SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VOLUME 46-49

WITH HOME CARING FELLOWSHIP OUTLINES

NAME: ____________________________________________

CHURCH LOCATION: ___________________________________
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.”
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LESSON 586

SEVEN TRIBES RECEIVE INHERITANCE

MEMORY VERSE: “Ye shall therefore describe the land into seven parts, and bring the description hither to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the LORD our God” (Joshua 18:6).

TEXT: Joshua 18:1-28; 19:1-51

So far, Canaan had been allotted to five of the twelve tribes of Israel. We recall that two and a half of the tribes settled on the eastern portion of river Jordan. Their settlement on the western side, however, did not occur at the same time but in two phases. The first comprises the tribes of Judah and Joseph – Ephraim and Manasseh – at Gilgal (Joshua 14:6-15) while the second happened at Shiloh for the remaining tribes (Joshua 18:1-19:51).

While the selection of Shiloh and subsequent assembling of the nation there had necessarily interrupted the process of assigning portions to the last seven tribes, they were slack in going to conquer the remaining land in Canaan. Joshua had to challenge the people as well as commission a team of surveyors to describe the land into seven parts in preparation for its division.

The division of the land into seven parts, the specific description of their borders and Joshua’s own inheritance at the end of the whole exercise form the discourse of this study.

THE CHARGE TO DESCRIBE THE LAND (Joshua 18:1-9; 13:7-14; 1:2-6)

“And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them” (Joshua 18:1).

The camp and the tabernacle of the children of Israel had been in Gilgal since their passage over Jordan. The land now subdued at the end of the war of conquests, they
needed to move the tabernacle of the congregation to a more central location. The setting up of it in Shiloh, as we shall see, is not a coincidence as it bears significance to the will and Program of God for His people. First, prophecy had gone before that there shall be the assembling together of the children of Israel unto Shiloh (Genesis 49:10); and the word of the Lord must be fulfilled irrespective of prevailing circumstances.

Second, Shiloh, which means ‘peaceful’, signifies the deliverance and rest which the Lord promised to give the children of Israel from their enemies. Third, this spot, chosen through divine directive is central to all the tribes making it accessible for worship and sacrifice. The tabernacle remained there with its contents throughout the time of the Judges until it was captured by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:3, 4). It is equally interesting to note that Shiloh, at this time was near Jerusalem (about 15 miles and nearly at the center of the whole land) where it would have its permanent residency in time to come.

Having found peace, the children of Israel was slack in claiming the remainder of God’s promises for them. But Joshua was quick to challenge them not to be carried away by the conquests until the task of full possession is accomplished (verse 3). Here, we observe in Joshua a leader’s ability to remain focused. He had received a divine mandate to divide the land among the twelve tribes of Israel (Joshua 1:2-6); he would not be carried away by this partial success. Christian pilgrims learn here that they are not supposed to put down their sword until the battle for the souls of men is won. Our Lord has charged us to go into all the nooks and crannies of this world to seek men and women drawn unto death so that they can be delivered. We are expected to traverse every land and cross every river in search of the lost sheep until the Lord bids us come home for the final rest. That there is considerable success in our outreaches should not cause us to lay down our sickle for the harvest of souls.

In order to accomplish his mandate towards all the tribes, Joshua commanded the people saying, “Give out from among you three men for each tribe: and I will send them, and they shall rise, and go through the land, and describe it according to the inheritance of them; and
they shall come again to me” (Joshua 18:4). He ensured that he completed this task as he had been commanded.

**Question 1: What can Christian leaders and workers learn from Joshua’s commitment to seeing that all the tribes enter their possession?**

Believers must be committed to finishing the unfinished task of evangelism. They must do everything necessary to reach those that the Lord has sent them to. Moreover, those who are privileged to lead or pastor the congregation of the Lord should labor to lead God’s people into their promised possessions through teaching the whole counsel of God. It is not the will of God for His people to be ignorant of what rightly belongs to them while suffering unnecessarily. This aptly conveys a rebuke to Christians who are satisfied with present attainments when there is so much to do. The believer must get back to the word of God and arise and go through the land with holy passion to possess it.

The surveyors were to be three men out of each of the seven tribes. The matter was thus preferred equally that there might be neither partiality used in making up the seven lots. Again, after surveying the land and dividing it accordingly, the allotment was to be by lot, as in previous instances (chapters 14-17). Reasons for this are not far-fetched: that there might not be favoritism in allocation, or arguments bordering on partiality, but that all might be satisfied with whatever fell to them as the perfect will of God.

“And the men arose, and went away: and Joshua charged them that went to describe the land, saying, Go and walk through the land, and describe it, and come again to me, that I may here cast lots for you before the LORD in Shiloh” (Joshua 18:8). When the army of the Lord rises in obedience to do God’s will, victory is guaranteed. Great progress is recorded when the leader and the led cooperate together in carrying out divine assignments. Success is the result and reward for Christians who unite together to do God’s will without looking back. No power can withstand the force of such people and no agent of the heathen can stop them. The church of God will triumph consistently if we learn to cooperate with our God-ordained leaders in carrying out divine assignments.
As the surveyors traversed the land, they brought back to Joshua in a book the exact description of the land into seven portions. Obviously, they defined the boundaries of each tribe according to their terms of reference. It was a job well done! The way they carried out the assignment simplified Joshua’s work of casting lots and allocating the land. A dedicated and obedient workforce makes the job of the overall leader easier and simpler. It helps in achieving what is in the best interest of the organization.

There were several reasons for establishing the well-set boundaries instead of turning the Promised Land into a single undivided nation. First, the boundaries gave each tribe ownership of an area, promoting unity and loyalty. Second, they delineated areas of responsibility and privilege which would help them develop and mature them. Third, they would reduce conflicts that might arise if everyone were left to choose where to build and reside. Fourth, the boundaries fulfilled the promised inheritance to each tribe that began to be given as early as the days of Jacob (Genesis 48:21-22).

CASTING LOTS TO DIVIDE THE LAND (Joshua 18:10; Numbers 26:53-56; 1 Chronicles 25:8; 26:13, 14)

“And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD: and there Joshua divided the land unto the children of Israel according to their divisions” (Joshua 18:10).

Earlier, Moses had given Joshua some guidelines on how the land should be shared among the various tribes (Numbers 26:53-56; 33:54; 34:13). Joshua was also committed to carrying out this divine directive to share the land by lot. In our text, we see the account of his obedience and full compliance. He did not add or diminish from all that God through Moses had commanded him.

Casting lots was an ancient practice of seeking divine position on a matter. When a case could not be settled by mutual compromise among parties, a lot was cast to decide it and the parties submit to the outcome, bringing an end to any strife.
Question 2: Why is it improper for believers in the New Testament dispensation to cast lots in seeking guidance from God?

Although, the Scriptures did not state explicitly how the lots were cast, the important thing is that God used this method to guide His people in those days; and they respected the outcome as His verdict (Joshua 19:10, 32-39). Consequently, each tribe inherited the portion allotted to them. However, in the New Testament dispensation, believers cannot revert to such means of guidance because now, we have the full Canon of Scripture to read and take instruction. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Besides, the Holy Spirit is given to every born again Christian to guide and reveal the mind of God to His children. And, there will always be harmony between the written Word, the Holy Spirit and whatever other means – dream or revelation – that the Lord decides to use to lead His people.

Today, a believer who wishes to know the mind of God or receive guidance on important issues like choosing a life partner, choice of career, profession, or business, should pray, read the word of God and listen to the Holy Spirit. God is willing to lead His children to take the best decisions for their lives. Failure to consult the Lord can result in avoidable regrets and sorrows. We should develop a regular devotional habit, study God’s word and listen to His Holy Spirit in order to enjoy divine directive and discern His leading in our situation.

APPORTIONMENT OF INHERITANCE TO THE SEVEN TRIBES (Joshua 18:11-28; 19:1-48; Genesis 49:7)

As soon as the description and definition of the land was concluded, Joshua wasted no time in sharing it. The tribe of Benjamin came first in the arrangement. They occupied the heart of the land and possessed within its borders the first fruits of Israel’s labors in Canaan. Their border stretched from Jericho and the wilderness of Bethaven to the north, Kirjathjearim to the south, and Jordan to the east and Kirjathbaal, a city of the children of Judah to the west.
The second lot went to Simeon (Joshua 19:1-9). Simeon’s inheritance was in the midst of the inheritance of the tribe of Judah. It seems that Judah’s land was so large that some was assigned to Simeon. This also fulfils Jacob’s prophetic word concerning Simeon that God “…will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel” (Genesis 49:7).

The third lot went to Zebulun (Joshua 19:10-16). The description starts on the south side, and looks first west, then east and north with all the cities and villages described. “And their border went up toward the sea... And turned from Sarid eastward toward the sun rising…” (Verses 11, 12).

The fourth lot was for the tribe of Issachar (Joshua 19:17-23). Their territory stretched from Mount Tabor on the west to the southern top of the Sea of Galilee, including in its area the valley of Jezreel. The fifth lot went to Asher (Joshua 19:24-31). The coastal region stretched from Mount Carmel in the north to Tyre and Sidon. The sixth lot was for Naphtali (Joshua 19:32-39). Naphtali was located in the eastern upper and lower Galilee.

Finally, the lot of Dan was located between the territory of Benjamin and the Mediterranean (Joshua 19:40-48).

**Question 3: Explain some of the qualities found in Joshua as a minister of God and a leader of God’s people.**

Joshua’s great assignment of leading the people to Canaan and ensuring that they got their inheritance ended on a worthy note. With him came rest and recompense after the labor and rigor of battle. But his manner of accepting the recompense was a great example in selflessness, sacrifice and humility. He was first in labor but last in reward. He was the leader but he did not reach forth for choice portions of the land first. It was only after his work was done and the children of Israel had received their allotted portions that Joshua thought it right to take his own inheritance. “When they had made an end of dividing the land for inheritance by their coasts, the children of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun among them: According to the word of the LORD they gave him the city which he asked, even Timnathserah in mount Ephraim: and he built the city, and dwelt
therein” (Joshua 19:49,50). What an unselfish conduct! How like Christ who gave His best to obtain the best for humanity.

Joshua shone brightly in the hall of fame of men of selflessness, sacrifice, submission to the will of God and dedication to duty. He exemplified the Scripture injunction: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Philippians 2:3, 4).

Joshua’s life teems with tons of lessons for the believer. **First,** he completed his assignment and fulfilled his ministry. He proved faithful to his calling till the end without wavering. In him, Christian leaders behold courage, consistency, commitment and consecration. He threw himself unrestrainedly into the service of humanity and obedience to God.

**Second,** he did his job with diligence and handled all matters arising from the division of Canaan with tact and wisdom of the Holy Ghost. He attended to those with complaints with patience, understanding and godly admonition. For example, when “the children of Joseph spake unto [him], saying, Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people, forasmuch as the LORD hath blessed me hitherto?”, he challenged them to arise and defeat the Canaanites though they had chariots of iron. As they hesitated, he reminded them that they were “a great people, and hast great power”. He was a competent and charismatic leader.

**Third,** no one could accuse him of favoritism or partiality in the discharge of his duties. Though he belonged to the tribe of Ephraim, he did not do anything to favor them above other tribes in the distribution of the land. Fourth, his faith in and faithfulness to God were made manifest to all; hence, he was able to challenge all Israel towards the end of his life to serve God (Joshua 24:15). He was also a good example in how to have faith in God in the midst of difficult situations. Fifth, he was a lesson in submission to leadership. All the days he served under Moses, he was humble and obedient.
Question 4: Beyond earthly possessions, what is the hope of believers?

God has ordained a spiritual inheritance for His people. A portion of this inheritance is to be enjoyed now while on earth and others in eternity. At present, we can enjoy the privileges of using the name of Jesus in prayer and spiritual warfare; we can claim the benefits of Christ’s redemptive works of salvation, sanctification, protection, provision, divine guidance and communion with God. As children of God, we can affirm: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:2-4). God has given us all things richly to enjoy. In eternity, we shall have crowns and stars as well as rewards for our labor on earth. We shall be with the Lord forever. Although, the children of Israel shared the land of Canaan, the inheritance of the believer is eternal and that which shall not be taken away.
LESSON 587

RENEWED CHARGE TO APPOINT CITIES OF REFUGE

MEMORY VERSE: “THE LORD also spake unto Joshua, saying, speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses” (Joshua 20:1, 2).

TEXT: Joshua 20:1-9

The appointment of cities of refuge to which the manslayer could flee was one of the judgments (rule of law) that God gave to Israel through Moses. The first reference to such cities was made in the book of Exodus after the commandments were given (Exodus 20:3-17; 21:1, 12-14). Subsequently, the operation of this institution was clearly laid-out by the Lord (Numbers 35:6-33; Deuteronomy 19:1-13; 4:41-43).

Moses was dead and Joshua was in charge of the affairs of the nation. Under Joshua’s leadership, Israel had conquered the enemy nations and all the tribes had possessed their portions of inheritance, as explained at the end of the previous chapter.

It was therefore important that they should be reminded of this aspect of God’s law which would prevent their land from being defiled or polluted by blood with the consequent forfeiture of God’s presence (Numbers 35:30-34). The timeliness of the charge is also important in that the cities of refuge were all to be cities of the Levites who were about to be given their dwelling cities out of the inheritance of other tribes (Joshua 21:1-42). The reminder will help the children of Israel to appoint cities that would meet God’s requirement (Deuteronomy 19:2-6).

The focus of this topic is that God’s commandments – the doctrinal landmark – are sacred and must be preserved, practiced and preached passionately even when the founding leader is no more and times have changed.

Question 1: What is the focus of our topic of study today?
THE IMmutABILITY OF GOD’S COUNSEL (Joshua 20:1, 2; Matthew 5:17; 18; 24:35)

“The LORD also spake unto Joshua, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses” (Joshua 20:1, 2).

It is rightly said that nothing on earth remains constant or permanent except change. But this is not the case with the Almighty God because the doctrines of His word and the righteousness of saints do not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; Psalm 119:89; Revelation 22:18-19; Proverbs 24:21).

Presently, the vision of DAWN (Discipling A Whole Nation) has been passed to us by our leaders; we cannot rest on assumption that we have attained a level of victory in the past. We need to continue working with the leadership on every revealed strategy to actualize this vision. Truly, the counsel of the Lord shall stand (Proverbs 19:21). People who attempt to change the word of God in order to boost their personal ego (like Jeroboam, the son of Nebat) will face God’s devouring anger and hot displeasure (Isaiah 46:10; Job 9:4; 1 Kings 12:25-33; 14:7-11, 14-16; Galatians 1:6-9).

Question 2: (a) Point out what we can learn from God’s mandate and leadership change. (b) Enumerate some reasons men change or compromise the word of God.

But why would mortal men, limited in knowledge, time and power, decide to change the wise counsels of the Omnificent God? A careful study of the Bible reveals some of the reasons as: (i) fear of man (1 Samuel 15:24); (ii) desire to keep one’s position by all means (1 Kings 12:26-33); (iii) wages of unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:15,16; Numbers 22:5-22); (iv) deception by false or backslidden prophets (1 Kings 13:11-22); (v) ungodly pressure from the congregation (Exodus 32:1-4); (vi) unscriptural counsel from trusted subordinates (Joshua 7:2-4; Number 27:18-21); and (vii) respect of persons (Jude 16; James 2:1-4).

Question 3: Why was it necessary at this time to renew the earlier charge of appointing cities of refuge?

At last, Israel had entered Canaan after several successful
military campaigns against the inhabitants of the land, led by Joshua; normal socio-economic and religious activities had already begun for a long time.

The Lord therefore gave new responsibility to Joshua to have the cities of refuge appointed or named, as He told Moses. Furthermore, God gave this command to Israel at a time when the land was newly-surveyed and they had settled after the battles with the enemies. We learn therefore that past victories or accomplishments in life or ministry should not be a yardstick to exempt ourselves from carrying out other assignments from the Lord.

The purpose of the new responsibility was to draw the people of God to the path of obedience. This is because believers tend to forget the counsel of God when they may have attained some level of victory or blessing (Psalm 106:13; Deuteronomy 32:20). It is therefore needful for leaders at every level in the church to constantly remind their congregations to renew their consecration and commitment to the will of God. The importance of constantly reminding God’s people on this issue was captured by Peter, when he said: “I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth” (2 Peter 1:12).

INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THE CITIES OF REFUGE (Joshua 20:3-6, 9; Exodus 21:13, 14; Numbers 35:6-33; Deuteronomy 4:41-43; 19:1-13)

Our text and other passages clearly reveal divine instructions on the appointment and operations of the cities of refuge. Like many Old Testament events and institutions, the cities of refuge symbolize the relief that the gospel provides for repentant sinners and their protection from the curse of the law and the righteous indignation of God (Hebrews 6:18; Romans 8:1).

Question 4: What are the equivalents of the cities of refuge and what do they typify in the gospel era?

The following are some of the instructions concerning the cities of refuge. One, all the six cities of refuge were to be cities of the Levites (Joshua 20:2; Numbers 35:6). This provision gave the manslayer on exile the privilege of associating with the Levites and receiving the much
needed teaching and comfort for his spiritual sustenance. The best companions on earth are God’s ambassadors. This is because they are the channels through which God sends His blessings of salvation and deliverance to men in their time of need (Job 22:29, 30; John 20:23; Acts 16:25, 26; 27:21-25; Daniel 2:10-19).

Two, the cities of refuge were meant only for the protection of those who killed any person unintentionally (verses 3-5). Those who killed as a result of temporary passion or premeditated malice were to face the consequence of their action – death (Exodus 21:13, 14; Numbers 35:15-25). The manslayer was to flee urgently to a city of refuge without delay, to prevent the blood-avenger from pursuing and killing him (Deuteronomy 19:5, 6). When the avenger of blood pursues the manslayer into the city of refuge, the elders had the responsibility to protect him from the avenger. This implies that the elders such as pastors and leaders have the primary responsibility of ensuring that converts do not stray or backslide into the territory of the avenger (the devil). The elders can do this through consistent intercession, prayers, follow-up and visitation.

Three, the manslayer, if proved innocent by the judges, was to dwell in the city of refuge. This foreshadows the justice of God that should apply in the organized social setting. By this appointment, God disallowed extra-judicial killing by any person or institution. Irrespective of social status, nobody was permitted to take the laws into their hands by prompting or instigating extra-judicial killings. The accused person deserved protection and fair trial until found guilty. However, if he was found guilty, he faced appropriate judgment (Numbers 35:9-11). The manslayer forfeited the privilege of immunity the moment he ventured beyond the border of the city of his refuge (Numbers 35:26-28). The believer can only enjoy protection from the power of sin, sickness and Satan as long as he abides in Christ.

Four, the death of the High Priest secured the complete deliverance of the manslayer from his sin. This symbolizes the freedom that the death of Christ secures for the sinner who trusts in Him (Numbers 35:25; Hebrews 9:14, 15; 2:14, 15). Unless by death of the High Priest, the children of Israel were instructed not to release the manslayer for any reason (Numbers 35:32). This confirms the truth that
lost humanity cannot be redeemed from the bondage of sin with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 2:18, 19; Psalm 49:6-8; Mark 8:36, 37).

Five, the children of Israel, the stranger and whosoever killed any person unawares had the same right to the benefits of the cities of refuge (Joshua 20:9; Number 35:15). This shows that God’s provision of salvation through the vicarious suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is for all men (John 3:16; Romans 1:16; Acts 10:34, 35).

IMMEDIATE OBEDIENCE OF GOD’S CHILDREN (Joshua 20:7, 8; Genesis 22:1-19)

We note the obedience of the children of Israel to the renewed charge to appoint cities of refuge. God had first spoken to Moses while he was their leader. Now, the command came to Joshua, Moses’ successor, and the people believed in their new leader and went ahead to appoint the cities in obedience to God. Church members should trust and obey God through His servants, the leaders. It is important for believers to understand that the basis of their prosperity is continual obedience to the revealed will of God (1 Chronicles 20:20). In the case of Abraham (for example) obedience of faith was his secret to receiving all blessings associated with the covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:15-18).

Question 5: Mention some qualities of acceptable obedience to God as implied in the obedience of Joshua and the children of Israel.

Joshua and the children of Israel’s response to God’s commandments is highly commendable and worthy of emulation (Joshua 20:8, 9; Hebrews 6:12). Their obedience was acceptable to God because it was:

(i) prompt – no time lag or delay between the period God gave the commandment and their action of obedience;

(ii) sacrificial – the children of Israel were to give forty-eight cities with their suburbs out of their inheritance to the Levites from which six would be used for refuge (Numbers 35:2, 3, 6-8; 2 Samuel 24:24);

(iii) Complete – they gave all that was demanded and
necessary. It is complete obedience that enables a believer to attain supernatural blessings and prevail in spiritual warfare (2 Corinthians 10:3-6; 1 Samuel 15:1-3, 7-23);

(iv) **unquestioning** - there were no records of questions, doubts, complaints, arguments and murmurings (Philippians 2:14, 15);

(v) **Loving** – they gave out the cities which were best for the purpose. The cities were on mountains, therefore making them suitable for use as cities of refuge because they could be seen from a far distance (Isaiah 33:15-17; Matthew 5:14);

(vi) **voluntary** – they were neither compelled by thrilling promises of blessing nor threatened by punishment; and

(vii) **Balanced** – their obedience was comprehensive and based on the Scripture. It took into consideration all other related instructions concerning the cities of refuge. Most often, zeal without knowledge leads to disappointment, despair and destruction (2 Samuel 6:1-10; 1 Chronicles 15:2-4; Hosea 4:6; Romans 10:1-3).

These cities of refuge bear striking significance to Christ, our eternal Refuge. Kadesh signifies separation or holiness. And Jesus is a “**high priest who is holy harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and made higher than the heavens**” (Hebrews 7:26). Shechem signifies the shoulder, and the government shall be on the shoulder of Jesus (Isaiah 9:6; 53:4). Hebron is fellowship. And, believers are called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3). Bezer signifies a fortified place or fortress. The Lord is our Fortress. Ramoth signifies an exalted or high place: God has highly exalted Christ and placed Him above the whole earth (Ephesians 1:20; 2:6; Philippians 2:9). Golan means joy or rejoicing. Christ is the joy of the whole earth.

The cities of refuge were positioned in such a way that there was one located within reasonable distance, making it easily accessible. This teaches that God gives every person access to His refuge. God’s salvation is therefore
available to the repentant. Jesus proclaimed, “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest…” (Matthew 11:28). This is the effect and advantage of the cities’ proximity to the people. In like manner, the house-church system of the DAWN vision will help get the gospel nearer to the people, more especially to those who would not, for one reason or the other, travel long distances to attend church services or crusades. It will also motivate believers to see the people in their neighborhood, know their predicament and be inspired to rescue them from perishing. Moreover, God has brought His salvation near to mankind through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

**Question 6:** (a) What is the pictorial significance of the names of the cities of refuge to Christ? (b) What do we learn from the strategic positioning of the cities of refuge?

As we compare the cities of refuge with the provisions of the gospel of Christ, the following points are worthy of note: (i) The slayer at the city of refuge is admitted on the basis of the profession of his innocence, but it is the full admission and confession of our guilt that grants us entrance into the kingdom of God through Christ (Luke 18:9-14; Romans 10:1-3). (ii) The cities of refuge afforded only a temporary protection for the body while the gospel affords full salvation for the whole man forever (1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 7:25). (iii) The protection which the cities of refuge afforded cuts off from the manslayer the privileges of fellowship with his family and temple worship, but the gospel ensures both privileges (1 John 1:1-3). (iv) The manslayer could only flee to any of the designated six cities for protection, but the gospel is available to all in every place and needs no toilsome pilgrimages (John 4:21-24; Romans 10:6-11).

**Question 7:** In what ways are the provisions of the Gospel of Christ different from the protection afforded the manslayer in the cities of refuge?

Finally, all sinners should urgently run to Christ, repent and renounce all known sins. Failure to do this will make the justice and vengeance of God to overtake them in death.
LESSON 588
INHERITANCE OF THE LEVITES

MEMORY VERSE: “But unto the tribe of Levi Moses gave not any inheritance: the LORD God of Israel was their inheritance, as he said unto them” (Joshua 13:33).

TEXT: Joshua 21:1-45

In our previous study, God renewed His charge to the leaders of Israel (Moses and Joshua) to appoint cities of refuge as safe haven for the unwitting manslayer. The provision of these cities of refuge purely at God’s initiative demonstrates His deep sympathy and understanding of man’s frailties, the need for considering the motive behind an offence when justice is administered, and the protection of the innocent.

Our text here focuses on the inheritance of the Levites, one of the tribes of Israel entrusted with the service of the sanctuary and duty of instructing and educating all other tribes in the law of the Lord. It is instructive to note that Levi was one of the sons of Jacob, who, along with Simeon, was involved in a cruel revenge against the Shechemites when they defiled Dinah, their sister. Because of this cruelty, Jacob cursed both Simeon and Levi (Genesis 49:5-7). People like Simeon, Levi, Achan, Cain, Herod, Pharaoh and a host of others brought severe judgments upon themselves because of sin.

However, it is important to emphasize that the grace of God can deal with the sin problem, creating a way for every man to escape its consequences when he repents and turns to God (Exodus 32:25-28).

The Levites had a turning point in their lives after the Golden Calf episode when Moses made an altar call. “Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD’s side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him” (Exodus 32:26). This decision by the Levites exempted them from God’s judgment. Instead, they were given the privileged position of replacing the first born in ministering in the sanctuary.
Question 1: What can we learn from the transformation, divine upliftment and inheritance of the Levites?

From the history of the tribe of Levi, we learn that there is no limit to what the grace of God can do in a person’s life. God’s grace can so transform a man and uplift him from the valley of sin and its consequences to the pinnacle of God’s glory. This transforming grace of God can break all yokes, eliminate curses and bring a person into fellowship with God. It is available today for all who will decide like the Levites to follow Him irrespective of their sinful past.

GOD-APPORTIONED INHERITANCE FOR THE LEVITES
(Joshua 21:1-8; 13:33; 14:3; 18:7; Colossians 1:12; Psalm 47:4; 16:5; Acts 20:32)

The Levites were allotted no territorial inheritance of their own at the time the land was divided because the Lord was their inheritance. “Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him” (Deuteronomy 10:9). The Levites were composed of three notable families: the Gershonites, Kohathites and Merarites, with the family of Aaron presumably the fourth. The priests who were chosen from Aaron’s family were also Levites; however, not all Levites were priests. The Levites were divinely assigned to assist Aaron, the high priest, and his sons in the priestly duties in keeping charge of the sanctuary.

It is instructive to note that the Levites were the last to receive their portion of the inheritance. This was so because they were not to occupy any distinct territory, but certain selected cities among the tribes. It was against this backdrop that the heads of the tribes of Levi came to Joshua and Eleazar, the high priest, to make their claim on their inheritance based on the command of the Lord. From the action of the Levites, we learn that though an inheritance has been provided for believers, they must ask in faith to receive (Matthew 7:7-11; James 4:2, 3). The response of the children of Israel to the demands of the Levites was prompt as they cheerfully obeyed the divine command. “And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their suburbs” (Joshua 21:3).
The prompt response of the children of Israel to the request made by the Levites is quite commendable and worthy of emulation by believers in all issues pertaining to the word and will of God. Whether convenient or not, God’s word and command must be obeyed implicitly, promptly and wholeheartedly. It is in our obedience that we can enjoy the fullness of His blessings.

Like the Levites, ministers of the gospel should shun covetousness and unbridled quest for power and position. They should desire to be “last of all, and servant of all,” following the steps of Christ. Ministers and leaders should serve without any prospect of earthly gain or reward. This is not, however, an excuse for believers to neglect their duty in the upkeep of ministers and servants of God and those on full-time service. To do so will be contrary to the tenor and teachings of the Scripture. As God commanded that the Levites should be well provided for, so also, those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:7, 14; Galatians 6:6).

**Question 2: State the main difference between the inheritance of the Levites and believers in Christ.**

Though the inheritance of the Levites was temporal, the believer’s inheritance in Christ is eternal and enduring in substance that “fadeth not away, reserved in heaven”. Believers can only enjoy in part their inheritance on earth, while they hope for the rest in eternity (1 Peter 1:3, 4; Ephesians 1:11, 14). At present, they can enjoy the privilege of using the name of Jesus in prayer and spiritual warfare; claim the benefits of Christ’s redemptive works of salvation, sanctification, Holy Ghost power, protection, provision, divine guidance and communion with God. However, in eternity we shall inherit all things; we shall receive mansions, thrones, crowns and dominion. We shall be with the Lord forever and ever (John 14:1-3). To prepare for the heavenly inheritance, believers need to hold fast their righteousness (Job 27:6); maintain a steadfast, consistent and holy walk with the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58; 1 Peter 1:15,16); demonstrate implicit and unwavering faith in God and obedience to His word; be regularly pre-occupied with soul-winning, sacrificial and consecrated service in the house of God (Mark 11:22; Romans 12:1,2; 2 Timothy 4:1,2).
Question 3: What preparations should believers make for their spiritual inheritance?


Our text gives a definite account of the distribution of the cities of the Levites among Aaron’s lineage and the three major families of the tribe. A total of forty-eight cities were given to the Levites. The family of Aaron, the priest, received thirteen cities with their suburbs (verse 19); the families of Kohath had a total of ten cities out of the tribe of Ephraim. The families of Gershon had their lot in Golan in Bashan with her suburbs. They had a total of thirteen cities. The families of Merari had their lot out of the tribe of Zebulun with their suburbs. Their cities were twelve in number. Six of the cities of the Levites were designated as cities of refuge.

Question 4: Why were the Levites dispersed into all the tribes of Israel?

The distribution shows that the Levites were dispersed into all the tribes of Israel. Their mixing therefore became necessary for proper performance of their sacred duties of ministering to the whole nation, teaching the law of God and preserving the sanctity of temple worship. The service given to the Levites is a challenge to believers today. God does not want our consecration to make us indifferent, isolated from the people or make us resort to a secluded life.

Every tribe had its share of the cities of the Levites. Thus, God graciously provided for preserving true worship among them and ensuring that the word of God was in all parts of Israel. In the same way, believers have been dispersed in the world to preach the gospel to every creature. We are to live among the people and win them to the Lord. Believers are to be scattered abroad for the evangelization of the world in order to fulfill the Discipling A Whole Nation (DAWN) project (Mark 16:15-20; Acts 8:4).
GOD’S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS COVENANT AND LAWS
(Joshua 21:43-45; 23:14; Luke 21:33; Deuteronomy 7:9;
1 Kings 8:56; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Psalm 89:1; Hebrews
10:23; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 19:11)

“There failed not aught of any good thing which the
LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came
to pass” (Joshua 21:45). God is faithful to His word, plan,
purpose and promise to His people in all ages. He has all
the resources of the universe at His command to fulfill His
promises; He is the unlimited, Omniscient, Omnipotent
and Omnipresent God who can never fail. In Him, there
is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James
1:17).

However, God may not always fulfill His promises the way
and time we expect. By His sovereign prerogative, He does
fulfill His promises at the appointed time. It is important
to note that the fulfillment of God’s promises and the
enjoyment of His blessings are conditional, hinged on
our faith, faithfulness, character, conduct and obedience.
There is the divine part as well as the human part.

Question 5: Upon what conditions are the promises of
God fulfilled in our lives?

The task of possessing the land of Canaan was
accomplished, though the Canaanites still dwelt in certain
parts of it. God did not however promise the Israelites
the immediate and total destruction of the Canaanites.
They were to be driven out gradually (Exodus 23:29, 30;
Deuteronomy 7:22).

