin so that we do not **“give place to the devil”**. Believers must take care to bridle their passion. **“Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools”** (Ecclesiastes 7:9). However, saints must rise with holy indignation when God’s law is spurned, or when scriptural standard of holiness and His majesty ridiculed, and corruption/ sinful activities are rife in the house of God. An example of how to be angry and not sin was manifested by Christ: He **“...looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts...”** (Mark 3:5).

Question 5: *What are the proofs of a new life in Christ?*

The proof that one has had an encounter with the Lord manifests in a transformed life. After conversion, erstwhile thieves will steal no more but engage in profitable labour and become a blessing to others. He will not misuse his tongue by way of corrupt communication. Vulgar or foul language will not proceed from his mouth. Backbiting, tale-bearing, whispering, slander, defamation and calumny which eclipse the radiance of God’s glory in a believer will all be gone. He will begin and continue to speak words that edify others. Every act that can grieve the Holy Spirit such as bitterness, anger, clamour, wrath, and evil speaking he avoids like a plague. He forgives everyone who offends him freely and fully. **“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you”** (Ephesians 4:32). Absence of these spiritual qualities shows that the professing believer needs salvation.

Lesson 735

BELIEVERS' WALK AND WISDOM

MEMORY VERSE: “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15,16).

TEXT: Ephesians 5:1-21

In continuation of Apostle Paul's admonition to believers to ensure they walk worthy of their calling, he enjoins them in our text to be followers of God, as dear children. He makes it very clear to those who profess true faith in Christ that they cannot continue to walk the old life, live the old way, keep the same old company of sinners and partake of the world's sinful dainties. There are lifestyles that the believer should not be found to be living. As children of God, love, purity, godliness and wisdom should be the hallmarks of those who expect to have inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

CALL TO WALK IN LOVE AND PURITY (Ephesians 5:1-7; Colossians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Romans 1:18; 12:3)

The Apostle enjoined believers to be followers of God as dear children and walk in love. Those who would be followers of God must become His children through repentance from sin and faith in Christ. Without the initial experience of salvation, a person cannot obey the call to follow God.

Question 1: *What are the godly attributes that believers are called to imbibe in our text?*

Believers are called to demonstrate Christ-like sacrificial love. The command is to love our neighbors as Christ loves us. Walking in love will therefore demand that we use our human and material resources for the benefit of others. Obviously, the call to walk in love also agrees with the demand to walk in purity like Christ. Christ-like love is pure. Immorality and covetousness are not the expressions of true love.

So, Paul the apostle instructs that there should be no hint of sexual impurity, greed, coarse jokes, offensive language and obscenity among believers. Though the world tolerates and celebrates these vicious sins, believers must detest them. Saints of God have nothing to do with filthy and foolish talking, polluting stories and jesting because they are unbecoming of saints. They are expected to be free from stains associated with followers of Satan.

Anyone who continues in sin, regardless of his position or rank in the church, is not a child of God. Paul made this so clear when he said, **“For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God”** (Ephesians 5:5). Greedy people who covet money, property, position, privilege, promotion, attention, whether in the world or in the church, are classified as idolaters. The object they covet has displaced God in their hearts and consequently, like the immoral person, they are excluded from God’s kingdom.

Question 2: Explain how people get into spiritual deception and the way out.

But there are people who have been deceived and also go about deceiving others concerning this truth. They do not accept the spiritual truth that immoral and covetous people have no part in the present and future kingdom of Christ. Such deceivers indulge in the vices and teach others that it is not a serious matter. Somehow, they have believed a lie that someone can live in immorality and yet get to heaven. In effect, they teach the doctrine of eternal security, call sin another name, such as human weakness, and play down the reality of God’s wrath against sin. But Paul says, **“Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience, Be not ye therefore partakers with them”** (Ephesians 5:6,7). The wrath of God is a real threat upon the profligate sinners as well as the fallen saints who refuse to confess, repent, forsake and retribute their sinful action.

The only way to avoid being partakers of God's judgment is to avoid sin.

COMMAND TO WALK IN THE LIGHT (Ephesians 5:8-14; Psalm 89:15; Matthew 5:14-16; John 12:35,36; 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8; 1 John 1:5-7; 2:8-11)

A crucial aspect of the believer's walk is the command to walk as children of light. Before conversion, a person is said to be in darkness. The situation of a sinner is even worse than merely walking in darkness: he is darkness personified. Darkness signified moral perversion and ignorance of God's word and will. Clearly, sinners being in darkness implies they are ignorant of God, engrossed in moral perversions and also cause others to stumble. They live in gross darkness of sins and grope steadily unknowingly towards the pit of hell.

Question 3: *What is the implication of believers being light?*

After conversion, believers become light and they walk in the light. Walking in the light means they do not carry on in their former lifestyle of sin; rather, they live in purity and obedience to the will of God. As light-bearers, they enlighten the darkness of others. Jesus said of His followers: **"ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid"** (Matthew 5:14). Believers act as light by preaching the gospel both through their lifestyle and words. The fruit of goodness, righteousness and truth in the life of believers can convict and open the eyes of sinners and lead them out of darkness into the light.

Contrary to God's design, many believers are hiding their light under the bushel of worldliness and compromise. They fail to realize that their conversion to Christ places a double responsibility on them not to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness and to let their light reprove or expose darkness. Believers' lives should be so transparent and radiant that sinners they come in contact with will see the true condition of their own hearts, repent of sin and avoid its present and eternal consequences.

Walking in the light is closely associated with walking in love. **“He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes”** (1 John 2:10,11). Anyone that harbours hatred towards another person is still in darkness, just like those who commit immorality, the covetous and evil speakers. Every form of sin is regarded as a work of darkness in the sight of God, and the needful step to take is to repent of them and begin to walk in the light. **“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance”** (Psalm 89:15).

CAUTION TO WALK IN WISDOM AND SOBRIETY:
(Ephesians 5:15-21; Colossians 1:9; 1 Peter 5:8)

Apostle Paul calls the attention of believers to the necessity of walking with circumspection and wisdom. Believers must watch how they live and avoid putting themselves in harm's way. They must not live carelessly as if there is no danger or possibility of falling. **“A prudent man forseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished”** (Proverbs 22:3).

Question 4: Why should believers walk circumspectly and what are the main features involved?

One reason believers need to be vigilant and prudent in their walk is that the devil is on the prowl, looking for their unguarded moment so that he can strike. **“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”** (1 Peter 5:8). A careless believer can easily fall into Satan's trap and be dragged back into darkness. But when there is watchfulness, prayerfulness and prudence, the enemy cannot succeed in his bid.

Coupled with the caution to walk circumspectly is the necessity of redeeming the time because the

days are evil. To redeem the time means to manage our time very well, to make the most use of every opportunity to preach the gospel and do God's will. In practical terms, it means working for God when it is convenient and when it is not, but at the same time not neglecting our basic responsibilities at home and place of work. The coming of the Lord is so near and the rate at which Satan is herding multitudes of people to hell is alarming. Multitudes die daily as a result of organized crime, natural disasters, strange sicknesses and global insurgency. The days in which we live are evil indeed and believers need to arise and preach the gospel so that many can be rescued from a gloomy eternity.