In conclusion, all the promises were fulfilled. For “…all
came to pass”. The sea was crossed; the desert had its
food and water; Bashan was subdued; Jordan was crossed;
and the whole land possessed. This is an encouragement
to believers today that however impossible the fulfilment
of God’s promises might seem, they will be fulfilled at the
appropriate time. He is “able to do exceeding abundantly
above all that we ask or think, according to the power
that worketh in us” (Ephesians 3:20). God is the same
today as yesterday. His word cannot return to Him void.
Heaven and earth may pass away, but His word shall not
pass away. In Christ, “all the promises of God are yea
and amen”.

28
LESSON 589
THE ALTAR OF WITNESS

MEMORY VERSE: “And when they came unto the borders of Jordan, that are in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to” (Joshua 22:10).

TEXT: Joshua 22:1-34

The tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh had the east side of Jordan after the Israelites conquered Sihon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan. Moses consented on condition that their men of war support the remaining tribes to possess their own land in Canaan (Numbers 32:33). The reason for their request was that “the place was a place for cattle”, they being cattle-rearers by occupation.

Having fulfilled their promise to help other tribes get their inheritance, the two and a half tribes were released to return to Gilead to take full possession of their own inheritance. Our text deals with their return, the decision to build an altar of witness, the misunderstanding of their action by the Israelites and the resolution of the impasse.

Question 1: What can we learn from the way Moses handled the request of the two and a half tribes?

RETURN OF THE TWO AND HALF TRIBES TO THEIR INHERITANCE (Joshua 22:1-9; 1:10-18; Numbers 32:1-42; Deuteronomy 3:12-20; Psalm 145:19)

“Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, And said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you... therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side Jordan” (Joshua 22:1-4).

The battle to conquer Canaan has ended and the Reubenites, the Gadites and half of Manasseh have
fulfilled their promise to cooperate in fighting to possess the whole land. They stood by their brethren to defeat all their enemies. The land had also been shared among the remaining tribes. Now, it is time to return to their desired inheritance having paid their dues. We learn here the importance of keeping our promises. If we have pledged something or made an oath, we should not default. It is unscriptural to make a promise and along the line, renege. Rather, it is an act of righteousness for one to swear to his own hurt, and change not (Psalm 15:4). The Scripture enjoins us to stand by our words, promises, oaths and vows (Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21; Ecclesiastes 5:4). Time does not cancel oaths. Believers should cultivate the habit of keeping to agreements, contracts or pledges which they had willingly entered into irrespective of the time it was made.

Joshua saw no reason to keep these tribes any further having accomplished their assignment. More so, he was a witness when Moses agreed with them and gave them their inheritance on condition that they help their brethren to possess their inheritance.

Question 2: What should be our attitude toward pledge redemption?

In demobilizing these tribes, Joshua admonished them to “take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Joshua 22:5). The importance of keeping the word of God cannot be overstressed in every situation and circumstance. Wherever we go or stay, obedience to God is the only panacea for peace, prosperity and progress. Joshua did not mince words in letting the people realize that their future can only be guaranteed based on their faithfulness to the law which Moses delivered to them.

After the admonition, Joshua blessed them for their faithfulness and commitment to the welfare of other tribes. Church leaders should not only be prompt to chide their subjects; they should be ready to appreciate, commend and bless them openly when they do what is right.
The two and a half tribes returned with joy and excitement to their families which they had left for many years. On getting to Jordan and in keeping with Joshua’s charge, they decided to build an altar. Though the altar was to be a replica of the one in Shiloh, its purpose was different. It was meant to be a witness and a memorial of their relationship with mainstream Israel. They feared that upcoming generations of their brethren might deny their affinity and common ancestry in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For them, the altar was to be a symbol of unity to remind their brethren that they are united in faith, worship and commitment to the God of Israel despite the geographical separation. In other words, the altar was to serve as a bridge to keep up their fellowship with other tribes in spiritual matters.

However, they erred on such a sensitive project in not consulting with other tribes. This is very instructive to us today. If we hope to enjoy the support and cooperation of our leaders, we need to carry them along in planning, executing church Programs and seeking counsels, where necessary.

**Question 3: Mention the dangers in failure to seek counsel in spiritual matters, where necessary.**

The holy jealousy of the other tribes of Israel for the honor of God and His altar at Shiloh would not allow them look away from the action of these tribes. They had supposed that their brethren were attempting to introduce idolatry into the worship of God. “And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them” (Joshua 22:12). In a swift reaction, they notified the princes of Israel and mobilized themselves against the Reubenites, the Gadites and a half tribe of Manasseh.

However, the leaders in Israel were also hasty in judgment. They did not establish the purpose for building the altar before deciding to take up arms against their brethren.
How leaders need to be patient and careful in handling sensitive issues. In matters that require acting, especially where life is involved, we are admonished to investigate and make diligent inquisition. This is important where there is need for sanction or discipline on those who have supposedly erred in the faith (Deuteronomy 19:18). Leaders need to balance up their zeal and holy indignation with facts so as not to destroy the characters they are trying to build. Some innocent people have been affected negatively due to undue haste in judgment. Therefore, caution should be exercised in every matter before any form of disciplinary action is taken against anyone within and outside the church.

Also, suspicion must not be allowed either in the natural family or the family of God. Any assembly where suspicion is rife cannot enjoy the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It’s always a cankerworm that destroys the fabrics of love, trust and confidence, and leaves in its place hate, apprehension, mistrust and misgiving.

**Question 4: What can we learn from the assumption of the leaders in Israel on the erection of the altar?**

In this dispensation of grace, we should be earnest in building trust in the body of Christ and strengthening the bonds of love. The common goal of Christians is heaven. Let us therefore concentrate on helping one another to get there. We should emphasize the message of holiness that is central to the Christian faith irrespective of denominations. Ours is battle against the devil, his cohorts, corruption, moral filth and sin in general, not against one another.

**RIGHT APPROACH TO CONFLICTS RESOLUTION AMONG BRETHREN (Joshua 22:30-34; Genesis 13:1-18; Psalm 133:1-3; Matthew 5:22-24; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8)**

It is instructive that the princes of Israel had a rethink and took a discreet step before the proposed war against their supposedly wrong brethren. It was a right step towards conflict resolution. “And the children of Israel sent unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, And with him ten princes, of each chief house a prince throughout all the tribes of Israel; and each one was an head of the
house of their fathers among the thousands of Israel. And they came unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, unto the land of Gilead…” (Joshua 22:13-15).

The approach by the leaders of Israel affirms Christ’s teaching in the New Testament. He says, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Matthew 18:15). This effort is to be repeated till the matter gets to the leadership of the church (Matthew 18:16, 17). This shows that accusation or retaliation is not the first option wherever there is misunderstanding among the brethren.

Question 5: From the conduct of the Phinehas-led delegation, what lessons do we learn in conflict resolution?

Phinehas and his company’s message to leaders of the two and a half tribes shows their disposition towards them: “Thus saith the whole congregation of the LORD, What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the LORD? Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the LORD” (Joshua 22:16, 17). They alluded to earlier occurrences of rebellion and the grave consequences they brought on their nation to support their decision (Joshua 22:18-20).

However, those that will make good decisions and judgments must learn to get all the facts, be receptive to new information and listen to the aggrieved parties before reaching a conclusion. Nicodemus’ question to the Jews regarding the way Jesus’ case was handled is apt in this regard: “Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” (John 7:51).

As presumptive and caustic as the message of these emissaries, the congregation of the two and half tribes delivered their response in such a tone that did not ignite the already inflamed passion. How true that “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up
anger” (Proverbs 15:1). There will be less arguments and frictions in families, Christian assemblies, organizations, if people learn to respond to criticisms, accusations and allegations with meekness and gentleness. “Then the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh answered, and said unto the heads of the thousands of Israel, That we have built us an altar to turn from following the LORD, or if to offer thereon burnt offering or meat offering, or if to offer peace offerings thereon, let the LORD himself require it” (Joshua 22:21, 23).

Unfortunately, many assemblies and churches today are filled with victims of misrepresentation, character assassination and injustice without anyone to defend them or grant them fair hearing. If we are to sustain brotherliness in our fellowship groups or families, we must endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace where members are free to worship the Lord without fear of intimidation or subtle victimization. Only by such can we curb grumbling, murmuring and resentment which are inimical to true fellowship.

Question 6: What do we learn from the comportment of the accused tribes and their eventual reunion with Israel?

Though falsely accused for an otherwise sincere motive, they kept their calm until God vindicated them. Their mature reception and response devoid of retaliatory statements are indicative of their inner strength of character. They placed positive construction on the false accusation and looked at Israel as being sincerely misled in their assessment. Such should be the conduct of followers of Christ, “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:23)

Opportunity came for the two and a half tribes to react to the allegation and they did it graciously. Regarding the altar, they claimed that River Jordan created a barrier between them and other tribes with the possibility of being stigmatized by subsequent generations. Also, the altar being patterned exactly after the altar of the Lord in Shiloh would serve as a witness between them and other
tribes in time to come. “And when Phinehas the priest, and the princes of the congregation and heads of the thousands of Israel which were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh spake, it pleased them” (Joshua 22:30). Thus, both the visiting delegation and the falsely accused congregation were brought to a reconciliation, open confession and restoration of trust.

In conclusion, we see that people and nations should learn to first dialogue about their differences, rather than resort to war. Nations should explore diplomacy to resolve issues; taking up arms against one another should not be the first option. Countless lives would be saved if people learn to hold round-table conferences. Our families, fellowships, factories and society would be a better place to live if we handle issues this biblical way.
LESSON 590

JOSHUA’S FAREWELL MESSAGE

MEMORY VERSE: “Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left” (Joshua 23:6).

TEXT: Joshua 23:1-16

In our studies in the book of Joshua, we notice the work and results that God achieved through Joshua. In this chapter, we have the record of the climax of the exploits of this general. “And it came to pass a long time after that the Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about...” (Joshua 23:1). At this point, Joshua was very old and ready for eternal rest and reward (Joshua 23:1, 14). However, as a man of vision, he needed to hand-over the mandate to the next generation of leaders. The chapter before us therefore captures a short but complete record of the charge he gave the leaders of Israel. In this kind of address, the usual practice is to encourage the next generation on the need to focus on appropriate actions and attitude that will put them on the right path that would enable them attain the expected glorious destiny.

In the Scripture, various leaders (before and after Joshua) had given such message to succeeding generations. For instance, in the Old Testament, Jacob addressed his children before his death (Genesis 49:1, 2); Moses charged Joshua and Israel before his death (Deuteronomy 31:1-8; 33:1); Samuel addressed Israel when Saul was appointed as king in Israel (1 Samuel 12:1-7); David did the same to Solomon when he was about to die (1 Kings 2:1-4). In the New Testament, our Lord Jesus Christ addressed His disciples before He went to heaven (Matthew 28:16-20). The charge of the Lord Jesus to the disciples, also called the Great Commission, is meant for all believers (Matthew 28:18-20). He wants us to occupy till He comes. “And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come” (Luke 19:13). Paul the apostle also gave such address to the
elders of the Church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17-21, 28) and the church at Philippi and by extension, to all believers to be united in living out and spreading the gospel (Philippians 1:27; 1 Corinthians 15:58).

**Question 1: Mention at least three biblical examples of farewell messages.**

One may ask why Joshua gave Israel this farewell speech or message. From past examples and cases listed above, the reasons for such a message include: (1) to communicate God’s will to the people; (2) to leave example for on-coming leaders; (3) to ensure continuity in the purpose and mission for the nation; (4) to challenge the people to be faithful to God; (5) to caution the people against unfaithfulness to God; (6) to create a sense of direction on the way forward; (7) to remind the people of God’s faithfulness; and (8) to refresh their memory on the promises of God for the future of the nation.

**Question 2: State the significance of Joshua’s farewell message/address to the children of Israel.**

The scope and content of Joshua’s address can be divided into three areas. These include review of God’s past goodness to Israel under his leadership, God’s promises for future exploits and Israel’s responsibility for enjoying and sustaining God’s goodness.

**REVIEW OF GOD’S PAST FAITHFULNESS TO HIS COVENANT PROMISES** (Joshua 23:3,4,9,14; 11:23; 21:43,44; 22:4; Deuteronomy 31:28; Psalms 89:34,35)

“And ye have seen all that the Lord your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the Lord your God is he that hath fought for you. Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward” (Joshua 23:3,4). God promised that Abraham’s descendants would inherit the Land of Canaan. Even though many generations have been part of the history of the nation of Israel, God’s promise has not changed. However, He has been renewing it. The review in our text is necessary and important for Joshua, Israel, as well as the church (Romans 15:4). For Joshua, it served as a
testimony of God’s faithfulness and power in his life and ministry. It shows that the effort and dedication he put into his leadership role were not in vain, and that he had the assurance of a great reward.

There were striking victories and achievements. For the elders of Israel, this review is meant to remind them of God’s power and readiness to see them through their various challenges, though Joshua was about to depart from them. Moreover, it was to let Israel know where they needed to start from and where they should go after Joshua’s departure. Change in leadership in any local assembly will be hitch-free where the leader has faithfully and dutifully prepared successors for future responsibility. We need to bear in mind that “we are laborers with God”.

Question 3: **Why should church leaders do proper handing over when leaving for a new station? What should be the content and manner of presenting it?**

We also learn about humility from Joshua’s attitude when he was doing this review. One, He did not fault Moses his predecessor, give excuse or apportion blame for the remaining unconquered territories. Two, he attributed all the victories to the power of God. In his words “ye have seen all that the Lord your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the Lord your God is He that hath fought for you” (Joshua 23:3). He gave God all the credit. Three, he reminded Israel that God did it all for them, not for him as a leader.

We learn that leaders should always give God the glory for their successes and teach the people to rely on God. This attitude has a lot of advantages. One, it saves the leader from pride and judgment of God. Two, it helps the people to put total faith in the eternal God who is their true and eternal helper; people should not put their confidence in man. Three, it opens the way for future victories through faith in the unchanging God. Leaders who take credit for God’s work and draw away people’s attention usually end as failures because of lack of continuity and faith in God. Besides, it can attract God’s judgment, as in the case of Herod. “**And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, it is**
the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost” (Acts 12:21-23).

**Question 4: What are the dangers of unduly attracting people’s attention to the human leader instead of God?**

In summary, we see that the benefit of such review is to show God’s faithfulness, inspire faith in Him and strengthen the relationship of the audience with God the author of miracles.

**REITERATION OF GOD’S PROMISES FOR FUTURE CONQUESTS** (Joshua 23:4, 5, 9 10; Obadiah 17; Isaiah 41: 10-16; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, Jeremiah 1:9-10; 34:11; Joshua 13:6)

Having reviewed the past exploits of Israel through God’s power and reminded them of the fact that God did it for their sakes, Joshua went ahead to exhort Israel that the Lord God would help them in conquering the remaining territories. “And the LORD your God, He shall expel them from before you, and drive them out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land as the LORD your God hath promised unto you” (Joshua 23:5). Joshua was given this same promise during the period of his commissioning and he had seen it fulfilled. Now he is confidently passing it on to his successors.

The content of the promise is very great. It is a promise of total dispossession of the Canaanites of their lands and the complete possession of the same land by Israel. Actually, the unconquered territories were not left because of lack of power, but the wisdom of God for Israel to possess the land in bits (Exodus 23:30, 31). God did not want the Canaanites to be removed at once so that the land would not be mismanaged for lack of use due to the disparity between the population of the Canaanites and that of Israel. We learn here about the wisdom of God. Enduring success usually comes step by step, not suddenly. Whatever the Lord does not allow you to have now, you should understand that (in His wisdom) He will reserve it for you so that you can possess it at the appropriate time. You should therefore not attempt to run ahead of God,
“he that believeth shall not make haste”. No wonder a writer once said, ‘it shows the sign of unbelief to ask why and how of what God does’. We should therefore not be in a hurry to blame God, the Church, family members or the Pastor, perhaps because of a temporary delay in getting the things we expect. Such issues may range from marriage, child bearing, and job to finance.

**Question 5: In view of the assertion that “enduring success is gradual”, differentiate between impatience and indolence as regards pursuing our expectations in life.**

As God promised to drive out the heathen out of Canaan in order to enable the Israelites to possess the Land, He will help us remove all the enemies and barriers to our progress. However, we must understand that the “**weapons of our warfare are not carnal**”; “we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities...” (Ephesians 6:10-12; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6); and our obedience must be full before we win in this battle.

Having reminded Israel of the promise of God, Joshua went ahead to tell them of their responsibilities in inheriting the promise. He said, “**Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside there from to the right or to the left**” (Joshua 23:6). This is an exhortation to obedience which is the secret of blessing. There are two aspects of the believer’s responsibility for obtaining God’s promises, namely, courage to fight the good fight of faith and caution to follow the Lord truthfully.

A similar statement was given to Joshua at the inception of his ministry by Moses (Joshua 1:5-9) and since then, he kept to it. It is also obvious from the address that he led Israel in the same way until this time (Joshua 23:8); but as he was about to depart, he needed to encourage Israel to continue in it since it is the only secret of victory. His emphasis here is not just on the courage to fight but courage to stand firm on the law of the true and unchanging God. Today, believers need courage to stand in the truth. There are many objects of distraction that can make us deviate from obeying the word of God. However, we cannot afford to lose God’s favor as a result of disobedience (Revelation 22:18-20).
Question 6: What is the secret of believers’ victory in this corrupt world?


The second aspect of the exhortation was to caution them against the danger of compromise. We learn that it is not enough to fight; we must also protect ourselves from the wiles of the devil, which is deception. Thus, after exhorting Israel to be courageous in obeying the Law of Moses, Joshua warned them against slipping into idolatry and unequal yoke. He told the people to keep the law, avoid compromise with the heathen worshippers and warned against unfaithfulness in worship (Joshua 4:23, 24). As preachers, we must maintain a balanced approach in preaching the word of God to sinners and believers in our congregations.

In this section of his message, Joshua revealed the downward steps to idolatry and its consequences. The steps and actions that amount to idolatry, according to Joshua 23:7 include: (1) attending the meetings of idol worshippers; “come not among these nations”. As true believers, we cannot attend idolatrous ceremonies, syncretic churches or occult meetings. (2) Mentioning the names of their deities or idols. The Bible says “neither make mention of the name of their gods”. Thus, a believer should not carelessly call or sing the names of the heathen gods; (3) affirming statements or swearing by heathen idols. In the same vein, we should not cause others to swear by them. The Bible says “nor cause to swear by them [the idols]; (4) serving the idols, “neither serve them”. To serve here includes giving money to promote or propagate the idols of the heathens; (5) bowing down to the idols “nor bow yourselves unto them”.

Believers must be very careful about the places they go, the songs they sing, the books they read, the music they listen to, movies they watch, the things they eat and the places where they worship in order to avoid unequal yoke with idol worshippers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). If you are already a victim, flee for your soul. Repent and follow
the admonition to cleave to and love the only true God (Deuteronomy 30:6).

**Question 7: Enumerate the various ways of getting involved in idol worship.**

It is instructive to note that Joshua also warned the Israelites against unequal yoke in marriage. “If ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: Know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you” (Joshua 23:12, 13). This has been and is still the consistent teaching of the Scripture. Believers who get involved in unequal yoke will open the door of backsliding. Why was Joshua very strict in warning Israel against idolatry and unequal yoke in marriage? The answers are clearly spelt out.

There are grievous consequences for involvement in unequal yoke and idolatry. “Then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you” (Joshua 23:16). The Israelites and, by extension, all believers who slip into idolatry and compromise will suffer defeat in the hands of enemies. “God will no more drive any of these nations from before you”. Once they compromise with evil, they forfeit enjoyment of God’s favor and promises. Also, they will fall into snares and traps of afflictions. Enemy nations “shall be snares and traps unto you and scourges in your sides and thorns in your eyes...” Sin will ruin the sinner. So, repent, be saved and abide in Christ till the end to be able to enter heaven.
NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

LESSON 591

EXHORTATION TO CHRIST-LIKE LIVING

MEMORY VERSE: “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).

TEXT: Romans 15:1-22

Having already covered quite some grounds in this epistle to the Romans, the concluding chapters show how Apostle Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write to believers of all ages what should characterize their lifestyles. It is clear from these chapters that the New Testament believer is expected to live like Christ, in purity, righteousness and true holiness. In all he does and says, he is to pattern his life and conduct after Him.

Question 1: Itemize some scriptural exhortations to New Testament believers from our text.

Paul had previously exhorted the believers in the preceding chapters to be doers of God’s word; walk in newness of life; be dead to sin; yield themselves unto God as instruments of righteousness; be free from sin; bring forth fruits unto God; mortify the deeds of the body; be not high-minded; continue in His goodness; be a living sacrifice; be not conformed to this world but be renewed; think soberly; be kindly affectioned one to another; be of the same mind one toward another; be not wise in their own conceits; recompense to no man evil for evil; live peacefully with all men; avenge not themselves; be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good; be subject to higher powers; pay tribute and render to all their dues; owe no man anything but love one another; love their neighbors; put on the armor of light; walk honestly; live unto the Lord; and follow after the things that make for peace (Romans 2:13; 6:4,7,8,11,13,22; 7:4; 8:13; 11:20,22; 12:1-3,10,16-19,21; 13:1-7,9,12,13; 14:7,8,19). He summed it up as follows: “For even Christ pleased not himself: but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning,
that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:3, 4).

EDIFYING OTHERS THROUGH CHRIST-LIKE SUCCOUR AND SUPPORT (Romans 15:1-7; 14:1; 1 Peter 3:18; Luke 22:31, 32; John 18:8, 9)

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1).

At a time when there is insecurity, economic meltdown and great challenge, some believers may be tempted to become individualistic, selfish and secluded. The inspired apostle exhorts believers to look away from their challenges and to care, love passionately and succor the weak brethren. The ‘weak’ referred to in this passage includes those who are spiritually unable to understand, appreciate and discern the will of God correctly; those who are discouraged, disappointed and distressed; those who are undergoing intense persecution; those who are overwhelmed with grief and sorrow; those who are abandoned, isolated and left to fate; and those who are destitute, sick and living in fear (1 Samuel 30:10-13).

Question 2: Point out people represented as weak and how believers can help bear their infirmities?

Believers are to follow the example of Christ in seeking and supporting all grieving, afflicted and troubled souls wherever they are, as this will edify, comfort and bring hope to them. Citing the reproaches that Christ endured, Apostle Peter says, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18).

Apostle Paul restates the purpose of this great epistle and indeed the whole Bible thus: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). In this vein, he calls on all mature believers, workers and leaders to support all weak brethren in prayer, protection, provision, personal visitation, profitable partnership, and positive and receptive attitude (Luke 22:31,32; John 18:8,9; Philemon 22; 2 Corinthians 8:6; Philemon 17; Romans 15:7). Such
Christ-like disposition towards the weak will naturally produce joy, encouragement and gratitude both to the weak and strong believers alike as they both will “...with one mind and one mouth glorify God” (Romans 15:6).

ESSENCE OF CHRIST-LIKE LIVING AND SALVATION OF SOULS (Romans 15:8-16; Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:15, 16; 1 Thessalonians 2:10, 11)

“Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy...” (Romans 15:8, 9).

The grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior to the Gentiles brought joy and celebration among them who were considered unworthy, unfit and therefore undeserving of eternal life. Though least expected by the Jews, reconciliation, adoption and salvation are now available also to the Gentiles.

Question 3: Highlight the responsibility of recipients of the grace of God.

Having been given this great opportunity, hope and grace, the Gentiles must reciprocate with corresponding attitudes of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Saved from sin and Gentile abominations, the believer radiates unending joy and hope. Also, he constantly enjoys abiding and abounding peace, though he lives in a tumultuous world (John 14:1, 27; Jeremiah 29:11; Isaiah 26:3). Saved by grace, we are to reach out to the sinning world and win them to Christ through the gospel.

Question 4: Enumerate the components of Christ-like living.

In a nutshell, Christ-like living entails a life of sobriety, righteousness, godliness, pleasing God, glorifying God, faith, honesty, holiness, transparency, being conscious of eternity, and preaching the gospel (Titus 2:4,12; John 8:28; Matthew 5:16; Hebrews 10:38; 2 Corinthians 8:21; 1 Thessalonians 2:10; Hebrews 11:13,14; Matthew 9:35).

In spite of the challenges he faced in ministry, Apostle Paul maintained a cheerful and an exultant spirit at every point as he says “… I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ …” (Romans 15:17). This gallant soldier of Christ bore indescribable suffering, persecution and lived under continual threat to his life. Yet, he referred to them as light afflictions.

Paul endured, among other things, perils of shipwreck twice (2 Corinthians 11:25), perils of robbers, perils of Jewish fanatics, perils of Gentile idol-worshippers, perils of insecurity, injustice and indignity from his fellow countrymen and the Gentiles, perils of false, fake and spurious brethren, and finally the perils of hunger. But he gallantly resolved that “none of this things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

Question 5: Given the challenges of our day, how are believers expected to pursue the DAWN project in their locations?

Unlike some believers who soft-pedal, follow the Lord from afar, recoil, compromise their faith or even backslide in times of fierce persecution, Paul was resilient and brave. He did not only overcome the storms; he forged ahead in ministry and made progress under challenging and difficult situations.

As he traversed the wide and wild Gentile communities, reaching where no other preacher had reached, sinners were won to Christ; the blind received their sight; the oppressed and tormented souls were delivered and captives of Gentile superstitions and vain philosophies were also freed. “Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (verse 19). This is the purpose of the Great Commission given by Christ to every believer. And it is the main thrust of Discipling A Whole Nation (DAWN) project of the church.

From Paul, we learn the following lessons on how to execute the DAWN project in our locations, districts
and communities: (1) daring in attempt to win our near
kinsmen and women; (2) decisive in advancing walled
neighborhoods; (3) direct and aggressive in witnessing
to the neglected and needy; (4) resolute in defeating the
adversary’s wiles and networks to preach the gospel and
plant churches in our suburbs and territories where men
are not willing to go.

Finally, seeing that we are already in the last days, we
must rise to our Master’s command and advance His
course in spite of threats to life and terrorizing activities
of Satan and his agents. The Lord’s command remains
unchanging: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the
gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).
LESSON 592

PAUL’S PLAN TO VISIT ROME

MEMORY VERSE: “And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:29).

TEXT: Romans 15:23-33

In our text, Apostle Paul outlines his plans to visit the Christians in Rome. For many years, he had desired to do so but had not been able due to the demands of his missionary engagements in Greece (Romans 15:22). Having accomplished his assignments in the eastern regions, Paul now proposes to do a pioneering work in Spain and to visit Rome on his way. He equally sought their commendation and backing for the Spanish mission. Apparently, he hoped that the Roman churches would provide assistants and general support for his western campaign.

However, his planned visit to Rome was to come after his journey to Jerusalem to deliver the collections from the Gentile believers for the poor saints. Although Paul was a free-born Roman citizen, he had never been to Rome, the capital of the then Gentile world; he had only heard of the church in Rome. In our text, he affirms the purpose of his visit which is, to communicate to believers in Rome “the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.”

PAUL’S PASSION AND PLAN TO VISIT ROME (Romans 15:23, 24, 28, 29; 1:10-15; Acts 23:11)

“But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you” (Romans 15:23). Paul here declares his intention to see the Christians in Rome. In pursuit of his tireless ministry, he provides a sketch of his itinerary to include ministering to the poor at Jerusalem and proceeding to Spain. Paul’s schedule challenges us to prioritize our Programs in order to maximize the use of our time and life. Considering that the time is short, with much work to do to serve the Lord and humanity, we do not have time to waste. We need to plan our lives in a way to give our
best to the Lord. Structuring our lives will give no room for frivolities and less-essential activities.

**Question 1: What was responsible for Paul’s delay in visiting Rome? What can we learn from this?**

Paul could not visit Rome earlier because he had much work to do for the Lord elsewhere (Romans 15:22). God had opened doors of ministry for him in other places and he labored as the Spirit directed (Acts 16:6-8). The gospel does not come by chance to any place, but by the will and counsel of God. He alone knows the ripened and ready fields (Matthew 9:36-38; John 4:35). We should therefore lose no single moment to “thrust in the sickle, and reap” whenever God opens gospel doors in any given mission field. We must not allow such opportunities of fields that are white unto harvest to slip; if we do, we might never regain them. We must allow God to plan our lives for us according to His own purpose and Program.

We also learn that the apostle displayed godly prudence by bestowing his time and labor where there was much need. He sought the purpose and will of Christ more than any other thing. He gave priority to God’s will and work. Had he considered his own personal comfort and interest above the will of God, he would not have fulfilled His timing for the brethren in Rome. We are to do that first which is most needful according to the will of God. Christians should give priority to preaching of the gospel over academic, business or economic opportunities which would limit their commitment to the Great Commission. Unfortunately today, many believers scramble for such opportunities even at the expense of their personal Christian lives.

Paul had intended a missionary journey to Spain after his great success in Asia Minor. Although it is not certain whether he ever fulfilled his purpose to visit Spain, his proposal was with a submission to the will of God. He said, “I trust to see you”. Eventually, he came to Rome but as a prisoner. Like Paul, we must make all our plans and proposals with submission to the will of God.

**Question 2: For what purpose was Paul eager to visit Rome?**
We are equally challenged by the purpose of Paul’s visit to Rome which is threefold. First, he expects them to bring him on his way towards Spain, counting on their assistance in his expedition. Second, he desires their company, conversation and refreshing communion and fellowship. Although Paul himself was a man of great attainments in knowledge, grace and spirituality, he still delighted himself in the thoughts of good company. He did not live the isolated life of scholars and philosophers or the secluded life of hermits or ascetics. Third, he expects to come to them in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. Paul hoped that God would bring him to them, loaded with blessings. “And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:29). He said earlier: “...that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established” (Romans 1:11). The blessing of the gospel of Christ is the best and most desirable blessing. It is always a happy meeting between members and ministers when ministers are fully prepared to give out and members are fully prepared to receive.

Paul would only labor in ministry to offer life-giving blessings to others. Time did not run him down. Much work did not make him ineffective. Here is the picture of an approved servant of God. Like springs of fresh water, he always refreshed people under his ministry. In like manner, we must not allow people to be spiritually famished under our ministry.

PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE OF RECIPROCAL SERVICE IN THE CHURCH (Romans 15:25-27; Acts 20:35; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 6:1; 13:1-3; Galatians 5:13; 6:2, 9, 10)

Before setting out for the west, the apostle had to take the proceeds of charity for the poor in the church at Jerusalem. At the time of writing this epistle, he was on his way to Jerusalem “to minister unto the saints” (Romans 15:25). He was taking with him a contribution which the Gentile Christians of Macedonia and Achaia had made for their Jewish brethren in Jerusalem, who at this time were in poverty (Romans 15:26). While recognizing his missionary work among the Gentiles, James, Peter and John had asked Paul to “remember the poor” (Galatians 2:10). Since then, Paul had encouraged the
churches of Greece (Macedonia and Achaia) to contribute to a relief fund. Actually the churches of Asia and Galatia also contributed (Acts 20:4; 1 Corinthians 16:1). They had willingly complied with his fervent appeals (Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:9). Brethren in Macedonia (Philippians) and Achaia (Corinthians) gave generously to the poor and needy in Jerusalem so that mutual dependence of Christians upon one another might be maintained.

**Questions 3: How should Christians relate with (a) one another and (b) gospel ministers?**

The Apostle uses the occasion to state that this act of giving cheerfully was indeed a Christian duty. “It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things” (Romans 15:27). According to the Apostle, the Gentiles are greatly indebted to the Jews and are bound by gratitude to be kind to them. The Gentiles are made partakers of spiritual things as they received the gospel of salvation from the Jews. It is therefore their duty to minister to them in carnal (material) things. All Christians also ought to cultivate this attitude of love, kindness and generosity towards one another. Though the saints at Jerusalem were at a great distance from them, they extended their bounty to them. This act of charity gave practical proof of the mutual sympathy between Gentiles and Jewish Christians. This teaches us to stretch out the hand of charity to all that are of the household of faith.

**Question 4: What lessons can Christians learn from the collections from Gentile churches to the saints in Jerusalem?**

In addition to relieving the poverty that existed among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, the collection is also a means of cementing the relationship and fellowship that ought to be maintained between Gentile and Jewish believers or the Jerusalem and Gentile churches (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8,9). Through this, Paul wanted to promote unity between the Gentile and Jewish Christians. On one hand, it represents the love of Gentile believers for the saints in Jerusalem. On the other, it may
be a form of duty owed by these brethren to their mother-church in Jerusalem. The presence of Gentile believers with him in Jerusalem was a token that Paul’s apostleship thus far had not been in vain.

THE POWER OF PRAYER SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTERS (Romans 15:30-33; Ephesians 6:18, 19; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 3:1, 2)

Paul expresses earnestly his desire for the prayers from the Romans for a prosperous journey to Judaea. Here is a good example of what Christians should be doing for their leaders and for one another. We are to always strive together in prayer for a cause. The reason for his request is “for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit...” (Romans 15:30).

Questions 5: What is the secret of Paul’s success in ministry?

One of the secrets of Paul’s success in life and ministry is his humility which always found expression in requests for intercessory prayer from the churches. We should learn to value the effectual fervent prayers of the righteous. Paul had prayed much for them and it was now their turn to reciprocate his kindness and love for them. “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints” (Romans 15:30, 31).

In soliciting for prayer, Paul discussed why they must pray for him, how they should pray for him and what they should pray for (Romans 15:30-32). Their prayer is a proof of the love which the Holy Spirit inspires and imparts in our heart towards one another (Romans 5:5; 2 Corinthians 5:14). On the how, he enjoins them to “strive together with me in your prayers to God for me”. We must pray with faith and fervency, not only when praying for ourselves, but also for others, especially gospel ministers. He gave three petitions: (i) the dangers he was exposed to: “That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea”. These constituted a prospective source of trouble for Paul in his journey. It is proper to
pray against persecution. (ii) His services. They are to pray “that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints”. As we need to seek the face of God for the restraining of the will of our enemies so also must we seek His face for the preservation and increase of the goodwill of our friends. (iii) His journey to Rome. They are to pray that he will come to them with joy, by the will of God, regardless of his experiences. All our joy depends upon the will of God.

**Question 6: From Paul’s experience, how would you assess the power of prayer?**

It is significant to note that the prayer of the Roman Christians made Paul to experience a mighty deliverance from the hands of the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem. Without their earnest intercession, he may not have escaped the life–threatening experiences and plots in Jerusalem. This is the power of united prayer.

Paul concluded the chapter with prayer for the same people he requested prayer from. Both the church leadership and laity, ministers and members, preachers and the people have a responsibility to pray for one other. Leaders have the duty of setting forth the example of intercession for members under their pasture from which the flock takes a cue to reciprocate. As leaders and members join in prayer for one another, great shall be the success and progress of God’s work here on earth.
LESSON 593

SALUTATION OF SAINTS

MEMORY VERSE: “Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles” (Romans 16:3, 4).

TEXT: Romans 16:1-16

Paul, the apostle brings the epistle to the Romans to a conclusion with expressions of love and affection for the saints. He begins this expression of love in his benediction at the end of the last chapter. “Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.” To have a wonderful mix of great spiritual knowledge of the mystery of the gospel such as the apostle dispensed in this epistle and endearing love for saints is by grace.

Spiritual knowledge without genuine affection for saints is empty, barren and worthless. Paul underscores this truth while writing to the Corinthians that: “though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge... and have not charity, I am nothing. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away” (1 Corinthians 13:2, 8). Love for God, His word, people and cause is the unfailing virtue every believer and Christian servant must possess. The apostle lived by the word of God he preached. He recommends affectionate treatment of every believer with good testimony by others; greets individuals as well as couples by name and acknowledges the sacrifices others have made in advancing the cause of Christ. Believers need to emulate this.

From our text, we see some standard church practices to emulate. The first is Paul’s instruction on how to relate with a member from another local church. Paul recommends Phebe to the church in Rome and solicits assistance for her. The second is Paul’s commendation of other faithful brethren among whom are Priscilla and Acquila, Epaenetus, Mary, Andronicus, Junia, Amplias, Urbane, Apelles, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Aristobulus and a
host of others. Christians should be challenged by Paul’s Christ-like attitude of love, care and appreciation of fellow believers. Such commendations lead to the spiritual stability, steadfastness and growth of the individual believer and the church.

**Question 1:** Mention some Christian attitudes that believers need to emulate in our text today.

**RECOMMENDATION OF CHRIST-LIKE BELIEVERS**
(Romans 16:1, 2; Malachi 3:5; Exodus 22:21; Leviticus 19:34)

“I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also”. (Romans 16:1, 2).

From the above passage, Paul, led by the Holy Ghost, recommended Phebe, a bona fide member of the Church in Cenchrea. She is simply described as “a servant of the Church”. As a visitor and stranger in the Church at Rome, Phebe needed the acceptance, encouragement, comfort and assistance of the brethren in her new environment.

**Question 2:** Why is it necessary to take care of visitors, newcomers and strangers in our Churches?

Today, it is not uncommon to find visitors and new comers to church fellowships and Programs unnoticed, uncared for and unattended to by members. This practice has negative effects on the Church.

Generally, taking care of strangers is a scriptural principle emphasized in both the Old and New Testaments. In Exodus 22:21 and Leviticus 19:34, the Jews were strongly warned to “neither vex a stranger nor oppress him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself...”. In Malachi 3:5, judgment is pronounced on those “that turn aside the stranger from his right”. In the New Testament, Christ declares that on the last day, He would demand: “I was a stranger, and ye took me not in” (Matthew 25:35). This implies that attention and affection shown to the stranger is regarded by the Lord
as shown to Himself. Christ-like attitude to visitors and strangers who come to church will encourage them to continue in the Lord and in fellowship. This practice will enhance spiritual and numerical growth of the members and the church.

Furthermore, when the church gives urgent attention to strangers who come in for worship and fellowship or have relocated from another local church, confidence and a sense of belonging will develop and this will in turn lead to love, unity and mutual co-existence of members with each person contributing positively to the overall development of the body of Christ. We also find that encouragement, sympathy and guidance are offered to visitors or strangers who are in trouble or perplexity. This will engender in them joy and fulfilment in life and ministry. Such visitors will become stable, active and committed members of the body of Christ. Some may even become future leaders in various arms and ministries in the church.

**Question 3:** In what practical ways can the church render help to her visitors?

Visitors and strangers who come to the church should be warmly welcomed by the pastors and officiating ministers of the church they are visiting. They could be counselled and prayed for at the end of the service. Committed church members, workers and leaders should be assigned to them for follow-up purposes. They could be temporarily accommodated after presenting their letters of introduction from their pastors.

**WOMEN MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH** (Romans 16:1, 2, 6, 12; Exodus 15:20; Acts 16:13, 14; Titus 2:3-5)

Scriptural instances show that women are important and relevant in the church. If adequately provided with an enabling environment, born again women can be a force to reckon with through the supportive services they render to the Lord and to the saints.

**Question 4:** List any three godly women in the Bible and briefly explain the role they played in promoting the work of God.

There are many women in the Bible who, through one deed or the other, contributed tremendously to the progress of
God’s work. Phebe who was described as “a servant of the church which was at Cenchrea” was a succourer of many, including Paul. Priscilla was a helper of Apostle Paul. She served as a selfless and sacrificial worker in the Roman church. Mary bestowed much labor on the Apostle and his team. Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis and Julia are all reckoned to have labored much in the Lord. This is indeed a challenge to many women in some of our local assemblies today who give themselves to idleness, talkativeness, tale-bearing and worldliness of all sort.

The encouragement we have from today’s lesson is that all born again women, whether young or old, educated or illiterate, married or unmarried have a place and a significant role to play in the service of God.

**Question 5: Highlight the various ministries that are available for women to fulfill in our local churches today.**

There are many duties, roles and ministries that are available for godly women to carry out or fulfill in our Churches today. Such ministries include teaching younger women (Titus 2; 3-5); interceding for saints (Acts 16:13-15); providing succor to the weary; ministering to the distressed; reaching out to the sick; reaching out to souls in schools, hospitals and prison custodies; serving in units such as the choir, ushering, security, etc.; and living a life that is above reproach at home, in the Church and in the workplace. “If ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do them” is our Savior’s prescription to all believers (John 13:17).

**LESSONS FROM PAUL’S COMMENDATION OF THE SAINTS** (Romans 16:1-16; Hebrews 10:24; Philippians 4:3; Colossians 4:8, 9, 12)

Saints who distinguished themselves in the Roman and Corinthian churches through devoted and sacrificial services to God and the brethren were all cherished and fondly remembered by Paul the apostle. The activities of these exemplary saints reminds us of the biblical injunction to “consider one another to provoke unto love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24).

Paul remembered these brethren for the enduring work they
did for the Lord and His kingdom. This acknowledgment reminds us of a song writer’s declaration: ‘Only remembered by what we have done’. For what would you be remembered when you have gone to glory or relocated from your present local church assembly?

It is quite unfortunate that while some believers are dutifully engaged in the service of the Lord, others prefer to remain idle in the house of God like some nobles in Nehemiah’s day. “And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord” (Nehemiah 3:5). The Scripture clearly reveals that indolence, indifference and eye-service in God’s work attract curse and divine punishment while diligence, sacrifice and faithfulness bring commendation and reward from the Lord (Judges 5:23; Colossians 3:23, 24). In view of the final commendation and reward from the Lord, “my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

**Question 6: What do we learn from the way Paul recalled the names of the saints at Rome and his companions in Corinth?**

From Paul’s roll call of devoted saints in Rome and Corinth, several lessons could be learnt. **First**, we discover from his presentation that Paul himself was not lazy. He went about his work with zeal, interest and devotion. He knew the state of his flock in various Churches and could account for their spiritual state. Though he never visited the Church in Rome, he was in touch with the happenings in that assembly. What a challenge to our church leaders today!

**Second**, the presentation of a long list of these devoted saints portrayed Paul as a loving minister. It was the Christ-like love in him that propelled him to speak so affectionately about the saints in question and their deeds.

**Third**, he mentioned many names of male and female saints who were faithful to God and the church. This means that he possessed uncommon ability for remembering names which is an essential quality in Christian leadership.
Fourth, there is no gender bias in the service of God. He did not overlook the contributions of godly women in the church for the furtherance of the gospel. It is obvious that men and women whose names are in the Book of Life are qualified to serve the Lord on the field of evangelism as well as in the local assemblies. There should be no bickering and trampling on others based on gender disparity because we are members of the same body of Christ. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

In conclusion, Paul’s acknowledgment and appreciation of the good works of saints in the Church is a clear indication that he possessed a grateful heart and spirit. How grateful are we to God for His mercies and to men for their favors?
LESSON 594
SCRIPTURAL ATTITUDE TOWARD FALSE TEACHERS

MEMORY VERSE: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17).

TEXT: Romans 16:17-27

In the preceding verses of this chapter, Paul the apostle sent commendations to some particular friends among the people to whom he wrote. Although he was not at Rome at this time, he still remembered the church on a daily basis. His heart was full of care, love and affection for the brethren. He must have observed the infiltration of false teachers who could influence them negatively and mar their brotherly love. False teachers in Galatia, Corinth and elsewhere who had always sought to corrupt the young believers from the simplicity of the gospel also crept into the church in Rome, especially as the obedience of the Roman Christians had come abroad to all men. This informed the need for Paul to caution the Roman believers, which is the pivot of our text in this study. As he tried to unite the brethren through his endearing salutations, it was also proper to caution them to take heed of people whose principles and practices were destructive to Christian love.

SCRIPTURAL COMMAND CONCERNING FALSE TEACHERS (Romans 16:17, 18; Matthew 5:19; 1 Timothy 1:6, 7; 4:2; 6:3; Titus 1:11; 1 John 4:3)

A false teacher is simply a person who breaks God’s commandments and teaches men so (Matthew 5:19). In other words, he is someone who compromises the standard of the word of God by his life and teachings. Going by this, it is clear that there are many false teachers around us who have infiltrated the body of Christ with their errors.

Question 1: Who is a false teacher?

A casual Bible reader or a nominal Christian cannot easily detect false teachers because of the high level of pretense
they put up. This is the reason Christ warned believers to beware of those who come to them in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves (Matthew 7:15, 16).

**Question 2: Mention some of the characteristics of false teachers.**

The following are some of the characteristics of false teachers: (i) they serve their own belly, seeing the work of God as a means of survival. Therefore, they tailor their messages to suit their selfish interests. (ii) They are covetous and through feign, pretentious words make merchandise of the people (2 Peter 2:3). (iii) They teach commandments of men in place of the sound doctrines of the Bible. Their teaching has no scriptural basis; their messages are more of human psychology, men’s philosophy that tends to only motivate. (iv) They are backsliders who are now swerved and turned aside unto vain wrangling, desiring to be teachers of the law, but understanding neither what they say, nor what they affirm. (v) They speak lies in hypocrisy. (vi) Their conscience is seared with a hot iron. (vii) They are proud and ignorant. (viii) They teach for pecuniary gain. (ix) They are influenced by demons.

**Question 3: What methods do false teachers adopt to achieve their goals and what should be the believer’s attitude towards them?**

False teachers do not appear apparently false. They put up deceptive and appealing attitude to allure the unsuspecting public. Jesus said, “**Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves**” (Matthew 7:15). Moreover, false teachers may capitalize on the prevailing economic situation by employing material baits and financial inducements. Other methods used by them include false miracles, false promises of liberty and claims to hidden knowledge and special revelation (2 Peter 2:17-19; Colossians 2:8, 18).

Apostle Paul knew the danger posed by these false teachers and warned the saints concerning them. “**Now I beseech you, brethren mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them**” (Romans 16:17). Although we are to love and forgive one another as Christians, compromise and hypocrisy in the church must be dealt with according to
scriptural standards. False teachers who cause trouble through their selfish interests are not to be received into the local fellowship. The church is commanded to “mark” and avoid them. We are to keep an eye on “church tramps” who run from one church to another, causing trouble and divisions. With their fair speech, they deceive the simple; but the discerning saint will see through their disguise.

Paul’s counsel to Titus on how to treat such false teachers is worthy of emulation by contemporary believers. “For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers... whose mouths must be stopped...” (Titus 1:10, 11). We are not to listen to such false teachers; neither should we give them place in God’s service.

**Question 4: How does obedience to God relate to victory over Satan?**

It pleases the Lord when the Church stands on His undiluted word in spite of distractions and other activities of Satan and his agents. Believers are to take their stand and hold on to the truth in spite of seeming adversities. It is only on that ground that we can be sure of God’s intervention. Our absolute obedience to God’s word gives us victory over Satan and his cohorts. “For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf... And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly...” (Romans 16:19, 20).

**SUCCESS THROUGH FAITHFUL COMPANIONSHIP**
(Romans 16:21-23; Acts 17:5-9; Philippians 2:19-22; Revelation 2:12, 13)

One of the secrets of Paul’s success in life and ministry was the company of people he kept. As a dutiful minister of the Word, his companions were fellow laborers in the Lord. “Timothy my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you. I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord. Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother” (verses 21-23). What a list of veterans! As a wise master-builder, he did not keep the company of fools. Paul loved these companions. No wonder he took time to convey his greetings to these brethren, thereby giving them a sense of apostolic affirmation. It is instructive to
note that with the support of these faithful companions, Paul recorded huge success in ministry.

**Question 5: What lessons do we learn from the faithfulness of Paul’s companions in spite of the activities of false teachers?**

The danger posed by the false teachers and their destructive tendencies notwithstanding, Paul had faithful companions who did not allow themselves to be swept away. They were like the brethren in Pergamos of whom Jesus said: “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith...” (Revelation 2:13).

**SUNDRY BENEDICTIONS TO STEADFAST BRETHREN**
(Romans 16:24-27; Numbers 6:23-27; 1 Peter 1:3-5; Jude 24)

Ministers in all dispensations have the responsibility of pronouncing blessings on God’s people. In closing this epistle, Paul bestowed on the brethren God’s benevolent grace, wishing them His fortitude and sustaining power in life and ministry. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. Now to him that is of power to establish you...” (Romans 16:24, 25). This was a specific directive to Aaron and his sons: “Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:23-27).

The blessing we offer will not only help those who receive it, it will also demonstrate love and encouragement, and provide a model of caring to others. In keeping to this, Paul here blessed the brethren, counting on God’s keeping power to sustain them in grace through our Lord Jesus Christ.
LESSON 595

COMMENDATION AND EXHORTATION TO
UNITY IN THE CHURCH

MEMORY VERSE: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

In the last chapter of his epistle to the Romans, Paul the apostle exhorts the brethren to a practical life of unfeigned love as befitting saints. He accomplished this by sending Phebe, a dedicated and committed succourer to the church in Cenchrea, a sea-port located at Corinth (Romans 16:1). Through her, Paul posits standard scriptural guidelines that should characterize mutual relationship among brethren. He highlights the role of women ministry and vehemently warns against the infiltration of false teachers.

In this epistle to the Corinthian Church, Paul the apostle acknowledges the effective work of grace in their lives and their endowment of charismatic gifts but then addressed the teething challenges of cleavages and divisions which could pose a stumbling block to the fellowship among brethren. He therefore exhorts them on the dire need for profound unity.

The natural man has the tendency to divide humanity along the lines of class, race, tribe, etc. This human trait had crept into the spiritually vibrant Corinthian Church founded by Paul during his missionary endeavors. It is this issue of schism, among other problems, that prompted the apostle to write the epistle.

Paul’s epistle under consideration was addressed to the Church in Corinth. The church in question is not a physical building nor a denomination, but ekklesia, a Greek word for the ‘called out’ which refers to the legislative body of citizens of the Greek republic called out from their communities to serve the country. In the New
Testament, however, the Church generally refers to the universal body of Christ which comprises: (i) all genuine born again believers of all ages (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 3:10), (ii) the local church which is composed of Christian believers identified with a constituted body worshiping in one locality (Romans 16:1; Colossians 4:16; Acts 14:23), and (iii) the House churches, which were an assembly of brethren in Christian homes (1 Corinthians 16:19; 14:23; Colossians 4:15).

Question 1: What is the meaning and significance of the Church?

By virtue of the fact that the church is a company of ‘called out’ saints (2 Corinthians 6:17), it therefore behooves contemporary believers to live a separated and holy lives unto God (2 Corinthians 7:1; Isaiah 52:11; Romans 12:11); shine as light to the world (Matthew 5:16); influence their neighborhood positively as the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13); and preach the gospel to save the lost with the mind of Discipling A Whole Nation (DAWN) (Luke 19:10; Mark 16:15,16; Matthew 28:19,20.)

THE PURPOSE OF GODLY COMMENDATION (1 Corinthians 1:1-7; Matthew 25:14,15,19-23; Revelation 2:2,3,8,9; 3:7-9; Philippians 2:19,20,25-30; 2 Corinthians 3:1; Proverbs 12:8; Luke 7:9; Mark 12:41-44)

At the time Paul the apostle wrote this epistle, it appeared that there were some at Corinth who now questioned his apostleship (1 Corinthians 9:1, 2) and vilified his person and ministry (2 Corinthians 10:10). It is worthy of note that faithful and dedicated ministers are not immune to contempt. Thus, Paul began by challenging this defective character as he asserts "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God..." He made it clear that he had not taken this honor unto himself but by divine commission; it was therefore proper for him to magnify his office (Romans 11:13) when false teachers and their followers relished in running him down. This should not be misconstrued as pride on the part of Paul, but faithfulness to maintain his apostolic authority.

The apostle’s salutation of grace and peace is a reminder of the patriarchal benediction in Numbers 6:22-26 which points to the favor of God. It is instructive to observe that
though this Corinthian Church was ridden with a lot of irregularities that needed to be corrected (1 Corinthians 1:11; 3:1-4; 5:1-3; 7:5; 8:1-5; 10:1-10; 11:29-32), Paul began with an appreciation of their steadfastness, wisdom, charismatic gift and continual waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Commendation, therefore, is a seal of approval on the positive performance of a particular saint and also a sense of acknowledgment.

**Question 2: What role does commendation play in Christian service?**

Commendation in Christian service serves the following purposes. One, it is evidence that the believer’s service is being acknowledged either by the Lord or one’s spiritual leader (Revelation 2:2; 3:7, 8; Matthew 25:20-23). Two, it is a source of encouragement to the believer, prompting him to do more in the Lord’s vineyard. Three, it presupposes the certainty of reward for an accomplished task. Four, when a faithful believer is being commended, it sends a warning signal to the callous and nonchalant brethren to wake up from their slumber. Commendation, however, must be laced with wisdom and sense of maturity so that a novice will not be lifted up with pride and be condemned.

**THE PATTERN OF SCRIPTURAL EXHORTATION (1 Corinthians 1:8,9; Acts 2:40; 11:22,23; 13:15; 27:22; 1 Thessalonians 2:3,4,11; Jude 3; Hebrews 3:13)**

After thanking God and commending the Corinthian brethren for their unwavering faith, perseverance and charismatic gifts, apostle Paul went further to exhort them on the need to cultivate the spirit of unity (1 Corinthians 1:10). He also identifies the faithfulness of God (1 Corinthians 1:9; 10:13; Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:24). Every true exhortation must be based on God’s word (Psalm 119:89; Acts 27:22, 25). Believers are commanded to exhort one another daily (Hebrews 3:13; 13:22).

**Question 3: What is exhortation? Enumerate its functions among believers today.**

Exhortation is a life-transforming admonition often used to build up the faith of believers. It could also be used as a soul-winning tool. It aims at strengthening believers with their walk with God. It is one of the gifts of the
Spirit (Romans 12:6-8). A prayerful exhortation has the capacity to accomplish the following: (i) convert sinners (Acts 2:40,41); (ii) motivate brethren to continue in the faith (Acts 11:22-24; 14:22); (iii) reproduce the mind of Christ in believers (Philippians 2:5); (iv) steer up the gift of the Spirit that is latent in saints (2 Timothy 1:6); (v) equip believers to become law-abiding citizens (Titus 2:9); (vi) make believers to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3); (vii) warn the unruly in the church and help them to be disciplined; (viii) stir up believers to intercede for the nation and secular leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-4); (ix) prepare believers for a blameless life in readiness for the rapture (1 Corinthians 1:8; 1 John 3:1-3); (x) maintain constant fellowship among brethren (Hebrews 10:25; Malachi 3:16), among others.

THE PRIORITY AND POWER OF SCRIPTURAL UNITY
(1 Corinthians 1:10-17; Ephesians 4:3; Romans 16:17; 1 John 5:6,7; Philippians 1:27; Galatians 3:28; John 17:21,23; Psalm 133:1-3; Matthew 12:25; 18:19; 1 Peter 3:8-11; Ephesians 4:16)

Believers in Christ are bound together in one brotherhood by ties of the blood of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the love of God shed abroad in the heart. Hence, true believers may be separated by time, space, status, nationality or color. But as members of the same household of faith, they are bound together by the same spiritual or moral laws.

“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 that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21).

The unity of the body of Christ is not negotiable. The apostle sought to resolve the divisions found in the Church when he questioned rhetorically, “Is Christ divided?” From Paul’s teaching and the uniform testimony of the Bible, we see that the unity of believers in Christ is a divine mandate.

Any Church member, therefore, who tries to divide the church along the lines of ethnicity, race, class or culture, is going contrary to the Scripture. Every leader in the Church must, like Paul, fight for the unity of the Church. Disunity in the Church is always the evidence of corruption, worldliness, backsliding and imperfect Christian experience.
Question 4: Give reasons for the importance of unity in the body of Christ.

The importance of unity in the Church cannot be over-emphasized. One, it is exemplified in the Trinity or the Godhead. Two, it is perfectly expressed in the two ordinances of the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17), and water baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13). Three, it was demonstrated in the early Church as a pattern for all Christians in all ages (Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-35). Four, Christ prayed and paid for it (John 17:21-23).

The responsibility of every believer is: “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). While we wholeheartedly believe that without a saving relationship with Christ there is no salvation, we are not to think that our relationship with Christ minimizes the importance of Christ’s church. Today, there are people who claim to be Christians; yet, they regard membership of a local church as an additional burden.

Question 5: How can members maintain unity in the body of Christ?

To maintain unity in the church, members must experience a purging of the heart from all divisive tendencies of bigotry, tribalism, superiority/inferiority complex, class consciousness etc. Church leaders and members must mark those who cause divisions and avoid them. Again, we must recognize our need of one another. We must be willing to submit to one another, share our burdens and resources together and pray for one another. We must also remove barriers to unity such as fear of loss of prestige, suspicion, fear of exploitation, pride and arrogance, unforgiving spirit and prejudice.

Psalm 133 extols the beauty of unity among brethren. However, it is important to note that this unity is not the same as unification, uniformity or ecumenism and the unequal yoke these may engender. Christian unity is the situation where our differences and diversities are swallowed up by the love of God in the believers’ hearts so that each member finds and takes his rightful place in the body of Christ, knowing that “there is neither bond nor
free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

**Question 6: (a) Differentiate between Christian unity and human organizational unity (b) State the basis of true unity.**

Man’s attempt to bring together all those who profess faith in Christ into one human organization with multitudes of people who know nothing about being born again and freedom from sin is not the Bible unity which Christ prayed and died for.

Christian unity can only be realized when we are truly saved and sanctified. True believers cannot find unity with those who hate the Lord (2 Chronicles 19:2). We are to be united in doctrine, fellowship, worship, prayer, and in our common goal in the service of the Lord, especially in preaching the gospel to the world of dying men.

Christ’s vision and mission for the Church is for her to occupy in the business of saving the lost through the power of the gospel and presenting a most formidable force against the kingdom of darkness and the present evil world. If the church will ever achieve the purpose of its existence, unity is very essential.

**Question 7: What are the benefits of Christian unity?**

Unity is the greatest proof of holiness and sanctification that presents to the world and the Christian a glimpse of heaven on earth. It provides grounds for the function, expression and manifestation of God-given gifts and abilities. It provides security and satisfaction. Other benefits of believers’ unity include corporate power and anointing for victorious living and ministry, effective ministry within the body, growth of the body and blessing of eternal life with Christ in heaven (John 17:24).
**SPECIAL STUDIES**

**LESSON 596**

**JUSTIFICATION**

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

**TEXT:** Acts 13:38, 39; Psalm 32:1, 2; Romans 3:20-26

Justification is the act of God’s grace through which one receives forgiveness and remission of sins and is counted righteous before God through faith in the atoning blood of Jesus. Having thus been cleared of every guilt of sin, the regenerated person stands before God as though he had never sinned, not on the basis of any personal merit but in the light of what Christ had accomplished for mankind by His substitutional death on the cross at Calvary (Psalm 32:1,2; Isaiah 1:18; Micah 7:19; Acts 13:38).

**Question 1:** Explain the Christian doctrine of justification.

God provided for man’s justification because the latter is spiritually helpless and hopeless. It is this utter weakness of man that makes us to fully appreciate the benefits of salvation in Christ. Being sinful and weak, man is incapable of changing his eternal destiny of damnation by paying the requisite price for his redemption. “The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace” (Isaiah 59:8). His weakness however does not excuse or exonerate him from the consequences of his sin, which is death.

**DIVINE PROVISION FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION**

(Ephesians 2:8, 9; Romans 3:24, 25; 1 John 2:2; Acts 4:12; Isaiah 44:22; Romans 5:9; 1 Peter 2:24)

**Question 2:** How has God provided for man’s justification?

God is righteous and He wants all men to be righteous. For losing the nature and likeness of God through acts
of sin, man fell from grace to grass. To meet the standard of divine justice, due price needed to be paid. Man lacked both the capacity and purity to afford this. It therefore requires the sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God to pay the necessary ransom with His blood for the expiation of man’s sins.

**Question 3: In what ways do people try to obtain justification?**

It is instructive here to note that the nature of sin is not such that man could handle on his own or by the merit of his works. Just as circumcision cannot justify the Jew nor water baptism the Gentile, so can church membership or confirmation not justify anyone by the standards of God’s righteousness and holiness. Only faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross can assure a penitent soul of full justification. So, redemption and justification is only by the blood of Christ.

**Question 4: Mention four Scripture references on justification.**

Though physically present in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve died spiritually and became alienated from God and from the commonwealth of His kingdom, after eating the forbidden fruit. Christ therefore became the sin-Bearer, based on the fact of God’s provision and promises of the Scripture (Romans 3:24, 25). And He is “the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2; Acts 4:12). By Christ’s finished work of grace, solution was provided to the problem of sin to ensure man’s reconciliation with God (Isaiah 44:22; Romans 5:9).

Christ suffered, died and rose again for our forgiveness and justification. “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. [He] was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness...” (Isaiah
53:11; Romans 4:25; 1 Peter 3:18; 2:24). It is clear that justification is by grace and through the merit of Christ’s sacrifice for humanity.

Question 5: **What are the conditions a sinner must meet to be justified?**

**REQUIREMENT FOR JUSTIFICATION** (Romans 5:1; Hebrews 4:2)

Although Christ’s atonement on the cross guarantees universal provision of salvation for all mankind, this could only be appropriated on personal basis through faith in Christ Jesus. The sinner who seeks salvation must acknowledge his/her sinfulness, repent, exercise faith in Christ’s blood and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. Apostle Paul gives proof of it in his epistle to the Romans. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). And to the Jewish Christians he writes, “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Hebrews 4:2). Faith is not only the requirement for justification but also the evidence of it. The Scripture says that the just or justified people of God shall live by faith.

**PROOFS AND CLARIFICATION OF JUSTIFICATION** (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:22, 23; James 2:14-26; Romans 4:2-14)

Question 6: **What are the proofs a person has been justified?**

Having been saved through faith in our Lord Jesus, the redeemed becomes a new creature: old habits and lifestyle of sin are all gone. He does not continue the same way he lived in the past. Before he was justified, the sinner was plagued by the works of the flesh such as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, partying, etc. (Galatians 5:19-21). All these sinful traits give way to the manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of people who have been made a new creature. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering,
gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22,23). Therefore, in lifestyle, speech, conduct and disposition, the redeemed is more like Christ, having been quickened by the Spirit of God.

The misleading conception of justification by works as an article of man’s religion is opposed to justification by faith because it denies the grace of God and dishonors the blood of Christ. The reference in the General epistle of James 2:14-26 may be interpreted amiss by a cursory reader of Scriptures, where it asks: “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” The underlying point being stressed by James is that ‘works’ as referred to, in this context are complements of justification by faith. Whereas Apostle Paul’s epistle in Romans chapter 4 is doctrinal and providing the basis for Christian practice, that of James is essentially practical.

So, though in one sense a man is justified by faith without works, in another sense, we see “how by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” Justification is by faith before God but by works before men. Properly understood, none is really mutually exclusive.

BLESSEDNESS OF JUSTIFICATION THROUGH CHRIST
(Psalm 32:1,2; Romans 5:1-11; Psalm 85:7-13; Luke 23:44-46; Ephesians 3:8; 1:7; 2:1-18; Hebrews 10:19-25 Romans 8:35-39; Colossians 1:26; Hebrews 7:23-25; 1 Thessalonians 1:9,10; 5:8-10)

Question 7: What are the benefits of justification by faith through Christ?