Believers walking in wisdom must also prove and understand what the will of the Lord is so that they can do it. In every situation, a believer must find out what God wants him or her to do. There are some areas where the Bible clearly spells out the will of God; but at other times, it is not specifically stated and one must find out by prayer, application of scriptural principles and the leading of the Holy Spirit. For instance, the Bible has clearly shown it is the will of God for sinners to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3,4; John 3:16); believers to be sanctified (1 Thessalonians 4:3); to give thanks in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18). But when it comes to the issue of who to marry, choice of career, where to live and other personal details of life, a believer must learn what the will of God is by prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit. Paul prayed for new believers that they **"might be filled with the knowledge of [God's] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"** (Colossians 1:9). Even in seemingly simple matters, a believer must find out what is the will of God and obey (1 Kings 13:7-24; 2 Kings 4:8-10,15,16,20-27).

To be able to work worthy of their calling, Paul the apostle said believers must be filled with the Spirit. This is quite different from the initial experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit should be a continuous and daily experience, necessary for believers to be led by the Holy Spirit.

To explain this experience, Paul used the analogy of people who are intoxicated with wine. Certainly it is God's will that believers should avoid intoxicating substances, such as alcohol and harmful drugs, because they lead to unruly behaviours (Genesis 9:21; Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35). But Paul used the illustration in contrast with being filled with the Holy Spirit. People who are drunk with wine come under the influence of alcohol. Believers are expected, so to say, to be intoxicated with the Holy Spirit always such that everything they do will be influenced by the Holy Spirit.

Question 5: *What are the visible effects of being Spirit-filled?*

When believers are filled with the Holy Spirit, they will be led by Him and they will produce visible fruits that glorify God. One, there will be mutual edification among the believers through singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Inspired singing will result in spiritual strength and refreshment for all believers. Two, being filled with the Holy Spirit will enable individual believers to make heartfelt melody to the Lord. Spirit-led singing results in melody to God and not to men. Three, it results in a life of thankfulness and gratitude. The Holy Spirit enables the believer to give thanks always for all things at all times, instead of complaining and feeling self-pity when the going gets tough (Acts 16:25; Colossians 3:16; James 5:13). Four, there will be mutual submission in the fear of God. Instead of selfish ambitions and struggle for pre-eminence, believers will be able to reckon with others better than themselves and submit to one another (Philippians 2:3).

Lesson 736

PRECEPTS FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

MEMORY VERSE: “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Ephesians 5:33)

TEXT: Ephesians 5:22-33

Paul the apostle, in our text, highlights the godly attributes that should characterise believers in a marriage relationship. He focuses on the duties of the husband to the wife and *vice versa*. This lesson captures the interdependence of both the husband and the wife, revealing that the true measure of a Christian home is not its abundant material possessions but the quality of love, care, submission and fellowship that exist in it. The Apostle further highlights that the union between husband and wife is a picture of the relationship that exists between Christ and the Church. The husband who is cognisant of this truth would not want to misrepresent Christ in the home; neither would the wife act in insubordination to him. Those who approve unscriptural unions such as homosexuality, polygamy, divorce and re-marriage, cohabitation and bestiality must have a rethink.

Question 1: *From the text, why are precepts for marriage union given prominence?*

THE WIFE’S LOYALTY AND SUBMISSION TO THE HUSBAND (Ephesians 5:21-24; 1 Corinthians 14:34; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 3:1-6; 5:5)

Paul the apostle first addressed the subject of the wife’s duty of loyalty and loving submission to the husband. God, in His infinite wisdom, has appointed man, the husband, as the head of the family while the wife is the body. As such, she is commanded to submit to her husband. The violation of these divine precepts will result in a dysfunctional marriage with all kinds of negative consequences.

Though Christianity recognises the woman as a joint heir of the grace of life with her husband, it does not release her from the God-given role of submission to him. The reason is, the submission of the wife to her husband reflects her submission to Christ. **“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing”** (Ephesians 5:23,24).

This duty of submitting does not depend on age difference, the character of the husband or his status, whether he is educated, experienced, exposed, rich or not. The issue here is not a question of comparative advantage but of divine order and arrangement. Even if the husband is not saved, the wife still has the duty of winning him by her submissiveness and meekness (1 Peter 3:1,2)

Question 2: *Point out the characteristics of a wife’s genuine submission to her husband.*

It needs be made clear here that submission of the wife is not servitude or subjugation, rather it is a voluntary and loving surrender of herself to the authority of her husband in the fear of God. Note these truths concerning this biblical submission of a wife to her husband: one, it is to her own husband. Two, her submission is as unto the Lord, complete and total, but limited to only those commands that are lawful and in line with God’s word. Three, it is deliberate and voluntary. Four, the submission that is scriptural is also sincere, done cheerfully and with pure motive. Sinful women practise hypocritical submission in order to obtain favor from their husbands but Christian women should have noble motivation for their own submission. Five, genuine submission consists of reverence for and obedience to the husband. Reverence largely describes the inner disposition of the wife while submitting but obedience is the outward manifestation of her submission. A woman may obey without reverence but that would be an unprofitable submission.

The Scripture teaches that a wife who submits to her own husband pleases him (1 Corinthians 7:34); obeys him, (Titus 2:5) submits to his rule and seeks his permission (Genesis 3:16); accepts correction (1 Timothy 2:12) avoids nagging, destructive criticism and fault-finding (Proverbs 21:9,19); proves to be help-meet indeed (Genesis 2:18); corrects him in love if he is going contrary to God. Sarah was submissive to Abraham, but on the matter of Hagar and Ishmael, she corrected him. At first, Abraham was reluctant but God said unto him: **“Abraham, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called”** (Genesis 21:9-12).

Many women experience difficulty in submitting to their husband as prescribed by the Scripture and there are several possible reasons for this. One, pride. A woman who is proud because of her position, situation or possession will not be able to submit to a husband who may probably be less endowed. Two, imperfect love. If there is no true love, a woman may struggle with the divine command to submit to her own husband. Three, worldliness and carnality dries up the milk of mercy and love for her husband. Four, backsliding. A woman who has lost her relationship with God becomes graceless; she cannot obey His word. Five, influence of outsiders who live contrary to God’s word will also affect the submission of a godly woman to her husband because evil communication corrupts good manners.

THE HUSBAND’S LOVING AND SACRIFICIAL CARE FOR THE WIFE (Ephesians 5:25; Genesis 2:24; 24:26; Proverbs 5:18,19; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7)

As the wife is commanded to submit herself to her husband, the Lord commands the husband to love his wife as He loves the Church. **“Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it”** (Ephesians 5:25). It is obvious here that the love of Christ for the Church is the standard and model for the husband’s love for his wife.

Question 3: State the qualities of love the husband is expected to show to his wife.

The Christ-like love God commands the husband to have for his wife is basically sacrificial or self-giving, not selfish or self-seeking (Ephesians 5:25). Two, it is a saving love, not destructive love that is sensual, sentimental and founded on worldly principles. Three, the love is considerate. It takes into consideration the delicate nature of the wife and treats her with care and honour. The Bible uses the imagery of a weaker vessel to describe the delicate nature of the woman (1 Peter 3:7). Four, the husband's love is tender and not harsh, cruel or bitter (Colossians 3:19). Five, it is cheerful and joyful (Proverbs 5:18,19). The husband who truly loves his wife will rejoice over her as Christ rejoices over the church (Zephaniah 3:17; Isaiah 62:5). Six, it is an enduring love. The love of Jesus for the Church is everlasting; so also the kind of love the husband should have for his wife should be unending and unfailing (1 Corinthians 13:8; Jeremiah 31:3).

Question 4: What are the primary ways a Christian husband can show love to his wife?