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.”

King David describes everyone who is justified as “blessed” for obtaining forgiveness which comes through repentance and faith in Christ. He is blessed because sins are washed and covered by the blood of the Lamb out of God’s sight. He is blessed because He has no account of sin to give before God. God does not impute his sin but righteousness unto him. All guilt and condemnation are gone. Freed
from sin, he now lives a righteous life. He is a genuine Christian “in whose spirit there is no guile” because he lives a righteous lifestyle. Justification by faith in Christ makes us have “peace with God” as against the crisis that characterizes the sinful lifestyle. Condemnation and guilt are also gone as God imputes His “righteousness” in the justified believer. Everyone who is justified, both Jews and Gentiles, have “access” to God to enjoy His inexhaustible riches of grace. Justification makes us receive grace to live the Christian life on earth. The justified are saved from the “wrath to come” (Romans 5:9, 10). Justification brings joy of freedom from guilt, the gift and abiding presence of the Spirit, fellowship with God, special knowledge and revelation, assurance of answers to prayers and leading by the Spirit. Through justification, saints become objects of God’s love, grace, power and purpose (Colossians 1:26; Romans 8:14; Ephesians 2:4; 1:18-20, 11; 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9). They are also made fit for the inheritance of the saints since their names are written in the Book of Life.
LESSON 597
FREEDOM FROM WITCHCRAFT

MEMORY VERSE: “And I will cut off witchcrafts out of thine hand; and thou shalt have no more soothsayers” (Micah 5:12).

TEXT: Acts 16:16-19; 1 Samuel 28:7-19; Deuteronomy 18:9-14

Alongside all the teachings, instructions and commands of the Lord in the Scripture is the mention of some forbidden heathen practices. For the avoidance of doubt, the Bible lists such practices which the people of God should steer clear of. One of these is witchcraft.

Some people try to deny the reality of these practices, yet the Bible, the Holy Spirit and experience have proved their reality. Indeed, to deny the existence of these heathen practices simply because of the effects of education and modernization is to be the proverbial buffoon who learnt nothing and forgot nothing. His life becomes a vicious circle and a horrible spectacle as he goes through harvests of failures, daily facing defeats and disappointments.

Believers must be scripturally informed concerning the activities of Satan, the arch-enemy of their souls, so that they can wage effective spiritual war against him. This is why this study is very important.

Question 1: Mention some heathen practices forbidden in the word of God.

DIVINE WARNING AGAINST WITCHCRAFT (Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:6, 27; Galatians 5:20; Revelation 21:8; 22:15)

Witchcraft is the practice of relating with evil spirits with a hideous, fiendish motive. It is also called sorcery. Witches or wizards are human agents of the devil who have entered into covenant with the devil and are so supernaturally endowed to carry out assignments for him, manipulating and wreaking havoc on people’s health, business, family or anything that catches their fancy. God forbids and warns us against this occult practice.

God wants His people to be free from the scourge of
witchcraft. Though it has become pretty pervasive these days, the Christian should be enlightened, come to know his position in Christ and the authority God has vested in him, and take a stand against witchcraft in all its ramifications.

Believers ought not to be afflicted by the activities of witches and wizards, neither should they be part of them. Saul, the king of Israel, as well as Manasseh were strictly punished by God for dabbling in witchcraft (1 Chronicles 10:13, 14; 2 Chronicles 33:6). Under the Old Testament dispensation, witches or wizards were to be put to death. Even today, involvement in witchcraft attracts the penalty of spiritual, death and “they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:21).

**DIABOLICAL WAYS OF SNARING MEN INTO WITCHCRAFT** (Deuteronomy 18:9; Numbers 25:2, 3; Isaiah 8:19, 20; Jeremiah 10:2, 3; 1 Corinthians 10:20, 21).

“When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, THOU SHALT NOT LEARN to do after the abominations of those nations” (Deuteronomy 18:9).

One of the reasons why witchcraft is so prevalent and pervasive in these last days is the simplicity and ease of initiation into it. The devil, kind of, made the qualification for initial entry into witchcraft so low to the extent that some even wander into it unawares. This is because Satan is so determined to ensnare as many as he can.

Some people dabble in witchcraft out of curiosity, prying into the secret knowledge of the spiritual world. Not being contented with the simple revelations in the Bible, they make a dash into witchcraft and get hooked. This is why the word of God warns believers not to learn the way of the heathen (Jeremiah 10:2). This may happen through reading books or watching occult scenes in drama or movies and home videos and by making a conscious effort to practice what is read or seen. This could also take place while carelessly browsing strange websites on the Internet.

Another way people get initiated into witchcraft is through demonized food: eating food sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 10:20, 21). Some people, while they embark
on a desperate search for power to protect themselves or to have success in one area of life or the other, find themselves in the center of use of charms. Some get initiated through careless social intercourse with occult people. Others get hooked into witchcraft through consulting spiritualists in their effort to solve life’s problems, while there are also those who deliberately and willingly offer themselves to become Satan’s agents so that they can exercise power and dominion over others or to make money (Acts 16:16-19).

Though strange, it is still true that some people are congenitally initiated. When desperate women, in search of the fruit of the womb, go to native or witchdoctors for help, conception got in that process might result in congenitally possessed babies. Sexual immorality with possessed partners, may also lead to initiation. The devil also gets people hooked through music with satanic undertones. In general, repeated backslidings and continuous sinning can open the door for all manner of evil spirits to possess a person (Matthew 12:43-45).

**Question 2: Mention some ways by which Satan entraps people into witchcraft.**

**DESTRUCTIVE WORKS AND EVIDENCES OF INVOLVEMENT IN WITCHCRAFT** (Numbers 22:6, 7; 23:8, 19-23; Acts 16:16; 1 Kings 19:1, 2; 18:4; 2 Kings 9:22; Acts 8:9-11)

In a general sense, there are some manifestations common amongst those who are involved with witchcraft. But we need mention clearly that an occasional manifestation of any of these does not automatically imply involvement in witchcraft. In the first place, a New Testament believer is not supposed to be afraid of being harmed or secretly initiated into witchcraft since he is seated together with Christ Jesus in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).

When one notices a strange diabolical power of fulfilment backing up his words and this forms a pattern in his life, it might be helpful to probe the presence of the spirit of witchcraft in his life. Besides, there are some whose mere imagination (generally evil, sinister ones) are unusually backed up with the power of fulfilment. Even those who can manipulate and remotely control the decisions and actions of other people, irrespective of how far away they are must
be operating with the power of witchcraft (Acts 13:7-10). This is quite different from the effect of intercessory prayer for people who are far off.

When one notices he generally takes flight to designated places where he meets with other people in his dreams, it might not be unconnected with witchcraft. An unusual delight in wickedness and a deep rejoicing at evil occurrences gives signals of connection with witchcraft. When one detests prayers, seeks to almost always evade anointed power-backed corporate prayer of authority, and shows a hardness of heart and stubbornness that is beyond the normal, involvement in witchcraft may not be altogether ruled out. So also is the ability to predict secret or future events without a personal relationship with God. This is not mere guessing or occasional accurate prediction but a consistent and regular pastime such as the case of the Philippian damsel in Acts 16:16.

**Question 3:** *Mention some manifestations common among those who are involved in witchcraft.*

People involved in witchcraft cannot be idle else they will earn the wrath of their master, the devil. They must be busy for him. The devil is a hard taskmaster and he saddles them with uncanny, wicked assignments. These assignments form the activities of their lives and they are faithful to them until One stronger than the devil comes to set them free. The first and primary activity is to initiate others into witchcraft and prevent people from exercising true faith in Christ (Acts 13:7-10). They also cause mysterious bloodletting accidents through the blood sucking spirits indwelling them. Some of them place curses on people and work at destroying lives. Destruction and disintegration of families hitherto happy and joyful is their stock-in-trade.

Some witches are assigned to seduce the opposite sex as many as they could get. Others oppress their neighbors at night, tie up the wombs of married women, wreck the businesses of others, cause delay in marriages, hinder progress and at times cause mysterious disappearance of money. Still, it is essential to emphasize that an abiding Christian should not and cannot be the subject of these attacks and operation of the devil. Even if witches and wizards target the believer, their weapons do not prosper.
(Isaiah 54:17; Jeremiah 1:19). The essence of witchcraft is to have the devil accomplish, through a human agent, what he would have done directly. But the Bible says “...God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly...” (Romans 16:20). If Satan, the master of witches, wizards, familiar spirits, magicians, necromancers, is bruised under our feet, his human agents have no power over us. This is the joy and confidence of believers.

**Question 4:** List some wicked effects of witchcraft.

**DEFENSIVE WEAPON FOR FREEDOM FROM WITCHCRAFT** (Psalm 91:1-4; Numbers 23:21; Zechariah 2:9; 1 John 4:4; 5:18; Acts 19:18, 19)

There is divine protection for true believers in Christ. So long as they live holy lives by the grace of God, Satan cannot touch them. They are the apple of God’s eye, highly treasured and preserved from all harm.

The believer should be free from the fear of witchcraft. And those outside Christ who are held under the power of witchcraft against their wish can also be freed through repentance and faith in Christ. “When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils” (Luke 11:21-22) Jesus Christ has spoilt (defeated) Satan and his cohorts. “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15).

**Question 5:** What is the basis of the believer’s assurance of liberty and victory over witchcraft?

Christ’s victory on the cross is the basis of freedom and deliverance from Satan and his cohorts (Colossians 1:13). Therefore, for those who genuinely desire to be free from witchcraft, deliverance is sure. All they need do is genuinely repent of their wickedness, expose their deeds, renounce Satan and all he offers, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work at Calvary and abide in Him till the end.
LESSON 598

BIBLICAL PORTRAIT OF THE HOME CARING FELLOWSHIP

MEMORY VERSE: “And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens” (Exodus 18:25).

TEXT: Exodus 18:13-24

During the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, multitudes attended His meetings and at times stayed with Him for more than one day. The Apostles of the early church too had ministries that had large following. On the day of Pentecost, three thousand thronged the throne of grace, got born again and were added to the church. Shortly after that, five thousand accepted the Lord, and so grew the church in leaps and bounds. This same feat in growth had been seen also in contemporary times.

Question 1: Which is more important to the spiritual well-being of the believer: the home caring fellowship or the general church assembly? Give reasons for your answer.

These large meetings, especially in present times, make the church lose sight of the significance and function of small groups within the large assembly. Significantly, large gatherings diminish with time. This then makes a re-directing of focus from the large groups to small groups within the large assembly necessary. The church cannot afford to continue to neglect the age-long principle of small groups within the large body. The truth is that the strength of the large crowd is in the small group. And the stability of the small group is in the large assembly. One cannot trade off the other. The small groups, when they are worth their salt, account for the dynamism, growth, spirituality, unity and impact of the large congregation. Yet, that small group cannot be stable, established and firmly rooted except the large assembly is still maintained.
**BIBLICAL PICTURES OF SMALL GROUP** (Exodus 12:3, 4; 16:16-18; Joshua 7:14; Acts 18:24-26).

“Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb” (Exodus 12:3, 4).

**Question 2:** **Supporting your answer with Bible references, how can you prove that the church as presently structured is Biblical?**

The occasion of the Passover in Egypt and its execution shows forth the pattern and profitability of small groups. The whole nation was to mark the occasion but it was done or accomplished through “the house of their fathers”. Each house (manageable unit) formed small group of people. At that level, the head of that house will convincingly and satisfactorily handle the questions of any member of the group.

In the organization and administration of the children of Israel, in small or great matters, the principle of the functioning of small groups is given prominence. In observing the Passover, in gathering the manna and in the administration of justice, the nation was grouped into small manageable units (Exodus 18:25, 26).

The way Achan was discovered, after he took of the accursed thing, convinces us of the strength and significance of the small group amongst the Israelites. To identify Achan, God started with the “church in the wilderness”, Israel. He then dealt with them, first, according to their tribes; second, according to their families; third, according to their households, and fourth according to their persons - “man by man”. These levels of groups ease off the burden of leadership and get rid of the facelessness of a large assembly. This certainly informs why we have our churches or congregation in units of groups ranging from Districts to Zones to Home fellowship locations and finally to individual members. The small group without any doubt, helps in clarifying members of the larger congregation of
anything that is not properly understood. There is always that interpersonal relationship that exists between the leaders and members. Misconceptions are straightened out in the house fellowship.

**SMALL GROUPS: AN ENDURING STRATEGY** (1 Samuel 10:19; Acts 16:15; 2:46, 47)

**Question 3: Why is small group like the Home Caring Fellowship system important in the church set-up such as ours?**

The use of small groups as we have seen was particularly central to the organization and administration of the children of Israel in the wilderness. In the times of Moses and Joshua, the groups were used to advantage in resolving problems. After Joshua, a dozen judges reigned, and later Samuel saddled the leadership of the nation. One would imagine that the hundreds of years between Joshua and Samuel would have swept off the concept of the small groups among the people. But it did not. The benefits of a small group endeared itself to the heart of Jewish leaders and it kept on being the primary and core method in the administrative, political and judicial procedure of the nation.

The procedure of choosing a king was yet through the small groups. The process started at the tribal level, then it scaled down to the family level, then to the household level and finally to a single person. Significantly, the much that is said and observed on the natural setting of geographical entity called Israel can be said of the spiritual Israel - the church. Through the small group setting, many families have been blessed and brought under the influence of God. These people in turn, serve as a direct link in reaching out to their neighbors and winning them for Christ.

**SMALL GROUPS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT** (Mark 3:14, 15; Acts 12:12; 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19)

Multitudes followed the Lord Jesus Christ. But in this milling mass of faceless seekers, He had to organize them into smaller groups of hundreds, and fifties. This He did to achieve effectiveness in ministry. This was striking in the administration of the followers especially when the five thousands, first, and later the four thousands, had
to be fed. While Christ dealt with, reached and helped
the multitude generally, He resorted to small groups in
mobilizing for effective evangelization. At a broader level, He
had a group of twelve whom He called and commissioned
to “be with him” and gave “power to heal sicknesses and
to cast out devils”. This choice of twelve, a small group
of ministers were chosen from the multitude that were
obedient to the doctrine and had been baptized in water.

**Question 4: How did the Home Caring Fellowship concept function in the New Testament?**

But still at a closer circuit, Jesus still chose three out of
the twelve who were privileged to relate with Him more
intimately. These three, Peter, James and John eventually
emerged as a small group and their role and significance
persisted throughout the New Testament. In the second
chapter of Acts, Peter, one of the three rose up and
preached. In the third chapter, Peter and John were at
the gate called Beautiful where a miracle of healing was
wrought on the lame, and there was a stir among the
people. In the fourth and fifth chapters, Peter and John
were arrested, released by an angelic ministry, re-arrested
and arraigned and then released again. James, one of
the three was beheaded but in the fifteenth chapter of
Acts, another James was appointed. And Paul referred to
this small group of three apostles as “the pillars in the
church” (Galatians 2:9).

**MINISTERING THROUGH SMALL GROUPS** (Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37, 42; Luke 10:1; 2:42-44; Matthew 26:37, 38)

Christ’s method of ministry was bequeathed to the first
century Church and later to other ages through the small
inner circle of Peter, James and John. They were with
Him on the Mount of Transfiguration where they saw a
glimpse of His glory and had a confirmation of both His
Sonship and divinity. The raising of the dead was done in
the presence of Peter, James and John in Mark’s gospel.
And in the early church, Peter followed the same pattern
he found in the Lord when he was faced with raising dead
Tabitha (Acts 9:36-42).

Again in the evangelization of the nation, Jesus still
mobilized the small groups. Of the multitude that followed
Him, out of whom He chose twelve disciples to carry on with the ministry of evangelizing and healing all that were sick (Luke 9:1).

**PURPOSE OF SMALL GROUPS** (Acts 6:1-3; 2:42, 44-46)

**Question 5: What is the purpose of the house fellowship system, and what can we do to have it revived?**

With the small groups, recognition or discovery of the needs of individuals in the church is easier and faster. A strong emphasis on the doctrines, dynamic prayer ministry within the church, and powerful preaching, cannot eclipse the fact that there are felt needs among the membership. Problems are nipped in the bud, reasons for murmurings and complaints are discovered at the earliest times, and suffering saints are singled out in the small groups for assistance, the same way neglected widows in the early church were attended to. In the church today, there are other small groups too that need help. Such groups are the young married couples, young parents, up-coming businessmen, ageing spinsters and bachelors, the sick brethren, the lonely, the widows and the bereaved.

Again, the small group makes us see methods whereby needs can be identified. After needs have been identified, it logically follows that a plan to address the needs be put in place. This implies correlating the total needs into Programs with an eye on overcoming the hindrances in the provision of the needs and concretely supplying or meeting those needs.

Closely following the planning is the organization. This is bringing up of concrete, specific methods that would help in solving the problems at hand. It is the mobilization of all the members of the small unit in order to solve the problems of suffering members. This makes the small groups very vital in the church just as they were in Israel. The functions of small groups make them indispensable in the present day church.

What then are the functions? First, small groups are problem-solving oriented. The leader in the group is there to solve problems, help the people out, and remove hindrances before the brethren. The leader is, therefore, an answer to the problems of people. Second, small groups
are meant to know the thinking of the people, their felt needs and where they ache. Third, small groups gather for profitable Program planning. Every member then should have a say and dictatorial spirit must be kept out of the group. Fourth, members of small group desire to see a change in their lives, situations and circumstances as a result of the prayer, fellowship or membership in the small group. This is perhaps the singular factor that would make them to keep coming. Fifth, small groups provide stability. Membership of these small groups gives the people a sense of belonging. This offers emotional stability in a large group where the superintending leader does not know everyone. The members are satisfied when they observe the group leader’s interest in them and their welfare. They feel at home, discover meaning in life and enjoy the personal recognition accorded them.

**PRINCIPLES IN A SMALL GROUP** (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:11, 12)

**Question 6: Explain with practical examples how we can apply the principles of small group to make our Home Fellowship grow and be what it ought to be.**

In every small group, the leader must communicate a sense of belonging. All the members must be heard and supported. The group must shun a task-centered approach. Fellowship, sharing and caring must have high priority in the group and this must be pursued vigorously. In doing this, the leader must learn to listen passionately to the people and in the process seek to make sense out of their narration. He must watch for the existence of the real situation or problems at hand. Third, there must be a consciousness of the goals of the group. This is what keeps an athlete on the track. If there were no goal, he would drop out. This is what keeps a student focused in school, and a wife in the home. The group’s goal is always a rallying point. The leader must be clear in communicating these goals to the members of the group. It might be the goal of evangelism growth, fellowship and assistance. Fourth, there must be the dual role for every small group. Every activity must be double-pronged: aiding and enhancing the growth and fulfilment of every member, and the well-being of the entire group. There must be continuous assessment and constant evaluation of the performance of the group.
Fifth, there must be deliberate effort to assist members of the group to meet their personal needs. These are not the petty, selfish, mundane needs. Rather, they are the deep-seated desires or eagerness for fulfilment in ministry, usefulness in the house of God, and walk with God or experiences with the Lord. The small group, therefore, should provide opportunities for members to do those things they cannot do or accomplish on their own. The small group should give the members the liberty, power, desire and drive to do what they cannot do on their own.

Sixth, every person in the group brings many impressions from other groups. This blending of impressions and ideas imposes a greater demand or challenge on the leader to lead each person towards the greatest height their capability can attain while the ideals of the larger group is unadulterated.

Finally, without any doubt, small groups make for efficiency and maximized profitability both for the individual members and the group at large.
OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

LESSON 599

ISRAEL RENEWS COVENANT WITH GOD

MEMORY VERSE: “And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey” (Joshua 24:24).

TEXT: Joshua 24:1-28

Joshua had summoned all Israel with their heads, judges and officers to a valedictory meeting in chapter 23 of Joshua. As a visionary leader, he was concerned about the future of the nation now that he was very old and could pass on any time. In the meeting, he challenged them to be “very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the Law of Moses…” (Joshua 23:6). He also spelt out the possible consequences of sliding back from following the Lord.

Our lesson this week concludes the ministry of this great general of God wherein he calls for the same assembly and recounts God’s manifold benefits to Israel, causes them to renew their covenant relationship with Him with a commitment to serve Him. He also charges them to be steadfast in obeying His laws and statutes.

JOSHUA RECOUNTS GOD’S GOODNESS TO ISRAEL (Joshua 24:1-13; 23:1-3; Psalm 77:11; Exodus 14:15-28; 23:27,28; Deuteronomy 7:20; 6:10,11; Psalm 103:1-4).

“And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God” (Joshua 24:1).

The assembly Joshua addressed here was the same as in the previous chapter (Joshua 23:2). The meeting held in Shechem probably because it was nearer to Joshua than Shiloh or since he was ageing, he could not travel too far. Second, it was the place Abraham settled on coming to Canaan, and where God made a covenant with him (Genesis 12:6, 7). Third, it was also near mounts Gerizim and Ebal where the people had renewed their covenant with God when they arrived Canaan (Joshua 8:30). The
location provided the right atmosphere for solemnity and soberness.

Of the promises God made to their fathers, and of the ones they made to Him, this place seemed appropriate for remembrance and commitment. We learn here that our places of worship should be conducive in terms of structure, design and decoration. The environment should inspire people to want to worship God in the beauty of His holiness. It must remind worshippers of the presence of God, reinforce their convictions in the old truths and remind them of their ultimate home – heaven. Believers’ gathering today should always be to the Lord with hearts prepared to worship and hear from Him.

**Question 1: Enumerate God’s kindness to Israel as recounted by Joshua.**

Joshua began his speech to the congregation by saying: “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel”. He spoke the language of prophets and the sermon consists of the history of the great things God had done for His people. He began by recounting God’s mercies, kindness, favors and other wonders which He bestowed on His people. He brought Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees (Joshua 24:2, 3), from an environment of idolatry. He and his ancestors had served other gods there, but God redeemed him by grace. Abraham’s justification is described as an instance of God justifying the ungodly (Romans 4:5). **Two**, he reminded them of the gifts of Isaac and Esau. **Three**, he spoke of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage through Moses (Joshua 24:5-7). **Four**, God protected them in the wilderness where they travelled and travailed for a long time. **Five**, He thwarted the plot of Balak and Balaam against them (verse 9). **Six**, He brought them safely into Canaan and delivered the Canaanites into their hand (Joshua 24:11, 12), “not with thy sword nor bow.” It was purely the Lord’s doing. **Seven**, God made them landlords of a good place which other people labored to build (Joshua 24:13).

**JOSHUA’S CHARGE TO ISRAEL TO SERVE GOD**
(Joshua 24:14, 15; Deuteronomy 6:12-18; Hosea 3:5; 1 Kings 18:21; 1 Timothy 3:4, 5)

The purpose of relating the history of God’s mercies to the
children of Israel was to exhort them to fear and serve God, in gratitude for His favor, so they might continue to enjoy the same. “Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD” (Joshua 24:14).

Question 2: Why was Israel charged to fear and serve the Lord?

In consideration of the great kindness and mercy God had bestowed upon them, they were enjoined to, first, “Fear the LORD” (Hosea 3:5). The God of heaven is to be feared because of His power, greatness, authority and majesty. He is infinite in all His attributes and cannot be compared with any other god or challenged by any. He rules the universe, space and galaxies with unquantifiable majesty. “Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11). Let the inhabitants of heaven and earth hear and fear the God who can do all things. However, fearing Him is not only manifest in reverential awe but in turning away from evil. Those who profess to fear God yet continue in evil miss the truth. “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate” (Proverbs 8:13).

Second, Joshua admonished Israel to serve the Lord. How else can a man prove that he fears God if not by diligent service? Serving God includes doing His will and working for Him. The greatest service we can render to Him today is to make His truth known to others both by our life as well as lips. This service is to be done in sincerity and truth; that is, without presence but with the whole heart as dealing with a God who searches the heart. Whatever is done outwardly should conform to the truth within.

Third, he said, “put away the strange gods”. It is the height of folly as well as insult to leave the Creator and serve creation. All other gods are works of men’s hands; they are dumb and cannot hear; blind and cannot see; dead and cannot give life; weak and powerless and cannot do anything (Deuteronomy 4:28; 2 Kings 19:18; Psalm 135:15). Though it would appear that Joshua had
succeeded in stamping out any visible idols from among the congregation, some of the people might still be in private possession of others. Thus, he charged them to prefer the God of Abraham to the “gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood”.

**Question 3: Why did Joshua leave the choice of faith to the people to decide?**

Having recounted the wonders of God and challenged the people to serve God sincerely and thrust out strange gods, Joshua led them to decide their own fate; it was a critical moment of decision-making. Though he was their leader, he would not force anyone against their will. This shows that our faith which leads to salvation is an individual choice. The faith of the father cannot save the son, neither can the faith of the husband save the wife. Everyone must choose who they want to serve. Moreover, any decision that is not voluntary might tend to hypocrisy. Joshua told the people: “choose you this day whom ye will serve”. It was a moment of decision that gave no room for procrastination because tomorrow may be too late. Elijah, many centuries after, pushed the same decision to the children of Israel to choose either the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or Baal (1 Kings 18:21).

Joshua demonstrated the seriousness of the matter and his own sincerity by publicly affirming his own decision. He said: “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

**Question 4: What lessons do we learn from Joshua’s declaration to serve God with his house?**

Whether as leaders or the led, we are to live by example; whatever we are demanding from people we should be seen to do same. We see here that Joshua did not exempt himself from the service of God. He was at the forefront of the decision to serve as well as influence his family to choose God over idols. Secondly, he made it clear that serving God was not optional for his family – wife, children and servants. As a great leader, he did not make his
involvement in public affairs and leadership roles excuse for neglecting his family responsibility. Of such leaders, the Scripture says, “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). Thirdly, we see in Joshua’s decision a declaration to remain with God though all earth forsake Him.

ISRAEL RENEWS COVENANT WITH GOD (Joshua 24:16-28; 8:31; Exodus 24:1-8; Deuteronomy 29:1; Ruth 1:16; Luke 9:62)

“And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods” (Joshua 24:16). The whole congregation immediately responded to Joshua’s entreaty with a decision to serve the Lord. Beyond any leadership authority from him, the people must have been influenced by his own example. This goes to underscore the saying that ‘a leader’s decision is a leading decision’. When men of power and caliber turn to righteousness, those under them, in all probability, will follow suit. Also, the children of Israel were scared at the thought of forsaking God because of the consequences which were very well known to them.

Moreover, they must have remembered God’s great kindness and mercies as ground for serving Him. Believers are continually admonished to remember Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross at Calvary and surrender their all to Him. “And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15). For the children of Israel, God defeated their oppressors in Egypt, healed their diseases, led them through that horrible wilderness, fed them with angel’s food, fought their battles and brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey (Joshua 24:17,18).

In order to ascertain the people’s depth of conviction and prove their commitment to it, Joshua revealed the difficulties associated with serving the Lord. “And Joshua said unto the people, ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the
LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good” (Joshua 24:19, 20). This motive was not to dissuade them from serving God; he did not intend to make them feel that serving God is a herculean task. But he meant to make them realize that serving God is not without its challenges. First, the tempter is still around to do what he knows best: put stumbling blocks before God’s people. Second, his agents of seduction are eager to distract God’s children from the goal of making heaven. Third, life itself brings challenges from time to time and requires that God’s people remain resolute in order to overcome. Fourth, we cannot serve God while at the same time carrying our idols along: one must give way for the other.

As Christians and servants of God, we must be balanced in the presentation of the gospel. A message that paints life as rose without thorns is defective. We must let our converts know that sometimes there could be difficulties along the way. Paul did exactly this, “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Everyone who comes to the Lord must sit down and count the cost and be ready to pay the price.

The way into the kingdom of heaven is ‘strait’ and narrow and we must strive to be able to enter. Whatever the challenges, our Lord promises to help us (Hebrews 13:5). Therefore, if you resolve to serve God, you must renounce all competitors with Him.

**Question 5: As believers, what challenge do we receive from Israel’s firm resolution to serve the Lord?**

Despite Joshua disclosing the difficulties associated with serving God, the children of Israel resolved to continue in faith (verse 21). They were like Ruth who, despite her mother-in-law’s dissuasion, resolved to go with the God of Israel (Ruth 1:15-18). She had the option of going back to her people in Moab but chose to brush aside fear of the unknown. She never regretted her decision.

To assure Joshua that they meant every word, the children of Israel repeated their resolution once again in verse 24:
“The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.” Every believer is hereby challenged to uphold the same strong conviction in serving and following the Lord in the strength of divine grace. Jesus demands this form of resolution from all true believers. “And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

“So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem” (Joshua 24:25).

**Question 6: Enumerate the things Joshua did to solemnize Israel’s covenant with God.**

Now that the children of Israel had willingly entered into a covenant to serve the Lord, Joshua helped them sealed it. This he did by calling witness to it. First, he made them their own witnesses: “Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD” (Joshua 24:22). There is no greater witness than ourselves: our own consciences bear witness to our relationship with the Lord. Second, he documented it so that generations to come might read of it and that their commitment might remain on record. Third, he erected a stone of memorial, perhaps for the benefit of those who were not conversant with writings. He said the stone would be a witness unto them, “for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he (God) spake unto us” (Joshua 24:26, 27).

Joshua’s dealing with the children of Israel in this matter leaves a lot of lessons for Christian leaders. One, we should not be slack in making people of God understand the whole counsel of God. No aspect of the gospel should be left untouched, unexplained. Two, what we preach we must practice. Three, we should be examples to the world, in word and indeed (1 Peter 5:3; 1 Timothy 4:12). Four, those making decisions to follow Christ should be let into the cost of discipleship so that they can make wise and informed decisions. Five, definite commitments should be extracted from people committing themselves to work and serve the Lord. Six, testimonies and extraordinary acts of the Lord should be documented for future generations. Seven, Joshua was a good example in consistent and wholehearted followership and service of God; so should
we. What a challenge to all believers, ministers and servants of God today!
LESSON 600
THE DEATH OF JOSHUA

MEMORY VERSE: “And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old” (Joshua 24:29).

TEXT: Joshua 24:29-33

Our text concludes the book as well as the life and leadership role of Joshua. In the previous lesson, Joshua rehearsed to the representatives of the tribes of Israel the faithfulness of God to them in fulfilment of His promise to the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Israel. Based on God’s unfailing promise, he exhorted them to fear and serve God with a sincere heart. He also challenged them to cleave to the true God. Following their avowed commitment to God and His word, Joshua led them into a renewed covenant relationship with the Lord.

Question 1: What challenge does the life of Joshua pose to Christian leaders today?

Our text reveals that he was able to preserve the true worship of God in his generation. “And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua...” The influence of Joshua on the Israelites continued long after his death. Like Joshua, God expects believers to be shining lights in their world and also influence people around them to preserve the legacy of true worship for succeeding generations. Contemporary saints like Martin Luther, John Wesley, Charles G. Finney, John G. Lake and a host of others influenced their generations for God and are now being remembered by what they have done. We must strive to live the brighter Christian life, win souls for Christ and disciple converts to be committed to God and true worship. It is obvious that we will not live on earth forever. The best of saints will one day die the same way Joshua, Joseph and Eleazar the high priest (mentioned in the text) passed on. Heaven is the home of all believers of all ages.
JOSHUA’S DEATH AND BURIAL (Joshua 24:29, 30; Revelation 14:13; Luke 12:15; Philippians 1:20, 23; Jude 3, 4; 2 Timothy 4:1-8)

“And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old” (Joshua 24:29).

Question 2: What lesson can we learn from the death of Joshua?

Death is an inevitable and necessary end of all men. Joshua began in a humble surrounding. Born in Egypt, he had a firsthand experience of the exodus. He first came to limelight in the Bible as a military commander. Soon after leaving Egypt, the Israelites were faced with a new enemy. Moses turned to Joshua to lead their first battle (Exodus 17:9-15). He rose to become Moses’ trusted aide and served him faithfully. On the verge of entering Canaan, Moses chose him to be one of the twelve spies. Ten of them returned with evil report but Joshua and Caleb had faith that God would keep His promises to the Israelites despite the giants in the land. For his good report, hope, courage and faith, thousands of angry Israelites called for his public stoning (Numbers 14), but he stood firm, and God rewarded him. Of all the Israelites who left Egypt, only he and Caleb entered the Promised Land – not even Moses had that honor. These good qualities in the life and pilgrimage of Joshua are worth emulating by all believers.

Question 3: In what ways was the ministry of Joshua similar to that of Moses?

Joshua’s ministry is similar to that of Moses in many respects. The miracle of crossing the Jordan River replayed Moses’ crossing of the Red Sea. Moses encountered God at the burning bush; Joshua met the ‘captain of the host of the Lord’ and likewise took off his shoes at the encounter (Joshua 5:13-15). Both leaders pleaded with God on behalf of their people and both ended their ministry with stirring farewell speeches that reviewed history and challenged the people to consistently walk with God.

However, the Scripture did not gloss over the flaws of this great general. In one incident in the wilderness, he was envious for Moses’ sake without knowing the mind
of God (Numbers 11:26-30). During the first battle of Ai and the treaty negotiation with the Gibeonites, he acted impulsively without first seeking God’s counsel. “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). Apart from these few incidents, Joshua’s life and ministry was marked by unusual faith, obedience and selfless service. When he divided the land, he did so with wisdom and fairness, selecting his own portion only after all others had got their portions. The Church and the world at large need such a selfless leader today.

Having accomplished God’s purpose for his life, Joshua, the servant of the Lord died and was buried in the border of his inheritance in Timnathserah, which is in mount Ephraim. It should be noted that the burial of Joshua was without any ostentatious display as carnal and worldly believers would indulge in today. There was no record of excess of passion, dressing, eating or drinking by those who buried him. This is a lesson to contemporary Christians. “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5).

JOSHUA’S MINISTERIAL SUCCESS (Joshua 24:31; Revelation 14:13; Luke 12:15; 2 Timothy 4:7, 8)

Question 4: Like Joshua, how can Christian leaders positively influence their followers to serve the Lord?

The Bible summarized his ministerial success and achievement by saying that “Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that over lived Joshua...” This was the greatest legacy of Joshua. His godly influence was effectively communicated to and through the whole nation. He also left competent successors behind who nurtured the children of Israel in the way of the Lord after his departure. Those who are called into leadership positions should look beyond the present; they are to labor to raise successors that will take over from them when they are called to rest from their labors and receive their rewards (Revelation 14:13).

Joshua went to rest in the bosom of the Lord. All believers should know that “there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God”. While alive, he never attempted to
take rest till all the tribes of Israel got their possessions and settled in their inheritances. He considered nothing done while anything remained undone. A life spent in the service of God is the most pleasant life that anyone can live in this world, for the worth of the life of a man does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses.

The consuming passion that underpinned Apostle Paul’s great service for God was for him to be found worthy of eternal rest in the abode of Christ (Philippians 3:9, 1:20, 23). After accomplishing his God-given task, he said, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7, 8). All Christian workers should aim at accomplishing their ministries well so as to be rewarded in heaven. It is not the beginning that matters but the end.

**CERTAINTY OF DEATH FOR ALL MEN** (Joshua 24:32, 33; Revelation 14:13; Jude 3, 4)

Everyone will die at one time or the other because it is appointed unto men once to die (Hebrews 9:27). Joseph died in Egypt and gave instruction that his bones should be carried to the Promised Land. Though he lived in Egypt, he had absolute faith in God that He would fulfill His promise by taking the Israelites to Canaan. We also read of the death and burial of Eleazar, the chief priest. These and many others died at their appointed time. The question is: how prepared are you for this inevitable appointment?

The most useful men, having served their generation, according to the will of God, one after another, fell asleep. It is undeniable that Joshua served his generation; he approved himself a faithful servant of God who diligently preserved true worship and caused Israel to serve God all his days.

**Question 5: How can sinners and believers adequately prepare for death?**

Everyone will surely bid this world farewell one day, only to be remembered by what they have done. Joshua’s life began with his relationship with God which he maintained
consistently until death. It could be recalled that as a man of unshakable conviction, he declared that he and his house would serve the Lord. And He did not renege on this vow. To live and serve God like he did, one needs to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, watching, praying and laboring till He comes.
LESSON 601
JUDAH’S VICTORY OVER THE CANAANITES

MEMORY VERSE: “And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men” (Judges 1:4).

TEXT: Judges 1:1-20

Our text is drawn from the opening chapter of the book of Judges. The Judges were special deliverers raised by God to rescue the children of Israel from their oppressors, especially whenever they sincerely repented of their state of backsliding. The Judges were also raised to revive the spiritual state of the nation and to administer justice to the people according to the Law of Moses.

After the death of Joshua, the elders that outlived him obviously carried on with his prayerful lifestyle by seeking the face of God before proceeding to battle. “And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that over lived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel” (Joshua 24:31).

Our lesson focuses on the military exploits of the tribes of Israel, chiefly, Judah, assisted by Simeon. Contemporary believers who are regularly engaged in spiritual battles have several lessons to learn from the strategies adopted by the tribe of Judah. First, the place of prayer cannot be over-emphasized since the battle is not ours but the Lord’s. Second, unity among brethren is indispensable for victory over the forces of darkness. God’s presence is promised whenever two or three are gathered in His name (Matthew 18:20). Third, believers should shun all divisive tendencies since “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand” (Matthew 12:25).

Question 1: What lessons do we learn from the children of Judah in fighting spiritual battles?

CONDITIONS FOR VICTORY OVER THE CANAANITES
(Judges 1:1-8; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Matthew 7:7-11; 18:19; 1 John 5:14,15)
“Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?” (Judges 1:1). It is instructive to note that after the death of Joshua, the children of Israel continued his military exploits. They did not allow enemy nations to exploit the absence of their leader. They sought the face of God for fresh direction in the battle ahead. They did not simply apply the previous strategies employed by Joshua in his successful outings. Here, we see the place and priority of prayers in the battles of life. Notwithstanding the promises of God to the children of Israel that He would give the land of the Canaanites unto them, there were conditions to fulfil.

Question 2: What conditions are necessary for spiritual victory today?

The children of Israel were not promised the land of Canaan on a platter of gold. They were to engage the Canaanites in a battle for possession of the land. Under the New Testament dispensation, we must understand that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. As believers, we are constantly engaged in spiritual battles. And just like the children of Judah sought the Lord, we must seek the face of God in prayer since it remains the key to spiritual victory. We need to pray for sustaining grace to remain on the narrow path in these last days. Also, we need prayer for spiritual strength to fulfil the great commission.

The children of Israel sought for wisdom in the impending battle. They did not lean on their understanding; neither did they trust in the strength of their number. Instead, they sought the face of God who is the Source of all victories. “And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand” (Judges 1:2). In response to their prayer, the Lord chose the tribe of Judah among other tribes.

The name, ‘Judah’ means praise. And the importance of praise in prevailing prayer cannot be over-emphasized. There is power in praise. No wonder, in response to the request of His disciples to teach them how to pray, Christ “said unto them, when ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name...” (Luke 11:2). In
this prayer, Jesus emphasized the need to praise God before making our requests. Praise puts us in the right frame of mind to tell God about our needs. The power of praise was demonstrated in the victory of the children of Judah under King Jehoshaphat. Also, in the New Testament, prison doors were opened after Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God.

Subsequent to the Lord’s response, “Judah said unto Simeon his brother, come up with me into my lot that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him” (verse 3). The response of Simeon to Judah’s request demonstrates the importance of unity and team work. Though the tribe of Judah was selected by the Lord, it did not exclude the role of other tribes in the execution of their military campaign.

“Togetherto Everyone Achieves More” is a popular acronym for the word TEAM. The work in the Lord’s vineyard is not restricted to individuals but to collective effort. Just like individual organs of the human body contributes to its overall growth and development, so also every genuinely converted member of the church is essential for the victory and eventual growth of the kingdom of God.

The Discipling A Whole Nation (DAWN) project should not be left in the hands of a few individuals if it must be accomplished within record time. We must quickly cooperate with the church leadership and other genuinely born again Christians to get the task done. As we engage in the Lord’s service, we must strive to shun every form of pride. “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).

CONQUEST AND CARNALITY OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH
(Judges 1:9-19; Galatians 5:7, 8; Luke 13:1-5; Matthew 14:25-31; Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9)

“And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah” (Judges 1:17). The tribes of Judah and
Simeon went into the battle, full of faith in the God of their fathers. They conquered the Canaanites, Perizzites and the inhabitants of Bezek. They captured Adoni-bezek, the lord of Bezek. Adoni-bezek was a self-confessed ruthless king who was tortured to death by Judah and Simeon, the same way he had killed seventy other kings. The calamity that befell him was in fulfilment of the Scripture that “... whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

The children of Judah continued in their military campaign and fought the inhabitants of the land even in difficult terrains because they went in the strength of the Lord. Being full of faith, they captured notable strongholds of the enemies like Jerusalem, Kirjath-arba (which was renamed Hebron), Gaza and Askelon.

**Question 3:** What are the steps to genuine salvation from sin?

God is not partial; all people are eligible for His gracious forgiveness as well as for His firm justice. Except sinners repent, they will face God’s fierce judgment like Adoni-bezek. But God, in His love, is calling all sinners everywhere to repent. If any sinner will acknowledge his or her sins, sincerely confess, forsake them and trust in the atoning blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, he or she will be saved. God is faithful and willing to forgive and cleanse the sinner from all unrighteousness. Hence, no degree or weight of sin is too heavy to be taken away because Christ shed His blood on the cross for this purpose.

**Question 4:** What pitfalls should believers avoid when faced with difficult situations in life?

“And the LORD was with Judah; and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron” (Judges 1:19). It is disheartening that the children of Judah marred their testimony because of carnal considerations; they were unable to defeat the enemies in the valley because, according to them, they had chariots of iron. Their negative confession portrayed their ignorance of the strength of their God. Today, many contemporary believers suffer defeat, not because of the power of Satan but due to their ignorance of the power in the name and
unchanging word of the Lord. Total victory is guaranteed when believers walk by faith, fully attired in God’s spiritual armor. By faith, the promises and power of God re-echoes in the hearts of faithful saints.

The children of Judah had soon forgotten the power of God that drowned the enemies at the Red Sea after they had successfully crossed the parted sea as dry land. For us to overcome daily challenges and life’s battles that come our way, we must develop our faith and trust in God who will surely fulfil His promises to His children.

**THE COURAGE AND COMMENDATION OF CALEB**
(Judges 1:12-16,20; Numbers 13:6,30; 14:6-9,37,38; Joshua 14:10-14; 15:13-19)

“And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak” (Judges 1:20). Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, of the tribe of Judah, was one of the twelve spies sent to search the land of Canaan. Although Caleb saw the giants, the sons of Anak, he emphasized the goodness of the Promised Land and described it as a land which floweth with milk and honey. He courageously “…stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (Numbers 13:30). He demonstrated great faith in the promise of God. He did not allow the opinion of the majority to alter his conviction neither did he serve the Lord halfheartedly. In return for his wholehearted devotion, God spared his life and promised him and his seed the land for their possession. The faithful Lord kept him alive and strong until he possessed his portion.

**Question 5: What lessons do we learn from the courage of Caleb?**

At the age of eighty five, Caleb was given the land of Kirjath-arba, a land originally inhabited by the giants which he renamed Hebron. In fulfilment of God’s promise, his seed also possessed the land. We can rightly possess the spoil of the strong man when we manifest faith in God’s promises and power, and serve Him wholeheartedly, like Caleb. Faith in the living God is indispensable if we must obtain a good report and fulfil our ultimate destiny.
LESSON 602

CONSEQUENCE OF INCOMPLETE OBEDIENCE

MEMORY VERSE: “If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isaiah 1:19, 20).

TEXT: Judges 1:21-36; 2:1-10

The book of Judges begins with a series of victories and defeats that took place after the death of Joshua. Joshua’s triumph in the military campaigns against the Canaanites could not be sustained for a long time after his demise. The new generation of Israelites did not obey the Lord fully. They left some of the entrenched inhabitants of the land contrary to the command of God. Instead of exterminating the enemies as commanded by Him, they opted for compromise: a deal of putting them into forced labor at the expense of their covenant promise.

The sad effect was that seven tribes – Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh, Zebulon, Asher, Naphtali and Dan – failed in taking full possession of their inheritance. Although the Israelites owned Canaan land by divine promise, they could not avail themselves of full possession and enjoyment of the land flowing with milk and honey. What an example of the consequence of unbelief in the life of God’s people!

**Question 1:** Why did the children of Israel fail to expel the Canaanites and what does that teach believers today?

Israel’s inability to conquer and completely expel the Canaanites was not because God was no longer able to ensure their victory in the face of the military prowess and superior weapons of the enemy nations. It is because something was wrong with them (Isaiah 59:1, 2). They had refused to obey God’s command to completely destroy the enemy nations (Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 12:1-3; 20:16-18). God expects His children to get rid of all previous accessories to sin – pictures, occult regalia, talisman, rings – and whatever had been instrumental in the hand of their enemies to tempt or defeat them.
ISRAEL’S UNEQUAL YOKE WITH THE CANAANITES
(Judges 1:21-36; Psalm 106:15; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 1 John 2:15-17)

“And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day” (Judges 1:21).

God had warned Israel since the days of Moses not to spare the inhabitants of Canaan because of the grave consequences it portends. He knew that Israel might not be able to completely resist the temptation of imitating their manner of life and worship. So He said: “But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee” (Deuteronomy 20:16, 17).

The children of Israel changed or substituted God’s command of total extermination of the heathen for a deal of conscription. Our text states that seven tribes – Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh, Zebulon, Asher, Naphtali and Dan – opted for this deal and could not take full possession of their inheritance (Judges 1:21-36). They fell into the trap of compromise which the word of God opposes. Their cohabitation with the heathen resulted into copying their sinful lifestyle and worship pattern. This is always the case for people who bend, change or substitute God’s truth to suit their selfish purposes.

Israel’s failure to displace the Canaanites was a glaring reflection of disobedience and lack of faith in the Almighty God. Secondly, it depicted the cowardice and slothfulness of the sluggard who says, “There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets” (Proverbs 26:13). Thirdly, the Israelites’ greed and materialistic attitude made them to prize the gains of conscripting the Canaanites as slaves above keeping the terms of their covenant relationship with God. Likewise, many so-called Christians today quickly sacrifice the benefits of their salvation and personal relationship with God at the altar of transient, mundane things of life.
Fourthly, Israel must have erroneously sensed no danger in cohabiting with these idolatrous nations. They forgot that “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”. Unequal yoke is deadly (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

The first misstep of the generation after the death of Joshua toward failure was their neglect of God’s word. Many generations ever since have been victims of the same mistake. Is it any wonder that many believers today seldom experience victory over sin, self, Satan and all his cohorts as preachers choose and pick what to preach from God’s word to satisfy the quest of their audience?

**Question 2: Explain God’s justice in His command to destroy the heathen nations.**

It was in the infinite wisdom of God that He demanded that the Canaanites should be completely driven out. It was neither an act of cruelty nor injustice that He commanded a total extermination of the pagan communities in the land. First, those nations had sufficient warnings and ample opportunities to turn from their idolatrous religions and embrace the true God (Joshua 2:8-13). Instead, in their impudent hearts, they refused to learn from the divine judgments against Egypt and the two kings of the Amorites. Inevitably, those who sin against the flood of light by rejecting God’s truth cannot but face the wrath of God.

Second, God’s command to drive out the Canaanites was also aimed at preserving the society and the religion of Israel from being influenced and contaminated by the filth of idolatry. Third, God perpetually abhors sin and is ever at war against it. Fourth, immorality is associated with the worship of Baal and Ashtaroth by the people of the land. The worship of these deities demanded mating with temple prostitutes to ensure fruitful orchards, vineyards, flocks and herds. God knew that relating agriculture with idolatry and immorality would present a great temptation for Israel (Numbers 33:51-55; Deuteronomy 1:1-5).

Steps toward backsliding start with seemingly harmless friendship with the world (James 4:4). It then grows to a point of being spotted by the world (James 1:27); bends towards affection for or love of the world (1 John 2:15-17); later transforms into conforming with the world (Romans
12:2); until it eventually ends at being condemned with the world (2 Corinthians 11:32).

**Question 3: What should be the Christian’s attitude toward unbelievers in a plural society?**

New Testament believers do not wield the sword. They have no scriptural authority to eliminate people of other faiths or those who do not adhere to sound teaching of God’s word. They must not however confuse the tolerance demanded in our society made up of different cultures, lifestyles, opposing beliefs and values with approval. The attitude expected of every Bible-believing Christian today is to maintain a distinct and unique walk with God (like Enoch) in all purity, comportment, adornment, conversation and worship.

Moreover, they must endeavor, through fervent intercession, personal evangelism and loving persuasions win the lost to Christ. True believers must never fight or kill unbelievers as a way of perpetuating Christian influence in their communities or nations.

**ISRAEL REBUKED FOR THEIR DISOBEDIENCE** (Judges 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:13)

The compromising attitude which the children of Israel assumed toward the heathen’s lifestyle made God to send an Angel to pronounce divine punishment for their breach of His covenant. “And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?” (Judges 2:1, 2).

This “angel of the LORD” was not an ordinary angel. It was one of the Old Testament appearances of Christ, the second person in the Godhead. Moses, Joshua, Gideon and a host of other Old Testament saints had the Lord appearing to them in a similar way (Exodus 3:2-5; Numbers 22:3-5; Joshua 5:13-15; Judges 6:11-24). This Angel of the Lord should not be misunderstood for an earthly being or a prophet from Gilgal. He was a divine personality that
had the same essence with Jehovah.

**Question 4: Highlight the significance of the Angel of the Lord coming from Gilgal?**

The Angel coming from Gilgal is significant. It was at Gilgal that the Israelites celebrated the Passover for the first time since they left Egypt 40 years earlier. The tabernacle was also originally located in Gilgal (Joshua 5:14-20). At Gilgal all Israelites were circumcised to roll away the reproach of Egypt (Joshua 5:2-9). At Gilgal the Lord appeared to Joshua to assure him of victory as he was to begin his campaign against Canaan. The memory of the religious engagement which the angel of the Lord from Gilgal signaled helped to enforce his rebuke on Israel’s apostasy.

To Christians, Gilgal represents that position from where the believer goes forth in obedience and faith to subdue all spiritual foes. The Lord, in His mercy, visited the people at Bochim to remind Israel of its commitment to God at Gilgal.

The message of the Angel attested to God’s past faithfulness, mercies and salvation for Israel. “I made you to go up out of Egypt and brought you unto the land which I swore to your fathers.” The new generation of Israelites were therefore reminded that they owed God loyalty and unreserved obedience. Those who have tasted of the grace of God at salvation should not forget His demand for sobriety and righteous living in this present world (Titus 2:11).

One would have expected prompt obedience from the children of Israel considering the faithfulness of God to them. But they did not; hence, the Lord said, “ye have not obeyed my voice”. How many Christians are guilty of the same charge today! God has been faithful to them in every circumstance of life but they have been consistently unfaithful in keeping His words. When the church habitually neglects to observe and do any of the Lord’s commandments or breaks one of the least commandments, and teaches men so, she incurs God’s wrath. “Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you” (Judges 2:3).
God leaves people deliberately to suffer when they veer from His commandments. Such are open to His stern rebuke (1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:2). The nations that Israel refused to destroy according to the commandments of the Lord became snares and instruments of torture to them. How wise to obey the Lord fully!

**ISRAEL’S RESPONSE TO THE LORD’S REPROOF**
(Judges 2:4-10; 2 Kings 17:32, 33; Matthew 27:3-5; 2 Corinthians 7:7-11)

The children of Israel wept at hearing the divine judgment on their sins. “And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept” (Judges 2:4). The place was called, “Bochim” meaning, ‘weepers’. The congregation wept because they realized that they had lost the golden opportunity of God’s divine presence. Sin brings us into disfavor with God. No matter our past relationship with Him, sin will estrange us from God’s fellowship. The doctrine of unconditional security of believers is a fallacy. Israelites were now to reap the bitter fruits of their disobedience in the days ahead except they repented. It is unfortunate that some Christians allow undue relationship with unbelievers or Achans in the camp to dissuade them from going unto perfection.

**Question 5: What major lessons do we learn from the Bochim experience?**

Someone has said, ‘A grain of faith is better than gallons of tears, just as a drop of genuine repentance is more precious than torrents of weeping’. The people wept but showed no evidence of repentance. Shedding crocodile tears for the consequences of sin is not equal to repentance. The weeping at Bochim was nothing but momentary outburst of feeling accompanied with hasty sacrifices without any amendment in their lifestyle. They wept but failed to make right their way before God (2 Kings 17:32, 33).

The fact that God did not withdraw His chastisement from this generation of Israelites meant that their weeping was not the same as genuine repentance. If they were truly penitent, God would have taken away their chastisement. Sorrow is not sobriety.
LESSON 603
DIVINE CHASTISEMENT FOR ISRAEL’S BACKSLIDING

MEMORY VERSE: “And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger” (Judges 2:12).

TEXT: Judges 2:11-23

God chose the Israelites to be a holy nation and peculiar people above all the nations of the earth (Deuteronomy 14:2). To preserve their peculiarity, He raised prophets, teachers and shepherds to lead them in the path of righteousness and obedience to His word. This distinct lifestyle of righteousness and obedience they were required to live was the condition of the covenant He made with them. God gave them commandments and laws to keep so that His presence will be with them as a shield from their enemies.

Unfortunately, the Israelites repeatedly broke the terms of their covenant relationship with God. After the demise of Joshua, there arose another generation that knew not the Lord and the works which He had done for Israel. The preceding verses to our text show how an angel of the Lord came to rebuke them for making league with the heathen nations around them. Though they wept, they seemed to have shed crocodile tears; they subsequently forsook God as our text today records. Consequently, the divine presence departed and “they could not any longer stand before their enemies” (Judges 12:14). God cannot walk with people who live in sinful compromise.

In spite of this, God manifested unfailing love, mercy and goodness towards them. Whenever they called upon Him, He would raise judges to deliver them from their enemies. Some believers today seem to be toeing this path of repeated backsliding and inconsistency in their walk with God. But as we shall see in this lesson, avoidable negative consequences always attend compromise and backsliding.
REPEATED BACKSLIDING OF ISRAEL AFTER JOSHUA


Question 1: What is backsliding?

Backsliding, according to the Easton’s Bible Dictionary is, ‘to draw back or apostatize in matters of religion’ (Acts 21:21; 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 1 Timothy 4:1). This may be partial or complete (Proverbs 14:14; Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:38, 39). To backslide is to turn back from good and approved standard of God. It is to retrogress from lofty ideals, to diminish in value and virtue; to become cold or lukewarm in love for God and to redirect one’s affection from pleasing God only to self and other person(s) and objects. It is also to disregard God’s messages, methods and mentors. The Israelites lost their bearing, spiritual steam and were simply backslidden. “And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim.” God is omniscient. Anywhere, anyhow and anytime sin is committed, in the secret or public, God sees it. It is in His sight because nothing can be hid from Him.

The Scripture declare that no one can serve two masters. Therefore, to serve idol contrary to the provision of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-5), the Israelites forsook God. “And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.” They had forgotten that God who brought them out of the land of Egypt was the only One they should serve throughout their existence on earth.

Recall that it was because of the sin of the inhabitants that God brought Israel as a nation to take over their land. It would be a great injustice on the side of God to drive out the people of the land for their evil deed and bring other people who are guilty of the same evil and sustain them in the land with the resources of heaven.

Question 2: Why were the Israelites given to backsliding?
Incomplete obedience always prepares a slippery ground for a certain future fall. The failure of Israel to drive out all the inhabitants of the land as divinely instructed led to their frequent compromise with them. Cohabiting with idol worshippers became a constant source of temptation into which they fell. Believers today live in a similar evil world that is full of temptation. Given that increase of sinful activities in the world will make the love of many believers to wax cold, we need to heed the warning of scripture to keep our hearts with all diligence. This requires graceful efforts in watching over the gates that leads to the heart: the eyes, ears, tongue, etc. We also need to watch against evil imaginations the devil tries to infiltrate the mind with. Though sinners paint evil with attractive and alluring colors in our offices, compounds, streets, markets, schools and campuses; though they try to intimidate whoever chooses to live an uncompromising lifestyle, we must resist sin.

When evil is tolerated and accommodated, the heart of the righteous no longer repulses it with the vehemence required. Gradually, the heart begins to drift, deviate and draw away from its holy conviction and becomes unclean. Outright evil deeds begin to manifest. This was what happened to the Israelites.

Israel forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashtaroth. Baal was the male sun god worshipped in Western Asia among the heathen nations as their chief deity. Ashtaroth was set up in the temples and worshipped with the most repulsive forms of sexual perversion, surrendering all virtues and decency under the guise of religious worship.

This kind of worship still goes on in many so-called Christian assemblies today.


**Question 3:** Mention some of the prophets God raised to deliver Israel.

The Judges were men (including one woman) whom God raised from among the children of Israel to serve as leaders, reformers and deliverers. They were specially
qualified, endowed and empowered by God to function in civil administration, legal matters and military defense of the people. These were Othniel (Judges 3:9), Ehud (Judges 3:15), Shamgar (Judges 3:31), Deborah (Judges 4:5), Gideon (Judges 6:36), Abimelech (Judges 9:1), Tola (Judges 10:1), Jair (Judges 10:3), Jephthah (Judges 11:11), Ibzan (Judges 12:8), Elon (Judges 12:11), Abdon (Judges 12:13), Samson (Judges 16:30), Eli (1 Samuel 4:18), Samuel (1 Samuel 7:15).

Israel’s suffering, distress, groaning and oppression touched the heart of God, even though they were the architects of their misfortune. God, out of His abundant mercy for the people, proffered solutions by raising Judges. Their decision to worship Baalim could not help them. It earned them sorrow, oppression, defeat and suffering but God’s choice brought solutions. It is important for us to observe that the decision of who would be a judge was not left to the people but to God only.

**Question 4: What are the similarities and differences between the Judges and Jesus Christ?**

There are some similarities between the Judges and our Lord Jesus Christ. One, the Judges delivered the people from the hands of those who spoiled them and Jesus Christ came to set the captives free. Two, Israel would not hearken to their Judges as Christ came to His own people but they received Him not. Three, God was with the Judges for the work they were called to do just as He was with Christ who always pleased Him. Four, the Lord delivered His suffering people through the Judges as Christ also did.

Despite the similarities between the Judges and Jesus Christ, there are numerous differences between them. Christ was the incarnate Son of God, while they were servants raised by grace. Christ is sinless while they were not. Christ was endued with power of the Holy Spirit without measure but they had a measure of the Spirit of God. Christ was born by a virgin, but they were not. Christ has eternal ministry, while their ministries were temporal. They were called to deliver Israel in their time, but Christ is the Savior of the world for all time. Christ laid down His life for His people, but the Judges did not.
Question 5: What can believers learn from the success of the Judges God raised to rescue Israel?

As God raised judges to rescue Israel, He is still raising Christian servants to rescue perishing souls today. Workers and leaders in the church should therefore make frantic efforts to win souls into the Kingdom while there is still hope. This is the revealed will of God that every believer should seek to carry out every day. The unchanging commission is, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

The success of the judges was based on God’s presence with them; hence, they were required to live holy lives so that they could secure God’s partnership in their ministry. Similarly, all workers and leaders working for God must be free from the corruption, pollution and evil in the world. Ministerial power is only guaranteed through God’s presence.

The work of the judges was made difficult because the people did not listen to them. Similarly, the work of leaders in the church today is made difficult when people do not believe in them and disregard God’s message through them. In spite of this, the judges were steadfast till death. It was only when they died that the enemies regained their hold over the people. We, too, should be steadfast in our call, commitment and consecration to God.

REPERCUSSION OF ISRAEL’S BACKSLIDING (Judges 2:14,15,20-23; Psalm 89:27-33; Leviticus 26:3-45; Deuteronomy 28:1-68)

Backsliding always attract God’s wrath and indignation. He chastises His children in love as a means of bringing them back to Himself (Hebrews 12:5-11).

The portion of God’s people in this life is the Lord. When they kept God’s commandments, it was well with them and their enemies could not stand before them. The Lord fought for them anywhere they went. Whatsoever they laid their hands to do, God prospered and they were like the watered garden. Anyone who touched them, touched the apple of God’s eyes. God’s hand was heavy against their enemies and no enemy could face them in battle. They were a terror to their enemies.
Question 6: What is the consequence of forsaking God?

When people forsake God, He leaves them at the mercy of their enemies to oppress them. God does that not because He approves of the sin of their enemies but to make His people to retrace their steps from their evil ways. In Leviticus chapter 26 and Deuteronomy chapter 28, God took time to impress on the people the consequences of breaking His covenant.

Our text reveals that the children of Israel were hardened. Even when God had mercy on them and raised judges for them, they would not hearken to their judges. They went awandering after other gods. When the judges died, things became worse, as they returned and corrupted themselves more than their fathers. Consequently, God left the enemy nations to afflict and oppress them. People who are inconsistent in their walk with God rarely enjoy the unceasing flow of God’s grace. They always have stories of affliction and oppression to tell. With genuine repentance, faith in God’s love, prayerful dependence on His sufficient and sustaining grace, unbroken fellowship with Him and His people, you can consistently abide in the Lord.
NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

LESSON 604

FOOLISHNESS OF HUMAN WISDOM

MEMORY VERSE: “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:27).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

The message of the cross as opposed to the wisdom of the world forms the nucleus of this study. The word of God refers to human wisdom as “foolishness” and “vain” (1 Corinthians 3:19, 20). “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). In the wisdom of God, the cross of Christ was designed to bring salvation to sinners, healing for the sick, deliverance for the demonized and redemption to all men. This, however, is foolishness to the finite mind which cannot comprehend divine plans and spiritual realities (Matthew 22:29; Isaiah 55:9).

Question 1: Why is the message of the Cross foolishness to the natural man?

CHRIST: THE WISDOM AND POWER OF GOD (1 Corinthians 1:18-25; Romans 1:1-4; Isaiah 8:14; Colossians 2:2, 3; Luke 2:34, 35; John 6:52-60)

“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:23,24). The preaching of the cross had different effects on different people. To the Jews, it was a stumbling block; to the Greeks, it was foolishness; but to those who are called, both the Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Question 2: Why was the message of crucifixion a stumbling block to the Jews?
The message of crucifixion made the Jews to stumble because they could not comprehend it. They had thought their expected Messiah was to be a great temporal prince, and therefore, would never accept one so mean in appearance. They despised Christ and looked upon Him as repulsive because He was hanged on a tree and did not gratify them with a sign. The Jews had always been used to miracles in confirmation of the mission of the prophets sent to them, and therefore insisted on a sign that would prove Jesus to be the true Messiah. Except signs and wonders were wrought, they would not believe. Although miracles were wrought in great numbers by Christ such as was not done by any mortal, they remained incredulous and persistent in demanding a sign from heaven. But Jesus told them that no other sign would be given them but that of Prophet Jonah, signifying the death and resurrection of Christ from the dead.