Looking at the love of Jesus for the Church, a husband's love goes beyond physical care for the wife. It includes giving emotional support, spiritual nurture and holistic plan on how to help the wife become all that God intends her to be. A Christian husband is expected to show love to his wife by providing for her (1 Timothy 5:3); pleasing her (1 Corinthians 7:37); protecting her (1 Peter 3:7); praying for her (Genesis 24:67; 25:21); partnering and being present with her (John 17:24); planning for her (Jeremiah 29:11); and preparing her for heaven by teaching and nourishing her spiritually (1 Corinthians 14:35).

It is the sacrificial and thoughtful love of the husband that makes submission an easy duty for the wife. Someone has likened this to priming a pump that brings water from a well. The pump brings more water than the volume used in priming it. When the husband loves his wife, he gets love and submission in return.

But there is another dimension to the love of a husband for his wife: he should love the wife as his own

body. The wife, being one flesh with her husband, should be treated as he would treat himself.

CHRIST'S ULTIMATE PURPOSE FOR THE CHURCH: (Ephesians 5:26,27; 1:4; Song of Solomon 4:7; Isaiah 62:3; Jeremiah 33:9; Ezekiel 36:25; Colossians 1:22-28; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 10:22; 2 Peter 3:14)

The Church is the bride of Christ. He purchased her at a very great price because of His love for her. He died and rose again to secure her. This sacrificial love of Christ has an immediate purpose as well as an ultimate one.

His ultimate purpose is to present the church to Himself holy and righteous in an unending union. **“That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word”** (Ephesians 5:26). Christ’s prayer to the Father at the twilight of His earthly ministry reveals this ultimate desire (John 17:17). To achieve this, He is presently preparing His bride by washing, cleansing, nourishing and cherishing her. The sanctification experience is His desire and prayer for every believer (1 Thessalonians 4:3). He wants to make the Church spotless and glorious ahead of the final union at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Question 5: *How does Jesus Christ show His love to the church?*

This example of Christ’s love for the church and the submissive response of the church to Christ’s loving care are what husbands and wives are called to emulate in their marriage.

Jesus wants His bride to be cleansed from all outward and inward unfitness. For that reason, He cleanses the church with His blood and the water of His word. Every sinner must exercise faith in the blood of Jesus for cleansing from the guilt and stains of sin. Having become part of the body or bride of Christ, the believer is expected to constantly hear, read and study the word of God to remain clean and pure (Psalm 119:9,11; John 15:3). Regular intake of God’s word and prayer empowers the believer to be Christ-

like. Every believer, whether married or unmarried, should endeavor to be part of the universal, rapturable Church Jesus is coming for.

Without scriptural submission to the husband and Christ-like love for the wife, no believer who is married has any hope of living with Christ in the end. God's grace is sufficient for those who are willing and obedient.

Lesson 737

BELIEVERS' RESPONSIBILITIES AT HOME AND WORK

MEMORY VERSE: “With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free” (Ephesians 6:7,8)

TEXT: Ephesians 6:1-9

The preceding chapter dwelt on the institution of marriage which is the basic unit of the church. The idea is, if we get it right in the family, we are most likely to have a healthy church as well as a functional society. When the family is Bible-based, upbringing of children, brotherly love and healthy relationship among brethren and neighbors which form the focus of this lesson will not be difficult. The Lord can help us overcome all challenges that confront our homes so that all members will be holy, happy and healthy. Godly conduct is expected of Christians in and outside the family circle. Such lifestyle will positively influence others. Good families make a good society while dysfunctional homes make a bad one. Wrong values, attitudes and perspectives imbibed from dysfunctional homes are always carried over to public institutions and the entire society.

The main thrust of Apostle Paul's message in our text is that a true Christian must manifest his new lifestyle both in the family and in the workplace. Whether he is a child, father or mother in the family; an employee, employer, junior officer or senior officer at work, the believer must display virtues of the new life in Christ. Genuine believers should avoid widespread attitudes of disobedience to constituted authority at home or workplace, neglect of parental responsibilities, eyeservice, overbearing and harsh disposition to subordinates, unfair and ruthless treatment of others.

GODLY CHARACTER AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHILDREN AT HOME (Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20; Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 22:6; 23:13,14, 22; 29:17 Matthew 15:4; Deuteronomy 5:16; Malachi 1:6; Mark 7:10; 1 Samuel 3:13)

The Scripture teaches that children develop in at least, four areas. We see this in the example of Jesus who grew in wisdom (mentally), stature (physically), favor with God (spiritually), and favor with mankind (socially) (Luke 2:52). When children enter this world, it is our responsibilities as parents to inculcate the right values and norms in them.

Children are commanded to obey and honour their parents (Ephesians 6:1; Exodus 20:12). To obey means to do exactly what they are asked to do and not trying to dodge, delay, hesitate or prolong the command of their parents. However, their obedience must be “**...in the Lord...**”. In obeying their parents, children should have the fear of God in mind and must not do anything to undermine the teaching of the Scripture. They should, with respect, do those things that will honour God while carrying out the directives of their parents. That means where the command or request of a parent conflicts with God’s command, we should rather obey God than men (Acts 5:29; Exodus 1:17).

Question 1: To what extent should Christian children obey their parents?

“**Honour thy father and mother**” means children should respect their parents. Even when they are not believers in Christ, it is still expected of children to respect and to love their parents. There is a blessing attached to honouring and obeying parents: “**That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth**” (Ephesians 6:3).

As a child, your honour and obedience should not be limited to only your biological parents. You should also honour and obey those who act as your parents in the home, church, school and community. Children are to honour elderly men and women they come in

contact with. This is acceptable in the sight of the Lord.

But parents need to remember that they have responsibilities towards their children if they would reap the fruits of blissful parenthood. To make it easy for their children to honour and obey them, they have to provide for and train them. The Scripture commands every parent(s) to **“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it”** (Proverbs 22:6). Of course, the key to that is for them to love the Lord Jesus Christ and be under the Holy Spirit’s influence. It is parents’ responsibility, therefore, to teach their children how to yield their lives to God. Negligence or failure in this regard is dangerous. **“For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not”** (1 Samuel 3:13).

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SCRIPTURAL PARENTING: (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21; Deuteronomy 6:7; 11:19; Psalm 78:4; Proverbs 19:18; 22:6; 29:17)

In fulfilling their responsibilities at home, parents are expected to teach their children (Deuteronomy 6:7), train them (Proverbs 22:6), provide for them (2 Corinthians 12:14; 1 Timothy 5:8), nurture them (Ephesians 6:4), control them (1 Timothy 3:4), love them (Titus 2:4), correct them (Proverbs 13:24) and instruct them (Deuteronomy 4:9; Proverbs 22:6). But in doing these, the Bible warns against provoking children to wrath (Ephesians 6:4). As parents, we should avoid anger, harshness, bad language, malice or vindictiveness in correcting our children.

When children go against ethical principles at home, church, school or the society at large, they should be disciplined. Discipline implies training, which involves rules and regulations enforced by rewards and punishment. We set the standard, follow it, and then hold our children accountable to it. If they meet it, we reward them, if they violate it, we punish them. That way, we will be helping them see the consequences

of their actions. To discipline a child, we need not use abusive language or corporal punishment that will lead to injury. It should also not be a denial of legitimate rights like clothing, food, education or apportioning of good things in the family. We are to nurture children in the ways and fear of God.

It is also the responsibility of parents to lead their children to know the Lord early in life. By their godly example, ceaseless intercession, clear and simple presentation of the gospel, parents can lead their children to Christ. As parents, we must walk the talk as we seek to train our children because we cannot expect them to obey us if we are walking in disobedience to God. Our children will be provoked to wrath if we fail in our obligations to them.