**Question 3: What made the Greeks consider the message of the cross as foolishness?**

The Greeks on their own part scorned at the story of a crucified Savior and despised the apostles’ way of proclaiming the story. They were men of wit and learning; men who cultivated arts and sciences; men, who had for ages been seeking and dispensing knowledge. There was nothing in the plain doctrine of the cross to gratify their curiosity. They, therefore, treated the story with contempt. How possible was it to be saved by one who could not save himself or trust in one who was condemned and crucified as a malefactor, a man of mean birth and poor condition, cut off by so vile and shameful death? This was what human reasoning and learning could not relish. The Greeks thought it would amount to stupidity to receive such a doctrine. They were therefore left to perish in their pride and ignorance (Romans 1:18-32; 11:22; Proverbs 1:24-32).

Today, some people consider it unreasonable that the Son of God should be crucified; that riches should come through His poverty and men brought to the kingdom and glory through someone so mean and wretched; that there should be life for men in His death and salvation through His crucifixion on the cross. Such men doubt the possibility of any blessings coming through His being
made a curse; they wonder how His death would expiate for the sins of humanity; and how justification could come by one who was condemned. To them, it is unthinkable that peace and pardon should come by His blood and that He should be raised again from the dead. These things are the subject of their ridicule; and, in their opinion deserve to be laughed at than credited. People who fall into such category should be pitied because they despise the riches of God's goodness and forbearance; and after their hardness and impenitent hearts, treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Romans 2:4,5).

The message of the cross supersedes human wisdom, “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (1 Corinthians 1:19, 20). All the valued learning of this world was confounded, baffled and eclipsed by the revelation and glorious triumph of the cross. The heathen politicians and philosophers, the Jewish rabbis and doctors, the curious searchers into the secrets of nature were all bewildered.

In spite of all their wisdom, iniquity still abounded. They were puffed up by their imaginary knowledge and that further alienated them from God. When Paul said, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness”, he was saying in essence that the message of the cross was foolishness in the eyes of worldly-wise men. Our living through One who died, our being blessed by Him who was made a curse, our being justified by One who was condemned, was all folly to men who are blinded by self-conceit, prejudices and inventions of their reasoning and philosophy.

Also, the manner of preaching the gospel was foolishness to them too. None of the famous men known for wisdom or eloquence was employed to plant a church or propagate the gospel. A few fishermen were called out and sent on this errand. These were commissioned to disciple the nations. These vessels were chosen to convey the treasure of saving knowledge to the world. Humanly speaking, there was nothing in them that looked grand or spectacular but
God used them to bring the message of hope to mankind. It is interesting to note that the Lord is still using men and women who yield themselves as willing vessels, irrespective of age and status.

THE CALLING OF CHRISTIANS (1 Corinthians 1:26-29; Psalm 8:2; 2 Timothy 1:9; James 2:5)

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Corinthians 1:26). In God’s service, not many men of learning, authority or honorable extraction are called. God did not choose philosophers, or orators, or statesmen, or men of wealth and power in the world to publish the gospel of grace and peace. He has chosen the foolish things of the world – the weak, the base and desppicable; men of mean birth, low rank, of no liberal education – to be the preachers of the gospel. As omniscient Creator, He knows best what instruments will serve His purpose and glory.

Question 4: What does God require from a sinner who wishes to be saved?

No one is qualified to be called into God’s service except that individual is saved. All that God demands from those who wish to be part of His service is repentance from sin through faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. We can spend a lifetime accumulating human wisdom and yet never learn how to have a personal relationship with God. We must come to the crucified and risen Christ to receive eternal life and the joy of a personal relationship with our Savior.

The gospel of Christ still sounds foolish to many today, especially in a society where majority of the people worship power, influence and wealth. Christ came as a humble, poor servant, and offers His kingdom to those who have faith, not to those who labor to earn the commendation of the Master by their good deeds. Indeed, personal knowledge of Christ is the greatest wisdom anyone could have.

CHRIST: OUR WISDOM, RIGHTEOUSNESS, SANCTIFICATION AND REDEMPTION (1 Corinthians 1:30, 31; Jeremiah 23:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9; John 17:19; Ephesians 1:7)
“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Our union and identification with Christ result in our having God’s wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3); right standing with God (2 Corinthians 5:21); being holy (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7); and having the penalty for our sins paid by Christ (Mark 10:45).

Question 5: What are the believer’s benefits in the death of Christ?

Christ is the Source of our redemption, righteousness, sanctification and wisdom. Through His death on the cross, God offered to trade His righteousness for our sin – something of immeasurable worth for something completely worthless. As the perfect and final sacrifice, the death of Christ gave us complete freedom from slavery to sin. And knowing full well that salvation is only through Christ, we should stop boasting about our personal achievements, and glory only in the Lord.
LESSON 605

MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL REVEALED

MEMORY VERSE: “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Apostle Paul had argued in the previous chapter that God chose the things and persons which the world calls foolish, weak and base to confute the world’s wisdom and power. In the present study, he pursues the same argument to show that the gospel does not depend on human wisdom and philosophy but on the power of God. This he illustrates by his own example of demonstrating the gospel through the power of the Holy Ghost.

The gospel is a mystery that had been hidden from the foundation of the world, but now revealed and made known to the saints by the Spirit of God. This is the mystery: “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6).

In the text, the apostle describes the process by which God has revealed this mystery through His Spirit and thereafter contrasts the difference between the “natural man” who depends on human wisdom and the “spiritual man”, led by the Spirit of God, who has the mind of Christ. We find here Paul’s declaration of the gospel message by the power of the Holy Ghost, the discovery of the mystery of the gospel through the Spirit’s power and the privilege of discerning God’s mind exclusively by the saints.

Question 1: In your own word, briefly explain why the gospel is a mystery.


“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with Excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God” (1 Corinthians 2:1). Paul
was a brilliant scholar who expressed deep things of God in Scripture. Yet, he did not use lofty language to elevate himself. Here, he reminds the Corinthian Christians that he avoided the use of high-sounding speech or intellectual argument to proclaim the gospel of Christ to them. He knew that the effectiveness of the gospel does not lie in eloquence or oratory but in the demonstration of the Spirit’s power. This teaches us that as we endeavor to preach the gospel, we should guard against mere intellectual display or worldly knowledge. We should, instead depend on the Spirit to energize and order our words. Our message must be centered and focused on Christ who was crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23; 2:2; John 17:3).

Question 2: What should be the focus of a sound gospel message?

The Holy Spirit is the great Converter of souls. Charles Spurgeon said: “The power that is in the gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher; otherwise men would be the converters of souls; nor does it lie in the preacher’s learning; otherwise it would consist in the wisdom of men. We might preach until our tongues rotted, till we would exhaust our lungs and die, but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit be with the Word of God to give it the power to convert the soul.” We must avoid the temptation of trimming and chiseling Christ’s teaching into a gospel more artificial and more congenial with the depraved tastes of fallen nature. Such means rather than improve the gospel, pollutes it, until it becomes another gospel and not the true gospel of Christ. Using human wisdom to alter and amend the Lord’s own Word are defilements and pollutions, “…for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it” (Exodus 20:25).

It must be noted, however, that the Apostle’s submission here does not exclude diligent preparation, clear articulation and persuasive presentation of the gospel message. Rather, it warns against any method that leads people to be carried away by mere grammar or vocabulary than point people to the Savior. Those who minister the Word must prepare and use every gift God has given them but they must not put their confidence in the gift but in the Giver of the gift.

Question 3: List some self-help methods adopted
in preaching the gospel today, and why they fail in winning souls.

The Apostle further explains that the human mind, no matter how intelligent cannot comprehend spiritual truths. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9). God’s wisdom differs from human wisdom because the wisdom of this world is transient: it belongs to the present age, and will come to naught whereas the wisdom of God is eternal and incorruptible. It originates in God’s eternal will and finds its consummation in His eternal glory (1 Corinthians 2:5-7).

Secondly, worldly wisdom is preoccupied with observation. 1 Corinthians 2:9 mention the three main fields of human knowledge: things that the eye sees, things that the ear hears and things that enter into the heart of man. Divine wisdom, however, is the opposite: it embraces things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man which God has prepared for those who love Him. That which man was unable to observe with the eye or the ear, or to grasp with his finite mind, God has prepared for His beloved.

The wisdom of God is higher and far exceeds human wisdom because it grants the new man in Christ a place in God’s glory. God has prepared this wisdom for those who love Him. He has laid out the mysteries of His wisdom for those who have been brought into a special relationship with Him through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In summary, we learn that (1) human wisdom is irrelevant to the proclamation of the gospel message; (2) Christ’s crucifixion is the centrality of the gospel message; (3) human weakness should not be an obstacle to the preaching of the gospel; (4) the Holy Ghost is He who empowers the gospel message; (5) the Christian faith should be anchored on God’s power and not man’s wisdom.

DISCOVERING THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH THE SPIRIT (1 Corinthians 2:6-10; Isaiah 48:6, 7; Matthew 11:25; Romans 16:25, 26; Ephesians 1:4; 3:4-9; Colossians 1:26, 27; 1 Peter 1:11; Isaiah 64:4; 65:17)
“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Corinthians 2:7). The message of Christ’s crucifixion embodies the wisdom of God. This message was veiled before Christ came. The Cross was ordained of God before the world and had been a mystery relatively hidden from the Old Testament prophets. This fact notwithstanding, it was announced by the prophets and prefigured in the law. “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant” (Psalm 25:14). Apostle Paul asserted that this hidden secret is made plain and revealed through the Spirit of God to the prophets and apostles. “Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:26). According to Isaiah 61:5, 6, the Gentiles are pictured as being the servants and Israel as the priests of God. While it is true that the Gentiles were promised blessings in the future millennial kingdom, they are never given equality with the Jews in the Old Testament. This equality is the point of the mystery discovered by the apostles through God’s Spirit in the New Testament dispensation. “Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Ephesians 3:5,6).

What are the components of this mystery? “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs” with the Jews. Thus, every promise of eternal inheritance would apply equally to both the Gentiles and Jews. Secondly, that the Gentiles should be members of the same body; hence, all would be equal in the body of Christ. Thirdly, that the Gentiles should be partakers of the same promises in the gospel of Christ which implies that every promise of forgiveness, joy, and peace would apply equally to both Jews and Gentiles.

The implication of this New Testament revelation is that, one, the middle wall of partition between the Jews and the Gentiles is removed (Ephesians 2:14). Two, the Gentiles,
like the Jews, are both accepted in Christ (Ephesians 1:6). Three, the grace which the gospel offers is without distinction to one above the other, but in the same way and on the same terms. The terms of pardon are repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

**DISCERNING GOD’S MIND: THE SAINTS’ PRIVILEGE**
(1 Corinthians 2:11-16; John 16:13; Amos 3:7; Romans 11:33, 34; Romans 8:26, 27; Ephesians 3:18, 19)

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Corinthians 2:12). Knowing the mind of God is a special privilege reserved for God’s children. God’s Spirit knows the divine secrets, and only God can disclose Himself to us. Apostle Paul states that since we have received the Spirit of God we are able to know the mind of God. True knowledge of the Cross does not come through intellectual research or laboratory experiment; it comes through God’s self-revelation through His Spirit.

The Spirit received by Christians is not the spirit of the world, but the Holy Spirit which Christ promised to be a Guide into all truth. “*Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come*” (John 16:13). Thus, the spiritual man judges all things by the Spirit. His understanding of the Scripture, his interpretation and application of it are influenced by the Spirit, and may appear unintelligible to someone who does not possess the Spirit.

**Questions 4: Explain why the gospel mystery can only be discovered through the Spirit’s power.**

Apostle Paul divides men into three classes: the natural man, who is unconverted and a stranger to God’s Spirit; the spiritual man, that is, the renewed man who is Spirit-filled; and the carnal man or immature Christian who is sensual and walk after the flesh (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). The natural man may be learned, gentle, eloquent, fascinating, but the spiritual content of Scripture is hidden from him. The carnal Christian is able to comprehend only its simplest truths. While the things of the gospel, which
the Spirit reveals, cannot be known and received by the natural man, because he cannot discern or value such revelations. The natural man is the unregenerate, who has the spirit of the world and is not converted.

**Question 5: With Bible references, list various ways God reveals His mind to believers.**

God reveals His mind to believers through His Spirit. This can come through impartation (1 Thessalonians 2:8), illumination (2 Corinthians 4:6), inspiration (Job 32:8), interpretation (Acts 8:30, 31), instruction (Isaiah 28:26) and intercession (Jeremiah 33:3).

God reveals His mind to His saints (1) that “...we might **know the things that are freely given to us of God**” (1 Corinthians 2:12). (2) To obey His commandments (Deuteronomy 29:29). (3) To believe in Christ as the Savior and have eternal life through His name (John 20:31). (4) For doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). (5) To know God’s plan and Program for the saints here and hereafter (1 Corinthians 2:9, 10). (6) To teach our children the mind of God (Deuteronomy 4:9). Thus, it is a great privilege for Christians to have the mind of Christ revealed to them by His Spirit.
LESSON 606
RENDERING ACCEPTABLE SPIRITUAL SERVICE

MEMORY VERSE: “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: 1 Corinthians 3:1-23

In the previous chapter, Paul the apostle rehearses to the Corinthian church how he preached the gospel with absolute reliance on the Spirit and the wisdom of God. We learn from this that for the word of God to have positive impact on hearers, it must not be preached with the wisdom of this world or with the motivational, enticing words of man’s wisdom that obtains in many modern-day churches. Our dependence on God in rendering spiritual service that will impact souls of men is acceptable to Him. This is because such service will be devoid of carnal reasoning and practices that He hates.

It is however discipline in the church that helps us maintain the requisite spiritual quality devoid of carnality in life and service for God. Our lesson today dwells on discipline in the Corinthian church arising from display of carnality there. We shall also see how carnality also affects believers’ service and renders it valueless and unacceptable to God when He makes final evaluation of what we have done in His name. It then becomes necessary to examine the conditions for rendering acceptable service to God.

Question 1: How can a believer’s service be acceptable to God?

The essence of our redemption is to serve. We are saved to serve God, saints and sinners in the world. But our spiritual service will not be acceptable to God if it is not rendered in holiness and righteousness. “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).
Faithfulness is another virtue that is required in God’s service which many servants of God have exemplified in every generation. Moses and Daniel are good examples of faithful saints in Scripture. “And Moses verily was faithful in his entire house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after. Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him” (Hebrews 3:5; Daniel 6:4).

But there cannot be holiness and faithfulness where carnality reigns. That is why Paul frowns and condemns carnality in the Corinthian church where he and other ministers like Apollos and Cephas had labored so much. He compares carnality to a little leaven that leaveneth a whole lump. Carnality, if it goes on unchecked, can lead to disunity and breed all kinds of sins. The consequence is that, service rendered by such carnal believers will be unacceptable to God. But “If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Timothy 2:21).

CONTRAST OF SPIRITUAL AND CARNAL SERVICE (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Romans 8: 6-8; Ephesians 4:13-15; Hebrews 5:12; John 6:60, 66)

Question 2: What is carnality?

Apostle Paul noticed a flagrant display of carnality among believers at Corinth. “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:1). Carnality in our context can be best interpreted as an act of sensuality, childishness, immaturity and indulgence in Christian service. The Bible declares that “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6). Also, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:7, 8). A carnal believer is walking in the flesh while the spiritual believer walks in the Spirit. While the carnal believers still live
under the influence of the old nature, spiritual believers in Christ are controlled by the Spirit of God.

Despite the rare opportunity these Corinthian believers had to have listened to the fiery teaching of the whole counsel of God under Apostle Paul and other ministers of God, they still remained childish, carnal and immature in their understanding and conduct at a time they ought to be spiritually matured. “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Hebrews 5:12). Though they were born again, they remain immature and carnal in their understanding, commitment, conversation, comportment and contribution to spiritual discussions. As spiritual dwarfs, they do not have the spiritual capability to handle spiritual matters or service that reflects the level of investment of grace in their lives. Such believers, still being spoon-fed with milk or elementary basics of the word of God, cannot take in the meat, that is, the sound teachings of Christ (John 6:60, 66).

**Question 3: How can we differentiate a spiritual believer from a carnal one?**

God expects new babes in Christ to grow into maturity in all areas of Christian living. He expects that, “we henceforth be no more children, 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; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:13-15).

**CONSEQUENCES OF CARNALITY IN THE CHURCH** (1 Corinthians 3:3-7; Numbers 12:1-15; 14:1-4, 11, 12, 21-24)

“For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord” (1 Corinthians 3:3-5). Unity among brethren creates the right atmosphere
for the awesome presence of God and His readiness to confirm His word with signs and wonders in the church (Acts 2:1-4; 6:24-33). But unity in the Corinthian church was threatened by the manifestation of carnality among the brethren. Obviously, carnality generates disunity among brethren. And spiritual services rendered with a carnal mind and the arm of flesh destroy the growth of the church.

Carnality still harms present-day churches like it did in the Corinthian church. It leads to debate, murmuring, strife and divisions in the church and even polarize it along social, ethnic and demographic lines. Believers in such churches will begin to express their preferences for ministers. Spiritual Programs like evangelism, retreat, crusade that can bring souls into God’s kingdom can be affected as a result of carnality. Brethren in the Corinthian church began to fight themselves instead of fighting sin and Satan. In fact, Satan through the cracks in the Corinthian church gained inroad to their families to afflict them.

**Question 4: What are the effects of carnality in the church today?**

Carnality is as old as the church in the wilderness. Because of it, Miriam was inflicted with leprosy and caused delay in the journey of the children of Israel to the Promised Land (Numbers 12:1-15). A whole generation of the children of Israel except Joshua and Caleb missed the Promised Land because of carnality (Numbers 14:1-4, 11, 12, 21-24).

Carnal traits can also be noticed in many assemblies today where brethren struggle for positions, opportunities and privileges instead of rendering selfless and sacrificial service unto the Lord. Worldliness is not far from a church where carnality is in vogue. The nearer believers are to the world, the more unqualified they become in spiritual service. We are called out of the world, cleansed by the blood of the Lamb and controlled by the Spirit of God. Paul noticed these traits of unsanctified life in the Corinthian church and rebuked them sharply. True servants of God in any assembly today, like Apostle Paul, must be vigilant, bold and courageous to preach against sin in whatever form, sparing no one.
Question 5: Why does God give different gifts to believers in the church?

Paul did not fail to exhort on unity and fruitful service. From his exhortation, we learn that whatever gifts or talents God has given us according to His own will should be used to perfect the Church of Christ. Believers should consider themselves as jointly employed by Christ for the salvation of the world. Our God-endowed talents and gifts are given to achieve this singular purpose. It should be our interest and priority to serve God and be faithful to His calling. Many ministers today make merchandize of their gifts. For many others, their hearts have been lifted up in pride. We need the assistance of God for a fruitful and successful service. “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:6, 7; John 16:7, 8). The need for selflessness and humility in service is underscored here.

CHRIST’S JUDGMENT OF BELIEVERS’ SERVICE (1 Corinthians 3:8-15; Numbers 12:7; Isaiah 2: 35; Nehemiah 7:2; Matthew 25:21; Luke 16:10-17)

“Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:8, 9). The use of the expression ‘according to his own labor’ by the Holy Spirit is instructive here. Biblical records show that the reward for believers’ service will not be based on personality (for God is not a respecter of persons) or according to the magnitude of labor. God will only reward our services in His vineyard based on our faithfulness and obedience to His revealed will in the Scriptures (Genesis 39:1-7; Numbers 12:7; Isaiah 2:35; Nehemiah 7:2; Matthew 25:21; Luke 16:10-17; Revelation 22:18, 19).

Much as it is good to be engaged in spiritual service, “let every man take heed how he buildeth...” (1 Corinthians 3:10) on the foundation of Christ. We need to be wise builders like Paul and resist errors and enforce godliness in the church because there will be critical evaluation of
the service rendered by the omniscient God. “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:13-15).

It is certain that God will reward our service as collaborators with Him. So, we need to be faithful by living out and upholding the doctrines of Christ; we need to build according to pattern; and we need to remain steadfast in His service. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Question 6: What will be the yardstick for reward for our service?

CONDITIONS FOR RENDERING ACCEPTABLE SERVICE
(1 Corinthians 3:16-23; Luke 1:74, 75; 2 Timothy 2:19; Titus 2:12; Romans 12:1; Ephesians 6:19; Acts 1:8; Colossians 2:8; James 1:5; Hebrews 11:28)

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17).

Many people now believe that Christianity is a religion of the heart; that it does not matter what people do with their bodies. Yet, the Bible declares the body of every believer as the sacred temple of the Holy Spirit. To claim to be saved in heart while you yield members of your body to sin is a contradiction!

Question 7: What are the conditions for acceptable and rewardable service?

Genuine conversion experience that makes our service acceptable to God is always followed by concrete outward proofs or fruits of repentance (Matthew 3:8; 7:20). Therefore, people who wish to serve God acceptably must have genuine salvation experience. They must also live a holy
life without which they will not see God. Service rendered is only acceptable and rewardable after one is able to see God in heaven. Carnality crept into the Corinthian church as a result of loss of the holiness experience. Cleansing in the shed blood of Christ is the only hope for those who seek or have lost this experience so they can become vessels of honor for the master’s use and prepared unto every good work (2 Timothy 2:21). Other conditions for acceptable spiritual service include sobriety and humility, fervency and zeal in service, prayerfulness and watchfulness and of course, being filled with the Holy Spirit (Titus 2:12; Romans 12:11; Ephesians 6:19; Acts 1:8).
LESSON 607

STEWARDSHIP OF BELIEVERS

MEMORY VERSE: “Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 4:1-21

In this chapter, Paul addressed the challenges facing the brethren at Corinth because of their background. The church at Corinth consisted mostly of Gentiles and a few Jews. Corinth was a chief city of ancient Greece, prominent for moral corruption, intellectual arrogance and materialism, similar to cities of the world today.

Question 1: Why are believers regarded as stewards of God?

Since God is the Source of life and the Creator of the heavens and earth, all men belong to Him, especially, believers having been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus. God, who has placed man on earth, requires from him the diligent use of his material and spiritual resources. Paul warned the Corinthian brethren against rash judgment, pride and despising their spiritual father as he endeavored to assert his apostolic authority.

BELIEVERS AS STEWARDS OF GOD (1 Corinthians 4:1-7; Luke 19:13; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Romans 14:8, 12; 1 Peter 4:4, 5; Exodus 19:5)

“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God”. Divine ownership is the uniform teaching of the Scripture. According to Microsoft Encarta Dictionary, a steward is somebody who manages somebody else’s property, finances or household. This being the case, it means we are accountable to God who has placed in our care various works in His vineyard. God is the Owner of the material world because “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). He is also the Possessor of the resources of the world. Paul, as a minister, counted himself a steward of God. Just like every believer, he was a manager of the mysteries or secret things of God. God has revealed His plan for the salvation of mankind through
our Lord Jesus. And it is our duty as stewards to reveal the mind of God to sinners through the help of the Holy Spirit.

As faithful stewards, the Lord expects that we serve Him with our talents, time, earthly possessions, etc. As stewards of the mysteries of the gospel, the Holy Spirit has enlightened us to know that through one man, the first Adam, sin entered into the world and through the second Adam, all shall be saved from sin. This is indeed a mystery to sinners who lack the grace of God in their lives. It remains a mystery to the natural man that God rules in the affairs of men and that the invisible Creator is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent.

**Question 2: In what ways can believers be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God?**

The Lord has committed unto all believers, the mysteries of the gospel so that they can fulfil their ministry as ambassadors of Christ in this world, reconciling sinful men unto God. God requires faithfulness from all saints, if the gospel is to be preached to every creature. The importance of implicit obedience in carrying out the great commission cannot be over-emphasized. Faithfulness also entails that we emphasize repentance and faith in the atoning blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Reliability is an essential part of stewardship. A faithful steward is always conscious of the day of accountability to his master. Paul the apostle was both a faithful and reliable steward who knew that he would give account to the Lord, not the Corinthian brethren. He was also convinced that his final state would not be determined by his own personal judgment. “For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord” (1 Corinthians 4:4).

God never intends man to judge his neighbor since He reserves to Himself absolute knowledge of the most secret actions, principles and intentions of every heart. Paul therefore rightly counselled that believers should judge nothing before the time. He reminded the Corinthian brethren that no matter how gifted ministers are, they remain stewards of God and have nothing to boast of
because He is the One who bestows gifts and grace on His ministers to function in His vineyard.

**BELIEVERS’ CALL TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST** (1 Corinthians 4:8-13; 1 Peter 2:20, 21; 3:18; Acts 5:40, 41; Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Matthew 5:11, 12)

“Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; And labor, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off scourging of all things unto this day” (1 Corinthians 4:11-13). The call to follow Christ is a call to suffer for the purpose of the gospel. Believers’ opposition to all forms of ungodliness will attract the wrath of Satan and his agents. Interestingly, as gold is purified by fire so is the Christian purified by fiery trials and persecutions. God uses suffering to make and mold His ministers. Opposition and persecution are part of a normal Christian life. No wonder, in his charge to Timothy, apostle Paul said, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). We should not be surprised when people misunderstand, criticize, and even try to hurt us because of our faith in Christ Jesus. We must live to please God who has called us into His service, challenges and threats notwithstanding.

The persecution of the apostles was as if “…God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death” (1 Corinthians 4:9). Paul, here, was making allusion to the cruel ancient Roman custom of setting persons against themselves or with wild beasts to fight till they were killed. Such circumstances made the apostles ‘weak’ and the Corinthians who were without such pressing trials, ‘strong’. Although, all believers are called to suffer for Christ, the degree of our trials differs.

**Question 3: What should be the attitude of believers in times of trials?**

The degree of our trials depends on the ministry God has prepared for us. For Paul the apostle, Christ said, “For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). Believers should not
think it strange when buffeted by many trials. Times of trials are not periods for murmuring, despair or running helter-skelter seeking for deliverance; rather, it should be a time for sincere self-examination, watchfulness and prayerfulness for sustaining grace and direction. The way of the cross leads home. There is no crown without a cross. Whatever challenge we may be facing today, the faithful Lord who sustained the saints of old will surely sustain us as we trust Him.

BELIEVERS AS SPIRITUAL MODELS (1 Corinthians 4:14-21; 11:1; 13:1-8; Ephesians 4:15; Matthew 5:13-16; Philippians 2:19-23; 2 Corinthians 12:18)

“Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me” (1 Corinthians 4:16). Paul enjoined the Corinthian brethren to be “followers of [him]” because he walked close with God, spent time in prayer and God’s word, and was aware of God’s presence in his life at all times. Through his life and conduct, Paul was indeed a model to the Corinthian brethren. As a faithful steward, he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. The saints in the church at Corinth were fruits of his evangelistic outreach. Hence, he admonished them with prudence and love. As their spiritual father, his words were motivated by love and care.

Question 4: What lessons do we learn from Paul’s admonitions for the saints at Corinth?

Contemporary believers have several lessons to learn from the approach of Paul the Apostle. First, in the course of preaching the word, there should be a clear demarcation between the sinners and their sins. Second, the truth of the gospel is better communicated with love. A song writer aptly puts it this way: “Love opened wide the gates of light to heaven’s domain, where in eternal power and might, Jesus shall reign”. Third, our lives are better teachers of the message than our lips. Fourth, every believer should be a model in his family, neighborhood and place of work; and lastly, believers with vibrant Christian lives should not be ashamed to challenge new converts to imitate them in faith and practice as they are followers of Christ, our perfect example.
Question 5: *Mention several ways of follow-up adopted by Paul the apostle.*

Apostle Paul followed-up the brethren by sending Timothy, a trusted and faithful minister whom he described as a beloved son to the church at Corinth. Timothy was a faithful steward and model for all saints. No wonder Paul the apostle did not hesitate in sending him to the Corinthian brethren on his behalf. “*But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state*” (Philippians 2:19, 20). If we must be successful in ministry, we must engage faithful believers who share the same vision with us.

Paul’s absence was never a hindrance to the work of God. Whenever he could not personally attend to the needs of the people, he delegated his responsibility to faithful ministers. Sometimes, Paul communicated his thoughts in epistles. “*And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea*” (Colossians 4:16). It is also instructive to note that he constantly committed the saints and the ministry to God in prayer: “*For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*” (Colossians 1:9).

**Question 6: List the possible outcomes of a Spirit-backed sermon.**

By divine illumination, Paul the apostle knew the thoughts of some of the Corinthian brethren. “*Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you*” (1 Corinthians 4:18). With fatherly authority, he told them that he would come to Corinth if the Lord permitted. At his coming, he would want the arrogant brethren to show evidence of their divine approval by power and not with empty speeches. The gospel is always effectual when it is empowered by the Holy Spirit. An empowered message will quicken dead sinners, convicting them of their sins; it will deliver the oppressed from the bondage of sin and
Satan while comforting, strengthening and establishing the saints. Paul, in this epistle, demonstrated a balanced mix of the spirit of love, meekness and spiritual authority over the flock of God. He was indeed a true follower of Christ and a model for believers today.
LESSON 608

THE PURPOSE OF DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH

MEMORY VERSE: “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:4,5).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

As a faithful steward, Paul the apostle’s exemplary affection and care for saints that showed in his vigilance over the church have been the subjects of previous lessons. He had earlier addressed the problem of carnality which generated strife, murmuring and division in the Corinthian church, challenging them as his spiritual children to follow his exemplary life (1 Corinthians 4:15, 16).

In this lesson, we shall see how Paul promptly acted on the report of fornication and incest that became a common practice in the Corinthian church. The bold and intimidating disposition of backsliders involved did not silence him. That is why today’s lesson is indispensable to any church that seeks to remain at the center of the will of God. It is instructive to note that a church may start on the platform and conviction of holiness, lose steam and gradually descend into impurity like the Corinthian church. Unfortunately, uncleanness and impurity have eaten deep into the fabrics of many present-day churches unrestrained that many unsuspecting, sincere souls have been trapped and those who were once resistant to evil are also giving in. No matter what attractive color sin is painted, God’s attitude to it will never change.

Question 1: What is Christ’s attitude to sin in His church?

The question is, what is Christ’s attitude to fornication and other sins in His Church? After introducing Himself as “the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass”, Christ revealed
divine displeasure with the church in Thyatira: “I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols”. For spurning the opportunity and privilege of repentance granted her, Christ declared that she and those who committed sexual immorality with her would suffer divine affliction and her children would die (Revelation 2:18-23). Since Christ hates sin, all believers who have experienced redemption through the Cross must hate sin with utter revulsion.

With Christ-like passion, Paul had been intolerant of sin in all the churches he superintended. He handled serious and scandalous cases not only with prompt, drastic and commensurate punishment primarily to keep the church pure but also to serve as deterrent to others. It was therefore out of his personal experience in ministry that he instructs all Christian servants to “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

Question 2: What should be the attitude of a true minister of God to sin in his congregation?

REPORT AND CONDEMNATION OF SINS IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH (1 Corinthians 5:1, 2; Habakkuk 1:13; Hebrews 1:9; Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Corinthians 6:18, 19)

Added to the initial problems of carnality and division in the Corinthian church is the discovery of fornication and incest that became rampant. “It was reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife” (1 Corinthians 5:1). Comparatively, the moral standard of this church was below what obtained among the Gentiles who did not know God. This church was fast losing the savor of its salt.

God detests sin in any form. It is for the purpose of freeing the whole world from sins that He sent His only begotten Son to the world (Isaiah 53:5; Matthew 1:21). The sins
that took Christ to the Cross were the same that have now been tolerated and allowed to spread. Rather than mournfully repent of their wicked acts, the fornicators in the Corinthian church were even bold and proud like their licentious counterparts in many Christian assemblies today.