Christian families must live according to the teaching of God's word, guidance and power of His Spirit. The husband must love his wife dearly; the wife is to respect her husband and the two are to be sensitive in raising their children in the things of Christ. If we do that, our children will be the blessing, joy, comfort, and consolation that God intended.

Question 2: Mention negative ways in which some parents treat their children?

Many believing parents provoke their children and treat them in negative ways which include: over-protection, fencing them in, never trusting or giving them opportunity to develop a healthy sense of self esteem. Eventually, they become maladjusted and have personality problems which manifest in various ways later in life. Some parents show favouritism or make undue comparison between their children and others. Each child is unique and a gift from God. When we compare, the less-talented or less-expressive child will be devastated. He or she will tend to become discouraged, resentful, withdrawn and bitter. We should pray and work hard to develop in our children godly virtues and not vices.

GODLY SERVICE AND INTEGRITY OF RESPONSIBLE SERVANTS: (Ephesians 6:5-8; 1 Timothy 6:1; Philippians 2:12; 1 Chronicles 29:17; Colossians 3:22; Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18; Matthew 24:45-51)

In New Testament times, slavery was a common practice throughout the Roman Empire. Undoubtedly, many church members were either servants or had servants as part of their households. People became slaves by being captured in war, being sold to pay debts or being kidnapped. Paul's counsel about how servants should act does not imply that he approved of the institution of slavery, but it teaches how the relationship between servants and masters should be guided by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Apostle Paul's advice still has application today, even though slavery, as was practiced in his day, is no longer common. For masters or employers who would not faithfully pay their servants or employees for goods and services rendered, the advice is still very instructive. He also has in mind men who are unkind, demanding and inconsiderate of their subordinates. Irrespective of the situation, servants and employees should consistently be faithful in service, **"Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart"** (Ephesians 6:6).

Question 3: How should servants and employees discharge their duties?

In the discharge of their duties, servants should take note of the following: one, they must reverence those who are over them, fearing to displease them. Two, they must be sincere in their obedience, serving in singleness of heart. Three, they should focus their attention on Jesus Christ in all service that they perform. When servants perform their duties with an eye on the Lord, they become acceptable service to Him also. To have an eye on Christ is to remember that He sees everything and is ever present with them. Four, they must not serve their masters with eyeservice, that is, only when their master's eye is upon them. They

must be conscientious in the discharge of their duty because their Master in heaven is watching. Five, they must do all things cheerfully, **“doing the will of God from the heart”**. Six, faithful servants must trust God for reward, **“Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord”**. Though his master on earth may neglect or abuse him, he shall certainly be rewarded by the Lord.

Question 4: *As Christians, what should characterise our services in the place of work?*

Believers should be properly guided as to the way and manner they carry out their responsibilities in the workplace. They should shun indolence and lateness to work.

BROTHERLY LOVE AND HUMILITY DISPLAYED BY MASTERS (Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1; 1 Timothy 6:2; Romans 2:11; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Peter 3:8; 1 John 3:14)

Whatever position or privilege we enjoy in the society comes from God. Therefore, the slave-master mentality should not becloud our minds to the extent that we begin to treat fellow brothers or sisters as second class citizens. As masters, we should not lord it over the poor (Proverbs 22:7).

Question 5: *What should be the right attitude of masters to their servants?*

Rich Christian masters should see themselves as custodians of God’s riches which they should use for His glory. Acknowledging this fact will help them develop the right attitude as they relate with their servants or employees. They should understand that they owe it a duty to help the poor or less privileged servants; act in a loving manner to those working under them; pay them salaries as and when due. They should not sit over the wages of their workers or deny them promotion (Genesis 31:7; Leviticus 19:13; Malachi 3:5). They should remember that God will judge all unrighteous dealing. Finally, they should recognize that God is the ultimate Master and

Judge who we shall give account of our stewardship on the last day.

Genuine love will therefore make us to strive for unity always; be patient with and have consideration for one another; avoid hurting people or doing wrong to others; be kind and courteous. The Lord said; **“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”** (John 13:35). We must love one another sincerely, fervently and genuinely.

Lesson 738

COMPLETE ARMOUR FOR SPIRITUAL WARFARE

MEMORY VERSE: “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11).

TEXT: Ephesians 6:10-24

Paul the apostle had established great truths about the great redemption that Christ has purchased for us on the cross and the life that should characterise our calling as Christians in the preceding verses of this chapter. The great price of our redemption invokes a responsibility upon us to maintain it at all cost. Thus, the Apostle admonishes Christians to “**be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might**” (Ephesians 6:10). The admonition is apt because our adversary, the devil, does not leave any stone unturned in ensuring that the believer is brought into bondage again and eventually destroyed.

Peter succinctly captures the preoccupation of the devil in the world; he “**as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour**” (1 Peter 5:8). Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ sums up the devil’s mission on earth as seeking “**to steal, and to kill, and to destroy**” (John 10:10). All these explain the reasons we must fight in the strength of the Lord and “**resist [the devil] steadfast in the faith**” (1 Peter 5:9).

Question 1: *Why should a believer be strong in the Lord?*

REALITY OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE (Ephesians 6:10-12; Job 1:6-11; 2:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11; Daniel 10:12,13; 1 Peter 5:8,9)

Many Christians are ignorant of the fact that we are constantly fighting a spiritual battle with a vicious enemy who will not give up easily. There are two kingdoms in this world, the kingdom of light headed by our Lord Jesus Christ and the kingdom of darkness headed by the devil. The moment one gives his life

to the Lord, he is engaged in constant battle with the forces of darkness, whether he knows it or not. **“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”** (verse 12). The words, **“we wrestle”**, is in the simple present tense, signifying constant fight with an enemy who never gives up. But it is not only the devil that we fight with: we also fight his cohorts organised in hierarchies – principalities, powers, rulers of darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places. Just as he has spiritual agents, so does he have human agents like the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:7) and Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:8).

Right from the Garden of Eden, this fight has been on. The devil tempted Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-6), sought to destroy Job (Job 1:6-11; 2:1-13), stood against David to number Israel (1 Chronicles 21:1), resisted Joshua the high priest (Zechariah 3:1,2), tempted Jesus our Lord (Matthew 4:1-11), desired to have Peter to sift him as wheat (Luke 22:31), and hindered Paul in his missionary work (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

Question 2: What devices does the devil use to fight Christians today?

The devil used – and is still using – many devices and stratagems to execute his war against the believer’s soul. He used temptation against Joseph (Genesis 39:3-12), the love of the world against Demas (2 Timothy 4:10), discouragement against Elijah (1 Kings 19:9,10), sickness against Job (Job 2:1-13), the love of money against Judas (Matthew 26:15), false doctrine against Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17,18), lust of the flesh against Samson (Judges 16:1), love of position against Diotrefes (3 John 9), and so on. We must therefore be wise against his antics and watch our desires, inclinations and actions. We must avoid secret sin and be temperate in our desires, as he uses what is uppermost in our hearts to tempt and bring us into bondage. The way

to overcome is to ensure that he has nothing in us to latch onto (John 14:30).

RESOURCES FOR OUR SPIRITUAL WARFARE:
(Ephesians 6:13-20; Hebrews 4:12; Romans 13:12-14; 2 Corinthians 6:7; Psalm 91:4; Luke 18:1)

Even though the believer is faced with constant battle against the forces of darkness, there are resources that could be used to assure victory. Actually, resources are means that one uses to accomplish a desired goal or objective. The resources are our armaments with which we fight against the devil. Six of such armaments are listed in the passage: the girdle or belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, shoes of the gospel, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. The imagery here is that of the kits for the Roman army of old. Since the believer is called to be a soldier, he should also be so kitted. The pieces of armour or armaments are a unit, and the absence of one makes the believer vulnerable. The loss of the helmet, for example, will expose the head to danger; the absence of the belt will hobble the free movement of the soldier at critical moments in battle. Again, the believer is commanded to stand in expectation of battle with the forces of darkness. We are to watch and be ready at all times.

It is expedient that we examine the armour pieces one by one and see their significance to the Christian faith. The first of the armour is the girdle or belt of truth, which is a symbol of integrity in the believer's life. Integrity holds the life of the believer together; without it, all profession is vain and he becomes vulnerable to Satan's attacks. Integrity makes the believer to have good report both within and outside the Christian circle (1 Timothy 3:7).

The second piece of armour is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate covers the heart and other vital organs of the body; without it, the Christian soldier is in trouble. Righteousness should be at the centre of the believer's life. He receives righteousness as a gift (Ephesians 2:8), and he is expected to continue in real practical righteousness on

a moment by moment basis (Romans 6:19). Without righteousness, he will not be able to walk with God, for the Lord loves righteousness and hates iniquity (Hebrews 1:9). Only the life of righteousness can guarantee God's continued presence in life and ministry as well as victory for the believer.

The third piece of armour is the shoe of the gospel. The shoe or boot protects the leg in the battlefield that is strewn with many metal objects. It also ensures a good grip of the feet in battle. The feet shod with the preparation of the gospel are nothing more than the believer being ready to preach the gospel in season and out of season, when convenient and when not convenient. Unfortunately, the Church has forgotten the command of the Lord to go and preach the gospel to every creature. Believers are preoccupied with what to eat, drink and put on (Matthew 6:31). No wonder there is a lot of backsliding nowadays. The feet that should be on the forward march to rescue the perishing are now moving back into the world. A sure antidote to backsliding is preaching of the gospel!

The fourth armour piece is the shield of faith. A common experience of believers of all ages is the fiery attack that comes from the devil in form of doubt. Not believing God or trusting in His promises has robbed believers of the precious things He has provided for them, and also subjected them to defeat. Momentary unbelief made Moses not to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 20:12). The ten spies perished in the wilderness because they did not believe or trust that God was able to make them overcome the giants in Canaan (Numbers 14:36,37). Satan throws the dart of unbelief into the heart of the Christian in order to make him doubt God's love and faithfulness.

Another piece of armour is the helmet of salvation. The helmet protects the head, the thinking, planning and coordinating centre of the body. Nothing graphically illustrates the importance of the head than the story of Goliath (1 Samuel 17:49-51). With all his awe-inspiring physique, when he lost his head, he lost everything. This then shows the importance of

salvation. Without it, man is lost eternally. No wonder the Lord admonished the believer to jealously guard his salvation. **“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”** (Mark 8:36).

Finally, we have the sword of the Spirit. When the enemy comes against the believer, he should use the Word to defeat him. It was through the Word that Christ overcame Satan when He was tempted. The devil has no answer or defense against the word of the Lord because He declared that, **“it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it”** (Isaiah 55:11). So, believers should always use the Word in battle.

Question 3: Mention the pieces of Christian armour and their significance.

As a kind of ancillary to the armour, the believer is admonished by Paul to pray **“always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”**. Prayer is the powerhouse of the believer; without it, he remains powerless and ineffective. Prayer should not be self-centred or about mundane things alone; we should pray for other believers and servants of God who are in the van of gospel work. No wonder, Paul asked the believers at Ephesus to pray for him that **“utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel”** (Ephesians 6:19). We need to pray for ministers of the gospel to be divinely inspired so that their ministration will make sinners fall on their feet and receive the Lord. Secondly, we should pray for them to have the courage to speak and uphold the truth, particularly in this error-riddled world. Thirdly, we should pray for them to live out the gospel they preach as any backsliding will affect the faith of many negatively. Finally, we should pray for them to overcome all the forces of the kingdom of darkness that want to destroy their lives.

Question 4: Why do we need to pray for Christian ministers?

REASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE AND BLESSING (Ephesians 6:21-24; Proverbs 27:23; 2 Timothy 4:18)

Paul concluded his treatise on Christian warfare on a positive note. He reassured believers of God's love and provision of the faith that will tide them over every battle of life, as well as the grace of God **"to help in time of need"**. He did not just send a letter to them, he also sent **"Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord"** (verse 21), who was to show them the way to conduct themselves in the faith and comfort their hearts. Ministers need to learn lessons from the way Paul cared for his converts.

Question 5: *What can believers learn from Paul's care for the Ephesian believers?*

First, we see his unwavering love and commitment to their welfare. Ministers should not just preach the gospel; they should know the affairs of their converts, even long after they must have preached to them. As Paul employed face-to-face contact via personal visit, ministers should do the same. Where this is not possible, as in the case of Paul who was in prison, we should send faithful ministers to find out their welfare and care for them. Second, Paul taught them the whole truth about the warfare that the believer will face, but also comforted them lest they should become fearful. What a balanced message from a faithful minister! A message that focuses on the activities of the kingdom of darkness emboldens the devil, and one that avoids talking about the battle the Christian will face deceives the people. We should be balanced in our message. The Bible is a balanced book that exposes all truths about the Christian life. Third, he assured the Ephesian Christians of God's grace. Grace trumps all challenges in the life of a believer. We should therefore learn to depend on the grace of God in all circumstances of life.

Lesson 739

WORLDLINESS AND WORLDLY AMUSEMENTS

MEMORY VERSE: “**Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**” (1 John 2:15)

TEXT: 1 John 2:15-17

There is a dividing line across all humanity, past, present and future. On one side of this divide is the Church, the invisible assembly of all redeemed souls whose lifestyle, conduct, character, disposition and taste are fully dictated by Christ. On the other side is the world, the pervasive evil system orchestrated by the devil which is easily detected in the taste, lifestyle, character, disposition, language, dressing, amusements and recreation of its followers. Worldliness, therefore, is any kind of conformity with the worldly system, practices, dressing or adornment.

There is no meeting point between the world and the Church; they are two irreconcilable systems. The world must not be allowed to come into the Church; but where it has surreptitiously crept in, it must be flushed out. Christ is coming for a pure Church without spot, wrinkle or any such thing. The Church and her entire membership must be completely free of the worldly value system and tradition. This is why the Bible says: “**Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him**” (1 John 2:15).

Worldliness begins in the heart. It is a secret, inward liking and, later, a craving for the fad, fancies and fashions of the world. It finally begins to show forth in the lifestyle of its victims.

Question 1: *What is worldliness and how does it begin?*

When the people of the world (friends, colleagues, relations, neighbors, etc.) dictate and determine your taste in dressing, you are becoming worldly.

When your heart begins to yearn after the trends and contemporary vogue in the world, worldliness is setting in. When a supposed Christian marriage attracts all the traditions, styles, conduct and showy spirit seen in the marriage of sinners, the world is setting in. And God warns in His Word: **“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”** (James 4:4). Neither the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ nor the epistles of the Apostles grant the believer licence to be worldly. The believer must separate himself from the world.

EXPRESSIONS OF WORLDLINESS (1 John 2:15-17; Isaiah 3:16-24; Matthew 24:38)

The Bible draws a picture of the world in its true colour. More than that, it declares, in many ways and in many places, that it is sensual, devilish, doomed and distorting. Dressing is one area where worldliness in the heart speaks loudly and clearly. Christians are not to dress like the world. The spirit that dictates the fashion of the world is that of the devil. It thrives on sinful passions or vices that do not rest until they set the opposite sexes lusting and making them to commit sin. This spirit and the fashions or designs it dictates are a continual constant digression from God, holiness and righteousness.