Irrespective of the personalities involved in sin in the church, Paul the apostle ordered that they must be disciplined. People who commit sin and show impenitent disposition should be excommunicated and “be taken away from among you” (verses 2, 13) and delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that their spirits can be saved. He instructed that this should be done in the name and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. Discipline in the church is therefore scriptural. And every minister of God that is worth his salt must not gloss over sin in the church. He must be courageous to preach against sin and place discipline on erring members in the church.

In any church where sin is condoned, God’s presence will depart. For He is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Habakkuk 1:13). The need to live and maintain a holy life is the main subject of scripture and condition for divine dealings with man across generations. Moses captured this divine essence in his exhortation to the children of Israel when he said, “The Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee... therefore shall thy camp be holy: that He sees no unclean thing in thee” (Deuteronomy 23:14). It was the singular purpose of saving sinners, purifying the church and preserving it in righteousness and holiness that Christ died. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). A polluted church will not only lose the presence and power of God on earth but also lose its place in the abode of God. Aware of the consequences of gross immorality, Paul sharply rebuked the Corinthian church for their tolerance of sin.

**Question 3:** What lessons can we learn from the report
of sin by some believers in the Corinthian church and the quick response of Paul?

Few people maintained their holy conviction in that church, however. The attitude of these uncompromising and God-fearing brethren in the Corinthian church is worth emulating. Rather than maintain indifference and allow evils to thrive, they reported to the leadership. The church today needs such vanguards of holiness and righteousness that would “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Brethren should not keep mute at sins. Workers of iniquities still exist in the church today. Irrespective of the status of evil doers in the church, we need to correct them with Christ-like love and report to the leadership so that we can jointly keep the church of God pure. It is our responsibility.

REASONS FOR DISCIPLINING THE SINFUL IN THE CHURCH (1 Corinthians 5: 3-8; 2 Samuel 12:7-12; 1 Timothy 5:20; 1 Samuel 2:12,17, 22-25; 4:17,18; Acts 5:5-11; Revelation 3:19; Proverbs 22:28)

“For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:3-5).

From Paul’s prompt response to the acts of sins in the Corinthian church, we learn that he knew about God’s demand for holiness in all generations of men. The Bible says that “God is angry with the wicked everyday” (Psalm 7:11). True ministers of God do not condone sins in any form in their congregation so as to retain the presence of God with His people. Two, the prompt intervention of Paul is commendable since sin like a little leaven, if allowed to be practiced unchecked, will spread and corrupt the entire congregation. To prevent escalation of sins in the church, sins uncovered must be quickly sanctioned and the culprits brought to book. Three, the backslidden believers might die in their sins and condemned to hell if
not corrected through appropriate discipline. “**God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance**” (2 Peter 3:9). A laboring minister of God will not want his labor to be in vain. Four, fornication is an infectious and heinous sin that calls for mourning and sanction (1 Corinthians 5:2). Believers are commanded to “**Flee fornication**”. For the Christian’s “**body is the temple of the Holy Ghost**” (1 Corinthians 6:18, 19). Besides, sin weakens the church and robs it of the grace and power to accomplish its purpose of winning souls into the kingdom.

**Question 4: Mention different types of discipline in the church.**

Discipline is indispensable in the church of Christ. As a matter of fact, it is part and parcel of the gospel. Discipline is like a whip in the hands of a loving and caring shepherd to lead the erring sheep back to the path of safety. Depending on the gravity of sins, discipline in the church can take the form of rebuke, denial of privilege, withdrawal from spiritual service, divine chastisement (like that of David) or curse on posterity (as that of Eli and his sons) and instant death (Ananias and Sapphira) (2 Samuel 12:7-12; 1 Timothy 5:20; 1 Samuel 42:12,17,22-25; 4:17,18; Acts 5:5-11 ). Apostle Paul here exerted his ministerial and apostolic authority to enforce discipline on the sinning believers in the Corinthian church.

**Question 5: Why must the erring ones be disciplined in a Bible-believing church?**

Discipline of erring believers pleases God. That is why the Trinity is always involved (Numbers 12:9, 10; 2 Samuel 12:7-12; Acts 5:5-11). Two, it is commanded in the Scriptures that the believers that commit sins should be rebuked before all for others to fear (1 Timothy 5:20; Acts 5:11). Three, it is part of love for others and Christ-like living. The Lord Jesus says, “**As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent**” (Revelation 3:19). Four, discipline is a means of bringing back the erring ones to the Lord. During discipline, backsliders usually take inventory of their lives and pray through to restoration (1 Corinthians 5:5; 7:9, 10).

Five, discipline of erring believers in the church serves as
a deterrent to others. If Ananias and Sapphira had gone unpunished, the couple would have been hardened to go further into other heinous sins; so also others would be encouraged and emboldened to commit similar and more serious evils. Six, to maintain standard and keep the ancient landmarks in a living church, discipline must be enforced on backsliders. This will serve as a good precedent for the generations to come and rebuke for other compromising assemblies (Proverbs 22:28). Like a leaven, sins must be purged to prevent their spread in the congregation as Christ is coming for a pure and stainless church (1 Corinthians 5:7; Ephesians 5:27).

Where scriptural discipline is observed and maintained, the fear of God will be instilled in members of the church. Righteousness will also flourish, giving room for mighty manifestation of the power of God among the saints. It will serve as an enduring legacy in a Bible-believing church. If Christ tarries, generations to come will be able to maintain the set standard after the present generation of God-fearing believers might have gone to glory.

**RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DISCIPLINED FOLKS IN THE CHURCH** (1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Proverbs 14:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 16; Titus 3:10, 11; 2 John 9-11; Jude 22, 23; Hebrews 12:5-11)

“I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators…. But now I have written unto you not to company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat” (1 Corinthians 5:9, 11).

If the yardsticks set by the word of God are strictly followed and obeyed, the primary purpose of placing discipline on backsliders, that is, the restoration of their souls “that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” will be achieved. John the beloved and Jude affirm this scriptural position (2 John 9-11; Jude 22-23).

**Question 6: How should believers relate with those who are placed on discipline?**

Though saints should not relent in praying for the restoration of the disciplined brethren, we are not to
encourage them in their sins. Since “the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways” (Proverbs 14:14a), the possibility of contaminating or corrupting the innocent brethren is real. Another reason is to allow the disciplined backsliders have ample time to mourn for their sins in prayer and to have godly sorrow that will lead them to genuine repentance and restoration. But we must refrain from those who claim to be members of the body of Christ but are agents of corruption.

Besides, the spiritual leaders in the church need to observe disciplined believers to ascertain whether they have remorse and godly sorrow for their sins. True repentance will be accompanied with necessary fruits. When these are seen in the disciplined brethren, they should be restored. Leaders and mature members of the church owe it a duty to pray for, visit and encourage brethren placed on discipline for quick restoration.

In all, God wants sin to be purged from our lives as well as His church so that we can be partakers of His holiness. If you are presently under discipline, “despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; ... for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:5-7, 10, 11).
SPECIAL STUDIES
LESSON 609
WATER BAPTISM

MEMORY VERSE: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

TEXT: Matthew 3:1-17; Acts 8:26-40

Water baptism is an ordinance instituted by the Lord and made binding on all believers in Christ. It is an essential part of the full gospel that the Lord has given unto us. A study of the gospel will show that water baptism comes along with the salvation message and with the Great Commission. It is binding on the believer as much as the gospel of repentance is binding on the sinner. It is as urgent and compelling as the Great Commission for the Church. Along with the Great Commission comes the command to baptize and both are unavoidable obligations and duties for a living, Bible-believing church.

Question 1: What other ordinance was instituted by the Lord, apart from water baptism?

Apart from water baptism, Christ also instituted the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). He gave the command on the Lord’s Supper before His death and that on water baptism after His resurrection from the dead.

MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF WATER BAPTISM
(Matthew 3:13-16; Acts 2:41; 8:36-38; 9:17, 18; 16:30-34; John 13:17; Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12; Galatians 3:27)

Water baptism is one of the cardinal doctrines of the Lord Jesus Christ, yet one of the most misunderstood teachings by contemporary teachers and preachers. At one extreme are those who believe that it is not necessary. To them,
repentance from sin and faith toward Jesus Christ is all that matters. They point to the thief on the cross to support their argument. At the other extreme are those who believe that without water baptism one cannot be saved. In the middle of the two groups are those who believe that though it is necessary, it must be administered in the name of Jesus only.

All these are wrong. The Scripture shows that the ordinance was commanded by Christ and it is a necessity for all believers. There may be circumstances that will make water baptism impossible for a convert/believer such as we see in the case of the thief on the cross. His case shows that salvation or the new birth experience is not conditioned on water baptism. But it is a necessity for all born again Christians. Jesus commanded it to be done in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; not in the name of Jesus only.

**Question 2:** Mention some erroneous views people hold on water baptism and say why they are wrong.

The word ‘baptize’ is derived from a Greek word ‘baptiso’ which means to immerse or dip inside liquid. This shows that the proper form of baptism should be by immersion in water. The immersion signifies identification with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12). In baptism, the believer shows his faith that Christ died for his sins and rose again for his justification: that if he dies he will be raised again in the resurrection; and that he dies to his old life and rises to walk in the new life in Christ.

It was not John who searched out Jesus to baptize Him, neither did he try to pester Jesus to be baptized in water. Rather, it was Jesus Himself who came to John the Baptist to be baptized. If you have been born again, you are the one to tell the leadership of your local church to baptize you in water. Water baptism is more important than other ceremonies of the Church. The Church must, therefore, not allow any program or project to hinder it from carrying out the duty of baptizing all who have repented of their sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ “for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” The baptizer and the baptized fulfil all righteousness when they obey
the commandments of the Lord on water baptism. To delay the baptism of new converts is to fail to fulfil all righteousness.

**Question 3: Mention some erroneous practices in water baptism. What is the proper order of water baptism?**

The erroneous practices include three immersions, sprinkling of water, making people to squat in water, infant baptism, baptism of the dead, making the sign of the cross with water on the participant’s face or pouring water on the participant, and, baptizing in the name of Jesus only.

Water baptism is by immersion, by submerging an individual into the water, by dipping him inside the water to symbolize the death of the Lord Jesus and bringing him up again to symbolize His resurrection. Water baptism is to be done in accordance with the commandment of Jesus: “*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*” The immersion is done only once and not three times. Jesus Christ was dipped inside River Jordan only once (Matthew 3:16); the Eunuch of Ethiopia was immersed in water once (Acts 8:38). Submission to water baptism serves as public acknowledgment of our faith in Christ. It is a public ceremony which testifies to the fact that we have put off the old man and his deeds and have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27). Delay in water baptism for a long time is not in accordance with the Word of God.

**THE COMMAND TO BAPTIZE** (Matthew 28:19; 3:13-15; Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 2:37, 38; John 14:15).

The command to “*go ye ... and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*” is part of the very last words Jesus left for the Church. The Church has, therefore, no choice than to baptize converts and believers. If the Church, in obedience to the Lord’s command, preaches the gospel, then it must baptize those who believe in the preaching, in obedience also to the commandment of the Lord. The Lord Himself, at the beginning of His earthly ministry, laid down an example when He submitted to water baptism. He was righteous and holy. He had no sin. He never did nor said anything wrong, yet He submitted to water baptism.
If He did, we also need to, no matter how holy or righteous we think we are.

**Question 4: What lessons do we learn from the Lord’s submission to water baptism?**

Obviously, Jesus was more spiritual than John the Baptist, yet He asked to be baptized by Him. You may think you are more spiritual than the people who have the responsibility to baptize you, all the same, you need to submit yourself to be baptized in water by them. Even though the Lord was righteous and holy, He needed to submit to water baptism to fulfil all righteousness. You may have been justified by faith in, and cleansed by the blood of Christ, but you have not fulfilled all righteousness until you are baptized in water.

**Question 5: Of what significance is water baptism to the believer?**

The Lord expects you to be baptized in water after you have heard the message, repented of your sins and believed the gospel. If you have not been baptized in water, you ought to. Repentance is an act of obedience to the Word of God, so is water baptism. We cannot separate the two. Water baptism is a visible, eloquent testimony of the sign of the believer’s death, burial and resurrection with Christ. It is his public identification with Christ in His humiliation, burial and resurrection. The believer who is baptized in water is publicly testifying to the world around that he has renounced the things of the world and accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. The Apostles kept this command by baptizing believers; the disciples also obeyed the command by submitting themselves to the ordinance of water baptism. If you are a believer, you have no choice than to obey so that you too can receive the blessings of obedience.

**THE CONDITION FOR WATER BAPTISM** (Luke 24:47; Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:12; Mark 1:14,15; John 3:3; Acts 2:38; 10:44-48; 19:18,19; 20:21; Matthew 3:7,8)

Repentance from sin is the condition for water baptism. In other words, water baptism follows a very definite experience of repentance and faith in Christ. “He that
believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” A sinner needs to hear the gospel and believe before water baptism can take place. He needs not understand all the doctrines of the Bible, interpret and explain all the difficult verses of the Bible before he is baptized in water. Once someone has shown a very definite assurance of salvation from sin and faith in the atoning blood of Jesus, he is to be baptized in water. The message of the Kingdom is summarized in this timeless admonition: “repent ye, and believe the gospel.” The natural, unregenerated man cannot enter into the kingdom of God. A sinner cannot merit by his power or strength the grace to live the kingdom life. The appropriate response of a sinner who wants to enter into the kingdom of God is to repent and believe the gospel. True repentance leads the sinner to break from every connection he might have had with idol worship, occultism, secret society and evil fraternity. The one and only condition that candidates for water baptism need to meet before they are baptized, is true and full repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

**Question 6: Why is infant baptism wrong and, what are the conditions for water baptism?**

An infant is innocent and has not practiced sin to repent of. Therefore, he cannot be baptized in water. Likewise a nominal Christian or a church-goer who has not been born again, who has not shown proof of repentance from sin, and who has not been justified by personal faith in the atoning blood of Jesus cannot be baptized in water. Water baptism follows a definite experience and assurance of salvation from sin.

Jesus commanded that sinners be preached to and as they repent and believe the gospel, they should be baptized. This confirms that water baptism is for those who have fully repented of their sins (Acts 2:38). This also confirms that only adults who can exercise faith to believe can be baptized (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; 20:21; Mark 1:14, 15). As it is being practiced by some churches, it is fundamentally wrong to baptize infants who have not reached the age of accountability.

The pages of the New Testament are filled with references on water baptism. In Matthew 3:13-17, Jesus Christ
submitted Himself to John the Baptist for water baptism. This was followed by the testimony of God the Father to the ministry of His Son, through the descent of the Holy Ghost on Him as He came out of the water. Christ’s command in Matthew 28:19 was re-echoed in Mark 16:16. The Apostles also continued to baptize believers in obedience to the command of Christ. Among those baptized were the converts of the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37-42, 47); Eunuch of Ethiopia (Acts 8:36, 37), Samaritan converts (Acts 8:12, 13), Cornelius and his kinsmen (Acts 10:47, 48); the Philippian Jailor (Acts 16:30-33); and the Ephesian disciples (Acts 19:5).

**BELIEVER’S BAPTISMS** (Hebrews 5:12 - 6:2; Mark 1:1-5; Luke 7:24-30; John 3:22-34; Matthew 20:20-23; Acts 1:5, 8; 2:1-12)

The Bible, especially the New Testament, has a lot to say about baptism. There are various kinds of baptism. There was John’s Baptism (Matthew 21:23-27; Mark 1:1-5; Luke 7:24-30; Acts 10:34-37; 13:24, 25; 18:24-26; 19:1-6) as there is Christ’s baptism (John 3:22-34). There was the disciples’ baptism (the baptism that the disciples did for people who believed on Christ while He was here on earth - John 4:1-4) and, there is water baptism (commanded by Jesus before He went away, and in which if you believe, then you are baptized - Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16). There is the baptism of suffering (which the believer goes through as he suffers persecution, deprivations because of his conviction and faith in Christ - Matthew 20:20-23) and there is the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 8; 2:1-12). Hence the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews uses the expression, “doctrine of baptisms” (Hebrews 6:2). That the word “baptisms” is in the plural shows that there are various kinds of baptism. But it is unfortunate that in the Christian fold, there is ignorance on this basic teaching of the Word of God.

It is instructive that the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews first mentioned “repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God” before mentioning “the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands.” In many Pentecostal/Charismatic assemblies the cart is put before the horse; they leave out the all-important issue of repentance from sin and faith in the Lord and concentrate on the baptism in
the Holy Spirit. In many a prayer and breakfast fellowship, worshippers are interested only in laying of hands and baptism in the Holy Spirit. Conspicuously missing is the clear and unambiguous teaching on repentance from sin and faith in the atoning Blood of the Lord Jesus. But a careful and diligent study of the Word of God shows no reason for such a rearrangement or trade-off.

In the proper order of doing things, “laying on of hands” is preceded by repentance from sin; not the other way round. Repentance and salvation from sin are in turn followed by water baptism before the laying on of hands. Repentance makes God to forgive the sinner all the sin he ever committed — as though he never sinned. Not only does He forgive, He also changes and gives the repentant and returning soul the ability to live a morally upright and victorious life. Through God’s grace and power at work in the born again Christian, he is empowered to live a morally pure life. The use of the word “brethren” earlier in the epistle (Hebrews 3:1) shows that the writer of the epistle was writing to people who had received the gospel and are born again.

**Question 7: What is the danger one faces for seeking ‘anointing’ without genuine experience of the new birth?**

Jesus has laid down the standard for water baptism and it is to be carried out in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19). Every believer, in obedience to Christ’s command, should therefore submit to the ordinance of water baptism.

However, salvation does not come through water baptism but by grace through faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7; 2:8, 9; 1 John 1:7, 9; Hebrews 9:22; Matthew 26:28; John 1:12; 3:16, 17; 1 Peter 3:21). The Scripture records a catalogue of those who got saved without water baptism being a precondition: the sick of palsy healed by Jesus Christ (Matthew 9:1-7); the woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and cleansed them with her hair (Luke 7:36-50); Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10); the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43) the Eunuch of Ethiopia (Acts 8:30-37) and believers at Antioch (Acts 11:20,21). In fact, Saul of Tarsus was addressed as
Brother Saul by Ananias before he submitted himself for water baptism (Acts 9:17).

The opinion of men cannot contradict the stand of the Scripture (Matthew 28:19). Once a person repents of his sin, it is mandatory that he submits himself to water baptism as provided for in the scriptures (Romans 6:3, 4). The practice was upheld in the early church. Converts were baptized in water soon after their salvation experience (Acts 2:41; 8:37, 38; 16:30, 31, 33). Every convert is therefore enjoined to yield to this important injunction. Peter encouraged his hearers to “repent and be baptized every one of you.” Pastors must do their best to encourage their flocks to attach great importance to this practice.

Obedience to this divine injunction attracts great blessings. It gladdens the heart of God to see the believer identifying with Christ in His death and resurrection. Submission for water baptism places the believer on the pedestal to enjoy divine favor and showers blessings from God as Christ did when He was baptized. “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matthew 3:16,17). For God to be well-pleased with you, obey Him as Christ did.
LESSON 610
QUIET TIME AND FAMILY DEVOTION

MEMORY VERSE: “And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35).

TEXT: Genesis 19:27-29; 28:18-22; Exodus 34:2-10

As soon as a child is born into the world, his need of breath becomes evident. Shortly afterwards, he cries, expressing his desire for water and, later, for food. His need of love is taken care of by the welcome attitude of the mother, father and other members of the family. The same goes for the newly saved believer who, on receiving the initial assurance of salvation, discovers his need for developing a regular “observance” of a time of prayer and reading the Word of God for growth and personal spiritual upkeep (I Peter 2:2). Not only that, the need to observe such a time with other members of the family also becomes apparent. He later learns that such times of personal study of the word of God and prayer are referred to, by believers, as quiet time. The issue of quiet time today, must be taken seriously by individual Christians and families who want to maintain a victorious Christian life in this wicked world and also function effectively in their service for God.

THE PRIORITY OF QUIET TIME (Genesis 19:27; 28:18-22; Exodus 34:2; Jeremiah 33:3)

Question 1: Give two reasons believers need to observe Quiet Time and family devotion.

The need for the practice of individual quiet time and family devotion cannot be over-emphasized. Two reasons stand out (among many) for this. First, God wants man to be in fellowship with Him. As a loving Father, He wants to have communion with His children on a daily basis so as to reveal more of himself to them and also direct their path. Sin made man to lose this privilege but Christ came to restore it (John 14:6). God calls us to meet with Him every day. We should in, reciprocal gratitude, respond positively and not be like the children of Israel of whom He said, “I
have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me” (Jeremiah 35:14b).

Secondly, regular study of God’s Word and communion with Him in prayer enhance rapid Christian growth (1 Peter 2:2). A Christian cannot grow spiritually without spiritual food as he cannot grow physically without physical food. Like a garden of flowers, God’s friendship needs careful cultivation and this demands consistency. We must maintain a continuous link with God through personal devotional prayer.

THE PLACE AND PERIOD OF QUIET TIME (Exodus 16:21; Psalm 55:17; 88:13; Mark 1:35; Matthew 6:6)

Question 2: When and where should a believer observe his quiet time?

A thorough study of the Scriptures shows that the best times are early in the morning and late in the evening before going to bed. This means we should observe our fellowship with the Lord daily. In Exodus 16:21, manna was gathered morning by morning and our ‘manna’ today is “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). The Levites (Old Testament type of New Testament believers) offered a daily sacrifice. David performed his vows and cried unto God on daily basis (Psalm 86:3). Paul prayed and was renewed in the inner man (obviously by meditative study of the Word) daily (2 Timothy 1:3; 2 Corinthians 4:16). So did the Berean Christians of his time (Acts 17:11). The examples of our Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 1:35), David (Psalm 55:17) and Daniel (Daniel 6:10) together with that of numerous Christians down the ages teach us the necessity of starting the day with God because the mind is always fresh in the morning. Rising early helps immeasurably in getting the best from study of God’s Word and prayer (Genesis 28:18; Exodus 29:39,42; 30:7; Psalm 5:3; 59:16; 63:1). Also, to have the best from this gracious exercise, one needs a place that is free from distraction and characterized by seclusion and quietness. We get all these from our present places of abode by rising early to read, meditate on the Word of God and then record. His disciples were with Him, yet “he was alone praying” (Luke 9:18). We can shut off the distraction of people, events and things to concentrate

In order to benefit maximally from personal Bible study, we need to know the purpose and focus of the Holy Writ. Though a revelation of God, and containing more information about man’s past, present and future than any other book, its design is to show man the salvation of God, obtainable through Christ Jesus (Psalm 27:1a; John 20:31; 2 Timothy 3:15; Acts 20:32). The Bible has a practical purpose of guiding us into the experience of salvation and spiritual maturity. Since this salvation is exclusively through Christ, the focus of the entire Bible is centered on the Savior (John 5:39, 46; Luke 24:25-27, 44). Christ is made and kept real to us as we study the Word “day by day”. For times of meditative study of the divine book, our prayer should be:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Break thou the bread of life} \\
&\text{Dear Lord to me,} \\
&\text{As Thou didst break the loaves} \\
&\text{Beside the sea} \\
&\text{Beyond the sacred page} \\
&\text{I need Thee Lord;} \\
&\text{My spirit pants for Thee,} \\
&\text{O Living Word.}
\end{align*}
\]

**Question 3: With what attitude should we study the Bible?**

To understand God’s revelation in the Scriptures, we must come with open minds, surrendered wills, and faith to believe. It is wisdom for the ignorant to acknowledge his situation before God and only such will be made wiser (Luke 10:21). Individuals who are wise “in their own conceits” languish in continued blindness and spiritual impoverishment (John 9:41). Then, we must approach God’s Word with a willingness to comply with whatever he is asking us to do. We must, like Christ, be willing to say, “Not my will but thine be done” and in this prove our love for Him (John 14:21). Thirdly, those parts we cannot, with the intellect, comprehend, we must, with faith, believe. We must deliberately choose to believe the Word as we read
it, accounting that God is faithful to all His promises. We must commence the walk of faith (and grow in the same) by hearing (and reading) the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

We should constantly study the Bible with the aim of having our lives transformed into the likeness of Christ (John 8:31; 2 Corinthians 3:18). We should be primarily preoccupied with what God has to say to us. Helpful questions while studying the Bible should include: what does the passage say? What does it mean? And how does it apply to me? We should not seek far-fetched interpretations for simple, easily comprehensible passages. We should be careful not to constantly search the scriptures during our quiet time for sermons to preach to others rather, for personal application. We must seek out from study passages, examples to follow, commands to obey, errors to avoid, imperfections to forsake and promises to claim. Other aids to fruitful study include the use of helpful books such as balanced commentaries, Bible atlas and concordance. It also helps to keep records of lessons in notebooks and memorize scriptures on regular basis. Character, books and topical studies have their places and advantages but in all, we must seek to have God speak to us as individuals.

**PRIMACY OF PRAYER DURING QUIET TIME AND FAMILY DEVOTION** (Daniel 6:10; Psalm 55:17; Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12)

**Question 4: What are the major activities that constitute a rich quiet time?**

Prayer is complementary to Bible study in the practice of quiet time. For our Bible study to be meaningful and effective, our prayer should be conditioned and molded by God’s self-revelation in the Bible. God has taken the first step in reconciling man to Himself. Man needs to reciprocate this love of God (1 John 4:19). Approaching the throne of the King of kings is a privilege specially reserved for God’s children by virtue of Christ’s death on the cross. God’s manifold blessings upon sinners are for the purpose of drawing them to repentance (Romans 2:4). We pray also because we love God. Prayer is one of our offensive weapons against the enemy. It is the believer’s spiritual breath. We “pray in” what we have gained from the Word of God, expressing our response to what He has said to
us. Daily prayer should include the following: worship, thanksgiving, intercession, supplication and commitment. We worship and adore the Lord for Who He is.

We should express our gratitude for all God’s past mercies received even when we still have some that are yet to be met (Luke 17:12-19; I Thessalonians 5:18; Romans 8:28). We should confess our frailties and imperfections to Him and solicit His enabling grace. We should also pray earnestly for other people and present their needs to God as Abraham did for Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:23-33), Jesus for us (John 17:9, 11) and Epaphras for the Colossians (Colossians 4:12). Then we should supplicate for our personal needs, great and small. Finally, we should commit all our activities for the day unto Him, asking Him to be “Lord of all”. This is the secret of joy in His presence every day.

**FAMILY DEVOTION** (Genesis 18:19; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15)

Every believer should know that it is his responsibility to lead the entire family in the way of righteousness. Abraham did and had God’s commendation (Genesis 18:19), Samuel’s parents did and had one of the prophets. Hezekiah led the whole city of Jerusalem to seek the Lord in his time (2 Chronicles 29:20).

**Question 5: Why is family devotion essential in the family?**

To accomplish God’s purpose for the family, there is a need to worship together, study together and pray together. The father, as the spiritual head of the home (Ephesians 5:23) takes the lead. A regular time of family altar is ensured when the members have time to sing songs/choruses of worship, the father (or his appointed representative) leads in reading and explaining scripture passages and time is given for heart-lifting praises, intercession, supplication and commitment. This is preferably fixed before the activities of the day are embarked upon. Both parents may prefer to have their individual Quiet Time before waking the other family members for corporate worship or choose to have it after. There is no hard and fast rule. It is also helpful for the family to pray together before going to bed. All these will help the spiritual growth of the young family members and their understanding of scriptural truths.
If we must become men and women who have authority over heaven, then, we cannot do without patterning our lives according to all that we have learnt today with respect to communion with God.

**Question 6: What should be our aim as we constantly study our Bible during Quiet Time?**
LESSON 611
GROWTH WITH UNITY

MEMORY VERSE: “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

The focus of the Apostle in our text is the Church, the body of Christ, and members in particular. The Church here is not a building, an organization, a club, society, community of people with common interest or a system. It is basically an assembly of people who, individually, are born again and thus have the life of Christ in them.

Question 1: What is the difference between the visible and the invisible church?

There is a universal church, the assembly or collection of all blood-washed souls all over the world. They are called the assembly or the Church of the first born, the redeemed of the Lord, and the saints in Christ, disciples or followers of Christ. This is the invisible Church.

Besides, there is the visible body of Christ that comes together for worship, fellowship and study. This is the local church.

THE MANIFOLD NEEDS OF A GROWING CHURCH (Acts 1:6; 2:37-47; I Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18)

This visible church, in God’s economy, is designed to grow and keep together in unity. Having sent the Lord to shed His blood for the redemption of all, He desires that no one will perish but that all would come to repentance. If that desire is fulfilled, the church will grow. Christ Himself said: “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17).

The Spirit of God is always working towards the growth of the Church: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And whosoever will let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). And if all those on whom the Holy Ghost beckons
to come all over the world respond, the Church will surely grow. If the Church universal is to grow, every local church will have to grow.

The leadership of the visible church also desires to see the church grow. This is because workers, preachers, teachers and ministers in the church have the mind of Christ which is the growth of the church. Second, since the workers are servants of God and God wants His church to grow, then the servants have the same burning desire. Also, the indwelling Spirit in every minister eagerly looks forward to the growth of the church and so the minister himself is driven by the same persuasion of the Spirit who indwells him. So in uniformity and conformity to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit the leadership will also want the Church to grow.

The Bible gives several pictures of the Christian worker and likens him to some common vocation so as to effectively communicate the expectation of heaven. Workers in the kingdom are likened to fishermen. “And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). And just as every fisherman wants his net to be full of fishes, so should every leader and worker desire his spiritual net, the local church, to grow and be full of people.

Leaders in the church are likened to husbandmen, wise master builders who take care of the vineyard of the Lord. In the natural sense, farmers want their vineyard to bear much fruit. So also spiritual leaders in the church must bear much fruit and make the church to grow. The Lord said: “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. 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. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:2, 5, 8). Again, the leaders in the church are also called shepherds (Acts 20:28). Certainly, all shepherds want their flock to increase. And if we are true spiritual shepherds with the heart and mind of Christ, we will want the church to grow.
Men show concern when their families do not grow -
total, holistic family growth. The church is also a family;
Christ the head of the family wants the church to grow.
Again, the church is likened to a nation. “But ye are a
chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation,
a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praise
of him who hath called you out of darkness into his
marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). In the natural sense,
presidents, governors, senators and other officers of the
nation endeavor to strengthen the nation so that there
will be growth in all the various areas of national life. In
the same vein, church leaders who are the equivalents
of presidents, governors and other leaders in the nation,
must not only desire but also work hard so that the church
will grow numerically and spiritually.

A local church in her hundreds or thousands has a
congregation whose needs are varied and various. The
different social and educational background of her members
would require different approaches in meeting their needs
spiritually and materially. But with the various, varied and
variegated needs, the church must still be kept united.

Question 2: What are the consideration that enhance
the growth and unity of the church?

There will be unity when every member of the body sees the
necessity and the responsibility that lies on him or her to
endeavor to make the church united. To sit on an armchair,
and opine that the work of the unity of the church is strictly
the business of the Holy Spirit is to sound simplistic. It
does not work that way. A small nuclear family of five or
six still have to endeavor to make the family united not to
talk of hundred, thousands or tens of thousands of people.

If the church must grow and be united, every member,
worker and minister must see that the church is unique
in outreach, ministry and mission to the body of Christ in
particular and the world in general. If this basic truth is
glossed over, you are not likely to remain in the body or
work for her unity. You will, in the style of a butterfly, nose
every nectar in every flower. This will be done at the cost of
growth and unity.