Adornments copied from the world, which reflects the pride of life and the cravings of a carnal spirit must, like a plague, be avoided. Some Christian mothers pierce the ears of their female children. Had it been necessary, God would have done it from heaven. Had it been needful like circumcision, He would have given it like a commandment. One wonders how a Christian mother could watch her daughter being subjected to a painful piercing exercise just to look like the world. A spirit is surely behind this!

Worldliness is also seen in ceremonies. When a marriage is attended by all that goes on in the world – renting, borrowing or hiring of dresses; excessive spending which leads to indebtedness; immodest

dressing – it is worldly. The guiding principle of a Christian is modesty and moderation. “ **Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand**” (Philippians 4:5).

Question 2: *Mention some of the common expressions of worldliness.*

Besides dresses, ceremonies and adornments, there are some assemblies or gatherings that are essentially worldly and sinful. When meetings are held to foster the carnal desires of the flesh, inflame the mind and make it to dance off godly sorrows that are necessary in preparing the heart for the seed of the Word, a Christian must keep away. Whether it is outright disco gatherings or its religious equivalent “praisco”, it is worldly.

A pilgrim to heaven has no business with the conferment of chieftaincy titles under whatever guise. Frequenting salons for trendy fashions, unspoken competitive social outlook, lust of the eyes and pride of life are worldly. These cannot help fix the gaze of a Christian heavenward. If anything, it blows cool the steam in the heart of the Christian and quenches the smouldering ‘flame’ in the young believer. “**Abstain from all appearance of evil**” (1 Thessalonians 5:22) commands the Lord.

Question 3: *Why should a Christian avoid worldly gatherings?*

RATIONALIZATION OF WORLDLINESS (Revelation 22:18,19; James 3:15; Romans 12:2)

Some Christians want to have the best of two worlds. They want all the privileges of the kingdom while they simultaneously hobnob with the world. They twist scriptures to make allowance for their worldly dispositions. They explain off fundamental truths and principles enunciated in the Word of God and by implication, remove ancient landmarks set in God’s word. “**For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And**

if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in the book” (Revelation 22:18,19).

How do these modern heretics rationalize worldliness? Those who indulge and persist in worldly dressing and adornment, even after they have come to the knowledge of the truth, say their immodest dressing is designed to expand the kingdom of God. They claim that they join sinners in their worldly styles in order to invite them into the kingdom of God. They eloquently say, “join them to win them”. But the Scripture says: **“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”** (Romans 12:2). Moreover, some opine that what they put on does not matter since salvation is in their hearts. But they err. If our hearts are saved and conformed to the Lord, our outward comportment will definitely follow suit.

Worse still, some assent that their models are Western or American Church leaders who live in Hollywood style, deck up in jewelry and pride in flamboyancy. They have forgotten that Jesus taught that we should be like Him, not like any preacher. **“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple”** (Luke 14:26,27).

There are those who say that if they do not wear a worldly look, they will lose their job. They, therefore, slide back into the world. What an awful path to spiritual death and eternal separation from God! Those who go into worldliness under this guise forget that their soul should not be sacrificed on the altar of worldliness.

Certainly, the Lord did not teach His disciples in vain to **“seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...”** (Matthew 6:33). Such Christians

who cannot decide what to do with such jobs have probably forgotten that **“if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell”** (Matthew 5:29).

Question 4: *In what ways do people try to rationalize worldliness today?*

DAN GERS OF WORL DLIN ESS AND WORL DLY AMUSEMENTS (Luke 21:34; Titus 2:12; 1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4)

Modern technology, idleness of mind, and a careless rush for money at the expense of the soul, have filled our cities with all sorts of amusements and time-killers, euphemistically described as ‘fun’. This is a dangerous trend and the believer must beware!

Worldliness is not only dangerous but deadly. Its effects are described in very negative terms in the Bible. James pictures the worldly Christian as an enemy of God and a friend of the world (James 4:4). Second, worldliness leads to backsliding. One of the early signs of backsliding is a tendency towards the world. Third, if worldliness is allowed in the church, it leads to loss of conviction and corruption. Fourth, if worldliness is allowed in individual lives or a local assembly, the presence and power of God would diminish or even disappear. Fifth, worldliness disallows the building of godly homes. Sixth, worldly amusements bring about carnal competition in the church. Seventh, worldliness incurs the wrath of God and this is fatal. Eight, worldly amusements weaken the church and individual lives as people spend precious time on trifles and vanities. When the membership of a church is given to amusements, little or no time is left for evangelism, visitation, follow-up and other services that have eternal value. Ninth, worldliness destroys the future of the church and makes nominal Christians of her membership. It must, therefore, be avoided like a plague.

Question: 5: *What inherent dangers do worldliness pose to the individual and the church at large?*

Lesson 740

CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN LIVING

MEMORY VERSE: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

TEXT: Genesis 5:22-24; 17:1

One of the negative end-time prophecies of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is that the love of many Christians shall wax cold. Its fulfillment, as Christendom is presently witnessing, spells grave consequences. It is obvious now that many who were once zealous and committed to the Lord are losing their first love and enthusiasm with which they served God. This is because the god of this world has enticed them with materialism into spiritual sleep and inertia, and sowed tares of discord, misfortune and sickness into their lives. Manipulated by the enemy, these Christians lose their conviction as their fellowship with God and His people become irregular. They have consequently become unstable and unpredictable in character, and unfaithful to God and His church.

Outright backsliding has become rampant. With this development, Christ, who always knows what to do, charges fervent believers and the church to wake up to their responsibility of reviving despondent, weak, lukewarm and inconsistent believers. **“Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent...”** (Revelation 3:2,3). Saved from sin or restored from backsliding, the believer needs to maintain a consistent righteous life to qualify to enter heaven.

THE CHARACTER OF HEAVENLY PILGRIMS:
(Genesis 5:22-24; 17:1; Hebrews 11:5,6,13-16; Philippians 3:20).

Enoch, son of Jared and father of Methuselah, is mentioned in our text as one who maintained a consistent, God-pleasing lifestyle throughout his lifetime. According to Scripture account, he knew God at the age of 65 and walked with Him for 300 years. That he lived in the Old Testament period before the cross, strips inconsistent believers of excuses they give for rising and falling in the Christian faith. Enoch lived in this same wicked world infested with demons as we do today. Moreover, with the death and resurrection of Christ, every earnest seeker can live a consistent Christian life. If it is not possible to live a righteous life, God would not have called Abraham to it (Genesis 17:1).

Question 1: *State the indispensable step to a consistent Christian living.*

However, the call to salvation precedes the call to consistent Christian living and perfection. Abraham had first responded to the call to come out of sin unto salvation and separation before this time. None is on pilgrimage to heaven until they are genuinely saved from sin. Pilgrimages to holy lands and engagement in religious rites/duties do not set the religionist free from sin. Every sinner and backslider need to repent of their sins and receive Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior to be free from sin.

Set free from sin that binds and inhibits spiritual progress, the believer begins to live a life of victory over sin, the flesh, self, the world and the devil. He is careful to **“walk with God”** and **“walk before God”** in righteousness. These phrases suggest that the believer consciously walks side by side with, lives and does everything under the watchful, never-blinking eyes of God (Psalm 139:1-12). As sane human beings do not want to expose their nakedness before the camera, so also the believer would not want to do evil while the omniscient and omnipresent God watches. These attributes of God, together with the fact that He is the final Judge who knows the minutest detail of our lives, should instill holy fear in the believer and enable him to live a consistent Christian life.

Besides, maintaining a consistent Christian life requires courage and faith. The heroes of faith grouped with Enoch and Abraham in Hebrews chapter 11 also regarded as “**strangers and pilgrims on earth**” all had their problems, difficulties, temptations, trials and challenges. Rather than give in, they exercised faith in God and were victorious. The challenges we face as believers will not last; we will continue to overcome if we lean on the Lord.

CAUSES OF INCONSISTENCY AND BACKSLIDING:
(Matthew 24:12; Genesis 19:26; 2 Timothy 4:10; 2:16-18; Zephaniah 1:12; 1 Timothy 6:9,10)

The heroes of faith focused their desire and attention on the city of God. “**But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city**” (Hebrews 11:16). Just as they did not allow their challenges to overcome them, they were not divided in heart and aspirations like Lot’s wife. They forgot the sinful world and lifestyle that existed in it when they came out. To this end, Paul the apostle exhorted believers to set their affections on things above where Christ is. Demas returned to the world because he loved it just like some believers who have not burned the bridge that linked them with the world. They want to enjoy the best of two worlds. But Christ says no one can serve two masters and fervently love both at the same time. Therefore, those who seek to maintain a consistent life of holiness with God must be crucified to the world.

False doctrines are deadly to the spiritual health of a Christian. Beliefs in purgatory, unconditional security of saved souls, continuing to live on earth without any hope of going to heaven, etc. engender licentious, careless living. The antidote to being poisoned by false doctrines is diligence in acquiring the word of God in both personal and congregational study of the Word (2 Timothy 2:15-18).

The devil may allow a man to start the journey to heaven but he will do all he can to obstruct him from making heaven. In these last days, he uses scoffers to dissuade

believers from continuing on the path of righteousness (2 Peter 3:3-11). The global economic recession is another factor that can divert the attention of the heaven-bound pilgrim. Some would even dare to deny the faith in an attempt to survive in these last days. But the Bible warns: **“Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth”** (Luke 12:15). Men are apt to forget God during promotion and prosperity (2 Chronicles 25:14). It is possible for a fervent believer to grow cold gradually until he loses all the good virtues he once had. Other causes of inconsistency in Christian living are fear of men (1 Samuel 15:24), evil association (1 Kings 11:4), stony hearts (Luke 8:13), spiritual laziness and emptiness (Zechariah 1:12), unbelief (John 6:64,66), love of the world (2 Timothy 4:10), lust of the flesh (Proverbs 7:6-27) and quest for materialism (1 Timothy 6:10).

Question 2: *Mention the causes of inconsistency of believers in the faith.*

CALL TO CONSISTENCY AND CONTINUITY IN HOLINES S: (Genesis 17:1; Matthew 5:48; 1Thessalonians 4:7; 1 Peter 1:15,16; Luke 1:74,75; Acts 11:23; Galatians 5:1; Ephesians 4:14; Philippians 1:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 2 Peter 3:17; Hebrews 12:14; 13:12,13)

Question 3: *Why is it necessary for believers to respond to God’s call to consistent holy living?*

God’s demand for a perfect lifestyle and consistent holy living is not limited to any generation. He is holy; He desires as well as demands that all who worship and walk with Him live holily. **“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”** (Matthew 5:48). As He called Abraham to lead a perfect life, so has He called every believer to this same experience. **“For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness”** (1 Thessalonians 4:7). God’s call to perfection or holy living is not limited to a particular day, week, month or period of time in our lives; we are to walk **“in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our**

life” (Luke 1:75). You can experience this holiness, sanctification or purity of heart through prayer and faith in the blood of Christ.

Question 4: *How then can a believer maintain a consistent walk with the Lord?*

Our text gives us the antidote to backsliding. **“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might”** (Ephesians 6:10). Believers are enjoined to be strong in the Lord and to make use of divine ability. God’s power is strong enough to keep all His children (1 Peter 1:5). And this requires that the believer knows the devices of the enemy, take the entire spiritual armour provided by Christ and constantly engage in spiritual warfare. **“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”** (Ephesians 6:12). No Christian can afford to trifle with the devil and his cohorts. The believer is in constant warfare with the devil and his agents. The methods of the devil are so complex that the believer needs to put on the whole armour of God at all times. The devil is at work night and day trying to entrap, enslave and ruin the careless believer. Consistency is synonymous with putting on the whole armour of God. You need to remain committed to the truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness. Holiness is a great weapon in spiritual warfare; it is a shield that protects from backsliding. It is not possible to maintain a consistent walk with God without living a consistent life of holiness.

The Bible also commands believers to be consistent in winning souls to the Lord. Their feet must be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Soul-winning is an important weapon as far as victorious Christian living is concerned. Also, you need to make use of the shield of faith. Develop your faith always. None can live the consistent Christian life without walking by faith.

Prayer is an important weapon for consistent Christians. The Bible enjoins us to pray **“always with**

all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints". The believer who wants to walk with God consistently needs to pray frequently. He will be able to "**stand**" unconquered by the enemy. Gluttony and talkativeness must not shut the believer's mouth from praying. Also, overmuch sleep leads to spiritual poverty. Men ought always to pray and not to faint. The praying Christian is a powerful Christian. The believer who adds fasting to prayer of faith becomes impregnable: he will be able to abide in the will and word of God and have divine energy with which to do exploits for God. After all, the goal of consistent Christian living is to bear fruits of righteousness and soul-winning to the glory of God.

THE REWARD FOR CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN LIVING: (Exodus 19:5; Matthew 5:8; Numbers 32:12; Joshua 14:12-14; Numbers 23:21-24; Daniel 1:8,19,20; Ruth 1:16; 4:13-22; Philippians 3:7,8; Psalm 103:17,18; Matthew 24:13)

Believers who maintain a consistent lifestyle of purity will be peculiar treasures unto the Lord. They will experience increasing abiding presence of God. The pure in heart shall see God and shall receive divine intervention of answers to prayers. They shall see the move of God in their lives and ministry on earth and live with Him in heaven.

To grow in this experience demands that the believer must wholeheartedly follow the Lord, constantly examines his life and conduct to make sure they are Scripture-based, sincerely renews his vow to walk with and serve the Lord. He must be ready to deny self, carry his cross and forgo even legitimate things that inhibits his entire consecration to the Lord and his holy pilgrimage to heaven. Joshua, Daniel, Ruth, Paul the apostle, etc. were consistent and faithful in their walk with God and they were blessed and used for the glory of God. So also were Enoch and Abraham in our text. Enoch in particular was translated to glory without seeing death, giving hope of eternal bliss in heaven to every believer who lives

a consistent holy life. It is obvious that those who do not maintain a consistent holy and obedient lifestyle will not be able to enter heaven (Matthew 7:21-23). But the believer who is steadfast and faithful in God's service will be blessed on earth and rewarded in heaven by the Lord.

Lesson 741

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen ” (Revelation 1:7).

TEXT: Matthew 25:29-46; Jude 14,15; Revelation 1:7; 19:11-21

The Scripture teaches that the Second Coming of Christ will be just as literal and visible as His going away. At His coming, He will execute judgment upon the ungodly, set up His kingdom and reign on this present earth for a thousand years. This is the uniform teaching of both the Old and New Testament scriptures.

CLARIFICATION OF CHRIST’S SECOND COMING: (Matthew 24:16-20,27-30; Zechariah 14:3,4; 1Corinthians 3:12-15; 2Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 19:18,19)

Question 1: *Explain the scriptural teaching of Christ’s Second Coming.*

Christ will come the second time immediately after the seven-year Great Tribulation. The period of the Great Tribulation will start from the time the Church disappears at rapture. Prior to His Second Coming, the children of Israel will be greatly persecuted during the tribulation until they cry to the Messiah, whom they previously rejected, to deliver them. The Lord will return to save the penitent nation of Israel from the desolator, the Antichrist (Matthew 24:16-20,27-30).

Thus, the rapture of the saints will precede the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ. However, the rapture should not be confused with the Second Coming. The two events are distinct and separated by seven years. Specifically, the second coming refers to Christ’s coming to the earth to be seen by all eyes. At rapture, He will not come to the earth but will remain in the air where the saints will

meet Him. It is not every eye that will see Him at the rapture.

When Christ meets the saints in the air, He will take them to heaven before the commencement of the Great Tribulation (Revelation 19:18,19). It is during this seven- year period that the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and the judgment of saints for reward would take place in heaven (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). In other words, the rapture is the time Christ comes for the saints to take them to heaven. At the second coming, however, He will come to the earth to live and fulfil a definite part of God's time-table for the earth and man. He will return with the saints raptured seven years earlier. Whereas the rapture can take place any moment without warning, the Second Coming cannot happen until after both the rapture and the Great Tribulation.

Question 2: *What are the differences between the rapture and Christ's Second Coming?*

PROOFS AND CERTAINTY OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING (Matthew 24:4-7,9-11,23-27,30,37; Mark 13:9,13; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 5:4; 1:7; Hebrews 10:27; Acts 1:11)

The Scriptures abound with proofs of the certainty of Christ's Second Coming. Our Lord Jesus spoke of His return several times and the signs that would herald it. A study of the scriptures indicate that certain prophecies concerning it and some future programs of God are not yet fulfilled and would only be, after the second advent of Christ. However, all the signs preceding the second advent are being fulfilled daily.

Going through the Olivet discourse of Matthew 24 and 25, the following signs of His coming are clear: Jesus Himself said, there would be deceptions (Matthew 24:4,5,11,24), false Christ's (Matthew 24:5,23-26), wars and rumours of wars (Matthew 24:6,7), famines (Matthew 24:7), pestilences, earthquakes, anti-semitism (Matthew 24:9; Mark 13:9,13), offences (Matthew 24:10), betrayals, hatred, false prophets (Matthew 24:11), lawlessness and martyrdom. He

said the impact of the Second Coming will be as universal as when **“the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth unto the west...”** It would make all **“the tribes of the earth to mourn”**. They would be deep in spiritual lethargy and indifference as was the case in the time of Noah’s flood (Matthew 24:27,30,37).

These descriptions of the social conditions of the last days is both frightening and gloomy. Paul the apostle writes in his epistle to Timothy that love of self will characterise the last days. There will also be cultural, scientific and technological advancement while spiritual ignorance will permeate the society. In spite of these admonitions and warnings from the Lord and His apostles about deceivers and signs of the last days, thousands have been entrapped in the web of false doctrines and sinful practices. In fact, the very widespread deception of nominal Christianity constitutes a greater danger that makes the ground slippery for those who sincerely seek to escape the damnation of hell (1 Timothy 4:1).

Question 3: *What are the signs of Christ’s Second Coming?*

Jesus spoke with deftness and certainty about His Second Coming. **“And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven”** (Mark 14:62). Added to the personal promise and prophecy of Jesus about His Second Coming is the announcement of angelic heralds at His ascension to heaven. Jesus, they said, **“shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven”** (Acts 1:11). The angels’ message that Jesus shall come back in like manner makes the interpretation of His personal, bodily and visible return undoubtable. The Holy Spirit, through the apostles, confirmed that Christ shall appear **“the second time”** (Hebrews 9:28).

PURPOSE OF CHRIST’S SECOND COMING (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 4:21; Isaiah 32:18; 33:20-24; Revelation 20:11-15; Isaiah 67:17; 66:22; Revelation 21:1; Jeremiah 12:4,11; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15)

The prophecy in Isaiah 9:6 that the government (of the whole world) would be on Christ's shoulders, relating to His Second Coming to reign literally on earth is yet to be fulfilled. Similar prophecies in Isaiah 61 would be fully fulfilled at His Second Coming.

The exactitude with which the old time prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ were fulfilled points to the infallibility of the Scriptures and to the certainty of those prophecies concerning His second advent. As prophecies concerning His virgin birth and details of His earthly life, death, burial and resurrection were all literally fulfilled to the letter, so would those relating to His Second Coming. A writer puts the subject of Christ's Second Coming thus: "Jesus will come again in just real and literal manner as He came the first time. No other interpretation of the Second Coming is consistent with the teaching of Scripture".

This imminent return of Christ is the glorious hope of the Church. One in every twenty-five verses in the New Testament pertains to the Lord's Second Coming. And there are more mention of the it than the subjects of personal salvation.

Question 4: *Why is Christ coming the second time?*

Apart from the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning Christ, other divine purposes which the second advent would fulfil include the comfort of the Church (John 14:1-3; 16:20-22); the restoration of Israel to her sovereignty as prophesied in the Scripture (Isaiah 32:18; 33:20-24); the judgment of the earth (Revelation 20:11-15; John 5:22); the renovation of the earth (Isaiah 67:17; 66:22; Revelation 21:1); and the restoration of all things (Romans 8:20-23; Jeremiah 12:4,11). At His Second Coming, Christ will reward His faithful servants with crowns of glory, praise and honour, and His adversaries with fiery indignation (1 Peter 5:4; 1:7; Hebrews 10:27).

CHRIST'S TRIUMPH AT THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON (Isaiah 11:1-9; Revelation 20:1-4; 19:11-21; 17:13,14)

Satan and his cohorts will mobilise forces to fight Christ and to frustrate His coming again to establish the Millennial Reign, just the same way he used Herod in his attempt to kill Christ at His first coming. He was defeated and he will be defeated again. The battle against Christ and His host is called the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19:11-21; 20:1-4). There will be a great and terrible slaughter of the armies of the Anti-christ gathered from the nations of the earth through the efforts of the evil spirits sent out over the earth by Satan, the Anti-christ and the false prophet (Revelation 17:13,14). This last attempt to wrongfully take the Kingdom from Christ will fail.

Christ will triumph in battle over Satan, the author of strifes and contention and bind him for one thousand years (Revelation 20:2,3). Thus, Christ will reign on the earth for a thousand years with the saints. His rule would be characterized by unprecedented peace, prosperity and blessings on the earth (Isaiah 11:1-9). Every believer should aspire to be there. The admonition of James the apostle to believers in view of this is: **“Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth near”** (James 5:8).

Question 5: *Explain the battle of Armageddon and the predicted losers and Victor.*

PREPARATION FOR CHRIST’S SECOND COMING: (John 3:1-8; Hebrews 12:14; 1 John 3:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:1,2; Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 1:7)

Question 6: *How should sinners and believers prepare for the Second Coming of Christ?*

Sinners and saints are called to prepare for this great event. While sinners are admonished to repent and come to Christ before the day of the Lord (John 3:1-8), the Church as a bride is called to be ready, holy, spotless, watchful, prayerful and busy preaching His word until He comes (Hebrews 12:14; 1 John 3:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:1,2; Ephesians 5:25-27).