If the church must grow and be united, you must have
a sense of belonging. This makes for commitment to the
doctrines, life, relationship and unity of the church. A sense of belonging gives you a deep desire, or unending longing to always be with other members of the church in fellowship. Real, genuine sense of belonging gives and attachment (spiritually, mentally, and emotionally) loyalty, fellow feeling, and an integration with the church. A sense of belonging makes you feel incomplete and unsatisfied when you are inevitably missing from the church or cut off from fellowship with other members by reason of a journey or relocation.

Again, a sense of belonging will drive or compel you to seize every opportunity to be involved in the ministry and mission of the church. Those who stay aloof cannot have a sense of belonging. Those who pop in to lick the sweet nectar of the word of God with a detached noncommittal stance do not have a sense of belonging and they cannot work for the growth and unity of the church. Therefore, for the unity of the church, every member needs to participate, contribute his life to the advancement of the church and must also realize that his contribution is required, recognized, appreciated and needed.

MEMBERS’ ROLE IN CHURCH UNITY (I Corinthians 12:21-27; Acts 2:44; John 17:17, 21; I Peter 1:22; 3:8-10; I John 3:16)

Question 3: In what ways can the members help in the unity of the church?

The members of the church have the duty to ensure they are genuinely saved. They must also be sanctified. This second definite work of grace does a lot within the heart of the believer. It fills his heart with love and brings him into unity with the body of Christ. The sanctified heart hates anything that divides the church and fellowship of the brethren. He cannot criticize others, gossip, or backbite. He has a natural inclination to keep the unity of the body of Christ as it ought to be. He is committed to continue in the saints’ fellowship with a strong desire to be part of the body of Christ. He is enthusiastic about his membership with the family of God and he cannot trade off that privilege with anything.

Furthermore, the true member of the church wants to love and forgive. He recognizes the possibility of offences,
(perhaps inadvertently or even advertently), but he commits himself to the principle of Christian forgiveness and non-retaliation. This brings about unity in the church. But when grudges, malice, ill-feeling are the order of the day, there will be no unity. If members in the small group or House Caring Fellowship will not forgive, love and overlook offences, there will be no unity in that House Caring Fellowship, much more in the choir or in the whole assembly.

Again, all members who want to work for and enhance unity in the church recognize that there are minor differences which are best described as non-essentials. We must not allow such non-essential differences to affect our love and relationship. There must also be humility among members if we must keep united. Where pride – of possession, family background, natural endowment or educational attainments – comes in, it will not be possible to be united. But if in honor we prefer one another, appreciate one another and recognize the contributions of other people more than ours, then there will be unity in the church.

**Question 4: What are the blessings that we can derive by living in unity?**

For unity, every member needs realize the blessedness of respect and obedience to leadership. This singular virtue, when it is in all the members of the church, makes the church united. When all the workers and members of the church duly respect and obey leadership, the devil will be shut out of the life of the church and all of us would speak, act and minister in cooperation, not in competition with other people. This is the ideal of the church. This is the model. This is the Bible standard. And this is what we must be. “**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 4:16).

**MINISTERS’ ROLE IN CHURCH UNITY** (1 Corinthians 12:28, 29; Ephesians 4:11, 12; Romans 14:19)

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry,
for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11, 12).

Question 5: How can the ministers work for the unity of the church?

If the church must be united together, the ministry of the ministers in the church must be edifying and challenging. It must be able to move the church forward. All those who minister in word and doctrine, in prayer and faith, in music and orderliness, must do it in love and charity and build up the church thereby. At the House Caring Fellowship, everything must be done in love and faith. These ministers and their ministries in the church must also be positive and Christlike in lifestyle so that unity will be promoted.

In addition, to make for unity, our ministries must be complementary, not contentious. In other words, our service must have the elements that make the total ministry of the church complete. Our service must be supplying something to the total life and ministry of the church. In this vein, every believer must shun criticism, complain, quarrel or cutting down of anyone indirectly or directly. Leaders or local pastors will not compete one with another or contradict one another. A section of the church must not seek to outshine the other. Rather, they should complement one another. This should exclude pride, contention and competition. It demands that all members and workers will pray for every area of the work even when they are not involved in those areas of work. Besides, it implies that workers will desire the growth and development of the other area of the work just as they desire the growth of the areas they are involved in too.

A pastor who wants to work for the unity of the church should not emphasize an area of the work while he de-emphasizes another area. All the workers and areas of work must be equally appreciated and recognized. Youth ministry must not be exalted while regular adult ministries are eclipsed. Again, the youth must not be swallowed up by the adult ministries in the church. The women ministry also must enjoy as much attention and recognition in the church just as the men’s.

Ethnicism, tribalism, partiality and favoritism must be kept out of the church lest the unity be threatened. The
pastor’s heart needs be broadened to accommodate all people from all walks of life. Besides, to ensure unity in the church, there must be harmony of all the various facets of the church life. When there is harmony amongst leaders, there will be unity in the church.

Again, there must be constant motivation to identify with the central mission and there must be commitment to the same goal. If personal, petty, selfish interest superimposes itself over the central, larger goal, our unity will be threatened. Ministers in the church must also manifest love, forgiveness, compassion and purity of life to enhance unity and growth in the church.
OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

LESSON 612

GOD PROVES ISRAEL

MEMORY VERSE: “And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses” (Judges 3:4).

TEXT: Judges 3:1-31

The second chapter of the book of Judges ended with the account of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God after the death of Joshua and the elders that outlived him. They had failed to drive out all the inhabitants of Canaan as the Lord commanded, and they also went into idolatry. For these reasons, God was angry with them and said: “...Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died” (Judges 2:20, 21).

In our present lesson, Israel continued with the stream of backslidings which began in the previous chapter. Here, we see the beginning of their servitude in the land of promise and the onset of a vicious circle whereby they would sin, then their enemies would oppress them; they would cry unto God and He would send a judge to deliver them. Then, there would be a period of peace and temporal obedience to God until the reigning judge dies, after which they would fall into sin again, and the cycle is repeated. It was such that backsliding became a recurring decimal in the nation.

Question 1: From the introduction to this study, what do you learn about Israel, men in general, and God?

Israel’s experience is typical of men generally. The natural man is wont to be sinful, stubborn and rebellious. He is accustomed to committing sin, not minding the consequence. But God’s mercy is available to those who call on Him out of a sincere heart.
CONFIRMATION OF ISRAEL’S KEENNESS TO OBEY GOD (Judges 3:1-4; Deuteronomy 8:1-3; Psalm 17:2,3; 66:10; Deuteronomy 8:5)

“Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan” (Judges 3:1). The children of Israel failed to drive out all the Canaanites from the land of promise as God had commanded them. From the human standpoint, Israel’s failure was because their enemies possessed chariots of iron which they thought they could not match (Joshua 17:16; Judges 1:19; 4:3). However, from God’s viewpoint, Israel failed because they lacked faith in His ability to help them defeat their enemies. Their lack of faith in God resulted in their decision to coexist with the Canaanites in the Promised Land; and God allowed it, not because it was His perfect will but because the people were already determined not to carry out God’s commandment to the letter.

We are furnished with a list of those nations which the Lord left to prove Israel. “Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath” (Judges 3:3). These became God’s instrument to prove and to know what was in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments or not (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Question 2: Explain the meaning of the expression “to prove Israel”.

God left the Canaanites in the land because the Israelites decided to leave them. The consequence of Israel’s failure to drive out the Canaanites as commanded was that God also withdrew His supernatural aid which could have given them miraculous victory over the enemies. Whenever an individual or a group settles for anything other than the perfect will of God, He may, in His sovereign wisdom, permit them to have their way; but often, with great consequences. The Canaanites were left to prove Israel, and that simply means: One, to discipline them for their unbelief and punish them whenever they go astray from God. Two, to be a kind of schoolmaster to teach them the art of war so that they can learn self-defense. This
should not have been necessary if Israel had driven out the inhabitants completely as God commanded them. There would not have been any threat or fear of attack within the land of promise. Three, to pose a test to Israel to show whether they would obey God or disobey Him. The Canaanites would be a source of temptation and constitute a stumbling block to the Israelites, and their response would confirm the inclination of their hearts: whether it is towards God or their own self-will.

From the failure of Israel to drive out the Canaanites and God’s response to them, believers learn that absolute obedience to God is the only way we can enjoy His best. Second, we cannot obey God except we fully trust Him. Obedience and trust go hand in hand. If Israel had trusted God, they would have depended on Him to drive out the Canaanites despite their seemingly invincible weapons.

Subsequent events showed Israel’s inclination towards disobeying the word of God. They failed to keep themselves from the idols of the land and their neighbors’ idolatrous lifestyle. They soon found themselves in unbridled compromise with the inhabitants of the land. Obviously, they had failed the divine test.

COMPROMISE AND COMMUNION WITH THE HEATHEN
(Judges 3:5-7; Psalm 106:34-39; Exodus 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-6; Ezra 9:10-12; Romans 6:2; Colossians 3:3)

“And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites: And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods” (Judges 3:5, 6). Not long after the death of the elders that succeeded Joshua, the children of Israel went into syncretism and compromise with the Canaanites among whom they dwelt. They mingled with them in marriage and worship of idols. These evil results which God had earlier predicted began to happen and the Israelites lost their distinctiveness.

Israel’s disobedience was in direct contrast with God’s earlier command to steer clear of the heathen and their lifestyles. He had warned them: “Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the
land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee” (Exodus 34:12). Again, He said: “And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (Deuteronomy 7:2, 3).

It is important for believers to identify the progression of Israel backsliding and their eventual apostasy so that they can avoid a similar fate. It all started with their incomplete obedience by leaving the Canaanites in the land. Then, they compromised by entering into marriage relationships with them. In this way, they established strong links and powerful soul ties with the enemies of God. Another wrong step was that they served the idols of the Canaanites, thereby breaking God’s commandment which prohibited the worship of other gods (Exodus 20:3-5). The final step in their downward trend was that they forgot the Lord their God and went into apostasy. The idols of Canaan eventually replaced the Lord in their hearts and they abandoned the true worship of God.

**Question 3: Point out the steps that led to Israel’s apostasy and state how believers can avoid them.**

The example of Israel’s apostasy here is written for our learning so we will avoid their mistakes. As believers, we are the Church of Jesus Christ, the ‘called-out ones’. Our safeguard in the world from which we have been called out is to maintain our distinctiveness and remain separated from its sinful practices. Believers should avoid compromise in all its ramifications. Though we are not called to destroy our unbelieving neighbors like Israel was instructed to destroy the Canaanites, God’s Program for the Church is not less drastic and ruthless in dealing with compromise and sin in our personal lives, family and the congregation. In the Old Testament, it was the potential agents of temptation and compromise, like the Canaanites that were to be put to death, but in the New Testament it is the believer that is called to die to the world and its evil influences (Romans 6:2; Colossians 3:3).
Practically, believers should not enter into any association with unbelievers in business, friendship, worship or marriage; neither should they adopt their lifestyles and tendencies. As the Canaanites posed a snare to Israel when they were spared, so would the world do to us if we fail to clearly separate from it and its lusts. Also, believers must not worship anything the world around us holds in veneration. Apart from the physical idols that must be rejected, we should also avoid the cult-like crave for wealth, sensuality, entertainment, position and power which characterize our present age. We must not allow anything to compete with or displace God in our lives. In the New Testament sense, idolatry is unbridled crave for anything apart from God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:5).


The immediate result of Israel’s backsliding was that God gave them into the hands of their enemies. The first instance of such servitude in the land of promise is recorded in our text. “Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushanrishathaim eight years” (Judges 3:8). God allowed the enemy to prevail over his own people so that they could learn, from bitter experience, the consequence of turning away from Him. Disobedience to God has grave consequences. It brings avoidable sufferings and inflicts us with incalculable loss.

There are six successive periods of servitude recorded in the book of Judges. During this period, twelve Judges were used of God to deliver Israel when they cried unto Him in their time of trouble. The first deliverer or Judge was Othniel, Caleb’s nephew and in-law. He had earlier demonstrated great courage and won outstanding victory when the tribe of Judah fought to conquer their own portion of the Promised Land (Joshua 15:16-19). “And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushanrishathaim”
(Judges 3:10). Here, we note that Othniel was a close relation of Caleb and, most likely, Caleb’s life of faith had positively influenced him and other members of his extended family. This is a challenge to believers on the need to allow their lives impact positively on their relations.

**Question 4: What can believers learn from Othniel as a judge in Israel?**

Also, Othniel carried out the divine assignment to deliver Israel by the Spirit of God. He judged Israel. That means he led them to deal with their sin and backsliding before going after the enemy. This is ever the divine order of recovery from the hands of the enemy, and it is the way to achieve lasting revival. The enemy within should be dealt with first before mobilizing against the enemies outside. But this is quite unlike man’s way. Men would rather struggle to have the yoke of their external enemies broken instead of dealing with their inward depravity and sinfulness which gave the enemy an inroad to their lives in the first place. A person who is enslaved by anger and lustful passions may be upbeat about getting breakthrough in finance and career, not realizing that those inward sins would decimate any breakthrough he may receive by the sheer interposition of God’s mercy. The wise thing to do is to seek inward cleansing first so that one can enjoy permanent, all-round victory. Like Othniel judged Israel before going after the enemy, believers are called to judge themselves (1 Corinthians 11:31).

The influence of Othniel’s intervention in Israel was very profound. The land had rest for forty years. But after the death of Othniel, Israel went back into sin and were once again brought into servitude. They learnt nothing from their bitter experience. This time, it was the Moabites under Eglon that oppressed them and the deliverer sent by God was Ehud (Judges 3:12-30). The strategy he used to secure Israelites deliverance was quite unique and different from that of Othniel. But the point is, God used both of them to deliver His people. Ehud employed a combination of skill and strategy to kill Eglon the king of Moab. He took advantage of his left handedness and used pretense to beat the Moabite security and catch Eglon unawares. He was courageous and witty. Ehud rallied the
children of Israel to defeat the Moabites and he secured eighty years of peace for the land.

Again, the people went back into idol worship; then servitude followed again under the Philistines. Yet, God in His mercy sent another deliverer, named Shamgar to deliver them.

As we look at the Judges whom God raised for Israel’s deliverance, we are able to understand why God would employ such men or methods in fulfilling His divine will. It is left for us as believers today to emulate the faith and courage of these Judges. Above all, rather than focus on the Judges who were mere instruments, or on their inadequacies which are common to men, we should celebrate the mercy of God and stand in awe of His longsuffering towards His people.

**Question 5: In view of the manifestation of God’s mercy and grace, what should be the response of (a) sinners (b) saints?**

God is ever faithful and merciful. Even after His people had failed, He made provision that could turn their mistakes into miracles. The presence of the Canaanites among the Israelites, though a human device, would become a tool in God’s hands to perfect Israel and make them learn wisdom. This should serve as an encouragement to those who, perhaps, have missed God’s perfect will in one area or the other in the past. They should not despair but turn to God in genuine repentance, hand over the broken pieces of their lives, and trust Him to make miracles out of their mistakes.

As many times as Israel repented and turned to God, He sent deliverers to get them out of their servitude. Such manifestation of mercy and unmerited favor is one of God’s unchanging attribute, and it should propel every sinner or backslider to genuine repentance, and motivate true believers to have a closer walk with God.
LESSON 613

EXPLOITS OF DEBORAH AND BARAK

MEMORY VERSE: “And Deborah said unto Barak, up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him” (Judges 4:14).

TEXT: Judges 4:1-24

The sinful compromise and inconsistent walk of the children of Israel with God received mention in the previous lesson. The oppression they suffered was as frequent as their backsliding. Since Israel repeatedly “did evil” in God’s sight ( Judges 2:11,19; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 9:57; 10:6; 13:1; Leviticus 26:23-25; Nehemiah 9:23-30; Psalm 106:43-45; Jeremiah 5:3), the natural consequence was for God to leave them to be afflicted by enemies. It is clear that no one continues to live a peaceful life who grieves God at heart.

Question 1: What lessons can believers learn from Ehud in our text today?

Three prophets, Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar were raised by God in the previous chapter to rescue Israel from their oppressors when they repented and called upon Him for intervention. But of these three Judges, the role of Ehud (who is the second of the three) is highlighted. He did not only deliver Israel from oppression like all other Judges but also ensured the people lived a righteous life that guaranteed eighty years of peace in the land. Thus, he became a standard-bearer and his death became a point of reference of Israel’s departure from God and godly principles. “And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead” (Judges 4:1). God had always raised people to rescue the perishing. The role of spiritual leaders in providing guidance for God’s people cannot be over-emphasized. Christian leaders must win souls, disciple and encourage them to continue to live a righteous lifestyle to enjoy divine peace. Also, believers need to be watchful not to forget God when He grants them deliverance, peace, prosperity and other blessings they
seek so as not to suffer a similar fate with Israel whose eighty years of peace lulled them into sin. Thus, the danger of sinful compromise and inconsistency, repentance and prayer for divine intervention and deliverance, necessity of courage in obeying the command to rescue the perishing from the wicked, assurance of victory over enemies are highlighted for our consideration in this lesson.

CAUSES OF DEFEAT AND OPPRESSION AMONG GOD’S PEOPLE (Judges 4:1-3; 2:14; 1:19; 5:8; 1 Samuel 12:9; Psalm 106:42; Proverbs 26:2)

Before the newest bondage, the land of Israel had had rest for eighty years. They had been delivered from their oppressors through the previous judge. But failing to learn from their sinful past, the people forsook God’s love and mercy, and went astray again into sin. Consequently, the “LORD sold them into the hand of” their enemies to oppress them and put them in bondage. As they strayed away from God’s love into sin, enemies had another ample opportunity to oppress them. And the enemy that oppressed the children of Israel in our text today is king Jabin of Canaan and his general, Sisera.

We should note, however, that Joshua had earlier conquered and killed one king Jabin of Hazor with all its inhabitants and possessed their land (Joshua 11:1,10). So, the “Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera” in our text lived more than a century after. Jabin then is either a standing name or a title of successive kings, much like the name, Pharaoh.

Question 2: What is the primary cause of defeat and oppression among God’s people?

God’s people, by their vantage position, are supposed to enjoy uninterrupted victory. In His love, foreknowledge and power, God has adequately provided for their daily victory. And the provision is inexhaustible. More often than not, this provision is never enjoyed by majority of Christians because of inconsistency in their walk with God. Truth is, whenever God’s people live righteously, no wicked power can overcome them. But when they open the door for Satan through sin, God gives them up for defeat and desolation.
When God’s people go into sin, Satan, like Jabin and his general, Sisera, uses the opportunity to mightily oppress them. Satan the archenemy of the believer is watching closely and working assiduously to see the protection or cover removed. God’s people seem to forget too frequently and easily that Satan and his cohorts are watching for opportunities to repossess their hearts and minds, and to turn them back into evil works.

**Question 3:** Enumerate some practical causes of defeats and oppressions among God’s people and how they can be overcome.

It is necessary to consider causes of believers’ defeat today and how to avoid them. Believers are mostly defeated in battle today because of compromise or secret sin. If they go into secret sin hoping that they will not be discovered by members or leaders in the church, they are unwittingly creating opportunities for their own defeat. Compromise or secret sin arise from lack of watchfulness. If the believer does not watch over his actions and reactions, he opens the door for Satan and, consequently, to defeat. When there is inconsistency in the believer’s walk with God, he becomes susceptible to defeat.

A prayerless believer can also suffer defeat. Whereas prayer ought to be the believer’s ‘breath’, many Christians see it as unnecessary burden which they must endure. In fact, to some believers, prayer is a means of solving problems and not of fellowship with God. Like the children of Israel in our text, they only pray when they are under attack, and when their attackers are warded off, they relapse into prayerlessness. It is not surprising that “the children of Israel cried unto the LORD” only when being oppressed by their enemies. Until they were oppressed by Pharaoh and the Egyptians, there was no record of them praying. This trend continued in the book of Judges: they prayed only when under bondage. Closely related to prayerlessness is the absence of courage and ignorance of the word of God.

**COURAGEOUS AGENTS OF DELIVERANCE** (Judges 4:4-9, 14; Hebrews 11:32-34; Psalm 83:1-5, 9, 10)

The passage introduces Deborah, wife of Lapidoth, the first woman recorded in scriptures to be a Judge in Israel. Or, put differently, this was the first woman to lead a government
of a nation in recorded history. From the passage, it is clear that she was a seasoned administrator both in civil and religious affairs. Her courage is a challenge, not only to women in Christian ministry but also to the men. Deborah made herself available for deliverance of God’s people when many men in the land ran for covers. Even when valiant men like Barak had their confidence terribly shaken by events in the land, she became an epitome of courage and an animating spirit of the government and discharged all the special duties of a judge.

By God’s direction, she ordered Barak to raise an army that would engage Jabin’s army. Her courage rubbed off on Barak who became so motivated that he mobilized other men of war for the task. Even at the battlefront, Deborah was available. She personally went with the army to the war against Jabin and his general, Sisera. It is doubtful today how many men, not to talk of women, will be willing to do what Deborah did.

Deborah was both a wife and a prophetess. Her ability to balance her domestic duties with religious obligations is something that cannot be ignored. Her performance at the home front did not disrupt or hinder her spiritual usefulness. On how she fared in ministry, a Bible scholar writes: ‘She judged Israel as God’s mouth to them; correcting abuses, and redressing grievances.' What a testimony!

Barak insisted that the lady judge must accompany his soldiers to war. While this talks about her usefulness to God’s people, it also underscores the much talked about symbiotic relationship between work and prayer. This relationship is also seen in Moses’ prayer while Joshua went to war. Deborah was not going to participate in the real fighting but as a spiritual morale booster for the soldiers.

**Question 4: What examples do exploits of Deborah and Barak signify for leaders and followers?**

Barak’s insistence on having Deborah accompany him to war, and Deborah’s promise to go with him teaches us that Deborah would not send Barak where she would not go herself. By extension, those who call others to duty should be ready to participate in such duties.
It should also be noted that Barak’s insistence on having the woman-judge accompany them to war was not a sign of cowardice or a result of weakness. Rather, it was a recognition of the power of God in her. Barak knew that Deborah accompanying them to war was a physical sign that Jehovah was with them in battle to defeat the enemy nation.

In any case, Barak’s offer to go and fight against these oppressors of Israel was an indication of his bravery and faith in the God of Abraham. This brought about his name in the catalogues of the heroes of faith (Hebrews 11:32).

One fact that must be borne in mind at all times is that God honors both men and women. He does not discriminate between man and woman. As He uses men so He uses women. All we need to do as Christians is to follow His leading (Deuteronomy 29:29).

**FUTILITY OF ALLIANCE AGAINST GOD’S PEOPLE**

(Judges 4:10-13,17,18; 1:16; Numbers 10:29; 24:21; Exodus 2:15,16,18; 3:1; 4:20,24; 18:5; Matthew 13:3-8,18-23; Hebrews 4:2)

Heber the Kenite was one of the children of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses. It would be recalled that Moses had invited this particular family to share in God’s promised blessings. “Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses’ father in law, We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel” (Numbers 10:29). Unfortunately, the great offer was turned down. “And he said unto him, I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred.” Hobab, and by extension Heber, had a rare opportunity of partaking in the benefits exclusively reserved for the children of Abraham but he turned it down.

The Kenites lived in the southern part of the country, but at this point in history, Heber, who was one of them, had relocated to the north. While there, he forged an alliance with the enemies of God’s people. From the town of Zaamain, they fed Sisera with intelligence about Barak’s movement (verse 11, 12). And after Sisera was routed, he could think of no other place that would be safe than “the
tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.” But when God fights with a man, there is no security for him in the house of his best friend as is in this case.

**Question 5: Who was Heber and who are those who resemble him in the church today?**

The case of the Kenites here is a warning to everyone. They had a golden opportunity of entering into an earthly rest like the children of Israel; they had a gracious promise and advantage of sharing in God’s provision for His people. But they rejected the offer. This also accounts for some people’s inability to derive all the benefits in God’s word; they simply exclude themselves. There are many people in the church today who have the golden opportunity of hearing the undiluted truth, getting saved and experiencing miracles as of old. Rather than settle their salvation once and for all, they keep postponing it. Such people are susceptible to forming alliances with enemies of God and His people. They give helping hands to people who fight against the truth and righteousness. To escape the judgment of God, sinners must break away from sin and relationships or associations that keep them in sin.

**COMPLETE DEFEAT OF GOD’S ENEMIES** (Judges 4:15-24; Joshua 10:10; Psalm 83:9-10; Exodus 14:28; Judges 5:24-27)

“And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet” (Judges 4:15).

Bible scholars say the Hebrew equivalent of that verse is rendered as: ‘Jehovah threw the army of Sisera into confusion.’ This implies that the men of war, their horses and chariots were intermingled in wild confusion. Feeling unsafe, Sisera lighted down his chariot and fled on foot towards the tent of Jael, Heber’s wife. It is faith-building to see a general who had been oppressing Israel with “nine hundred chariots of iron” abandon them and the multitudes with him on the battlefield and take to his heels before the ten thousand men Barak raised out of
Naphtali and Zebulun. Truly, woe unto him who strives with his Maker!

The requests of the fleeing Sisera engage our thought. “And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty” (verse 19). He got and drank milk which led to his death, in line with Deborah’s prediction. His second request was for Jael to serve as his guard after leaving his chariots and soldiers on the battlefield. There is no refuge for anyone who fights with God, His people and His cause in this world. Security is only guaranteed for those who reconcile with Him.

The interesting part of this victory is that it was the wife of Heber with whom he had a pact that “took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died” (verse 21). Surely, God makes the enemies of those who please Him to be at peace with them; He also makes even the friends, associates and neighbors of those who displease Him to be at war with them. God can turn anything and anyone to an instrument of judgment to prove His word. The victory of every oppressor of God’s children is temporary.

It must be underlined that Israel’s victory over Jabin and Sisera was not because of Barak’s intelligence and bravery but by the power of God. Deborah and Barak were only instruments God used in defeating them. Israel’s triumph has become a reference point in history.

God has made ample provision for the believer’s victory through Christ’s death and resurrection. He has therefore promised victory to everyone who will depend on Him. All the believer needs to do to have a repeat of this kind of victory is to be a friend of God at all times, giving Him a prominent place in his life, being watchful, prayerful and consistent in his walk.

**Question 6: What assurance does the victory over Jabin and Sisera give to believers?**
LESSON 614
DEBORAH AND BARAK’S SONG OF VICTORY

MEMORY VERSE: “One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4).

TEXT: Judges: 5:1-31

Although men ought “in everything [to] give thanks” unto the Lord, we are more inclined to render praise to Him in moments of joy. The joy of victory after a hard battle for the Lord excited saints of old to compose and render worshipful songs. Such songs serve to preserve the memory of God’s wondrous acts among His people. An example is the song of Moses and Miriam following the unforgettable and miraculous deliverance of Israel and the destruction of the army of Egypt at the Red Sea (Exodus 15). Another example is the song of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 32, in which he rehearsed the great things God did for Israel in contrast to their recurring infidelity. Moses’ song in Deuteronomy was meant to be a deterrent, by constantly reminding Israel of the dangers of apostasy, as well as an exhortation to faith. Thus, sacred songs serve as expressions of worship and thanksgiving to God and a means of preserving the remembrance of divine acts from generation to generation.

Question 1: From Scriptural examples, what purposes do sacred songs serve among God’s people?

The song of Deborah and Barak in our text captures the above essential attributes. It also provides a study of the misery which people plunge themselves into when they abandon their Rock and choose “new gods”. It brings to the fore the deceitfulness of idolatry and compels us to examine ourselves in the light of the different attitudes and dispositions of the tribes of Israel when they were faced with a situation that called for sacrifice and courage, in furtherance of God’s glory and the re-establishment of true worship, righteousness and order. Finally, we witness the inevitable end of any divinely promoted cause or battle. It reminds us that if we altogether hold our peace at a time of challenge, “then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise...from another place” (Esther 4:14).
TROUBLED TIMES OF IDOLATRY (Judges 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Acts 3:19; Colossians 1:13, 14)

The early part of Deborah and Barak’s song dwelt on the unpleasant conditions that prevailed when Israel labored under Jabin. It mirrored the deep distress which Israel suffered before Deborah appeared on the scene. The national misery and anarchy was attributable to Israel’s descent into idolatry when “they chose new gods”.

The contrast in the situation of Israel during the time they wallowed in idolatry and after their return to God was so sharp that one could hardly believe it was the same nation that was being described. The change and transformation were dramatic, striking and all-encompassing. This is similar to the change that takes place when a hopeless and miserable sinner turns to Christ. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Repentance, whether on a national or individual level, always ushers in a time of refreshing (Acts 3:19).

Question 2: Describe the condition of Israel during her period of descent into idolatry and how it mirrors the life of the sinner.

The intense suffering and deprivation of Israel under Jabin typifies the tyranny of sin and Satan in the unbeliever’s life. Jabin’s despotic suppression gave rise to insecurity and anarchy which affected the very life of the nation. The sufferings and miseries in the land of Israel mirrors the life of the sinner. The cessation of commerce and trafficking reflects the futility and unprofitability of a life without the outworking of God’s grace. The effrontery of robbers who operated without check on the highways thereby forcing frightened citizens into byways typifies the abundance of iniquity in these last days with its danger of weakening the love of God in the hearts of men. The neglect of agriculture because of the fear of plunderers reflects the neglect of eternal life by those who are ruled by the fear of men and the pressure of present worldly system. The lack of arms for defense and offence is typical of the vulnerability of those who do not know the promises of God and who do not have and cannot be clad with the whole armor of God.
Question 3: What remedy has God provided for the miseries, fears and hopelessness in the world today?

God, in His mercy, responded to the cry and suffering of Israel under Jabin by throwing off his yoke through Deborah and Barak. Today, anyone can be delivered and “saved from [his] enemies and from the hand of all that hate [him]” by faith in Jesus Christ, “who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13, 14).

TAKING OUR PLACE IN GOD’S ARMY (Judges 5:9-19; Ecclesiastes 9:11; 1 Corinthians 15:57; 1 Peter 2:14; Luke 12:48b; Matthew 12:30)

In their song, Deborah and Barak reserved places for the enemy who fought against Israel, for the various tribes and people who fought for Israel, and for those who stood neutral while the Lord’s battle raged. The enemy was identified in the song to be Jabin and Sisera, their Amalekite allies together with the kings of Canaan. The enemies were large, ferocious and bitter. They were determined: “they took no money.” Their resolve against God’s people was stronger than could be found among mere mercenaries.

For Israel to rout such formidable enemy forces without a king bears testimony to the truth of God’s word that, “the battle [is not] to the strong” (Ecclesiastes 9:11); “there is no king saved by the multitude of a host”. “A mighty man is not delivered by much strength. A horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength” (Psalm 33:16, 17). On the other hand, God, by His holy arm, always gives victory to His people who trust Him. Apostle Paul’s experiences in all his life’s battles made him exclaim, “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

The courage and selflessness of those whom God raised to redress the oppression of Jabin and Sisera were commendable. It is noteworthy that such willing instruments in God’s hands were found across all social classes. They included: “governors of Israel that offered themselves willingly among the people” (verse 9), the
nobles “that ride on white asses” and the magistrates who sit in judgment but set aside their privileges and honor to serve God at such an auspicious time. While ascribing the glory of the victory to God who stirred up the various classes of people, Deborah recognized the exemplary roles of those who lent themselves as instruments in God’s hand. Indeed, giving due praise to those who do well encourages them to persist in well-doing while setting them up as good examples for others to emulate. Similarly, leaders at all levels will do well not only to rebuke offenders, but to praise those who do well. According to Scripture, leaders are sent “for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of them that do well” (1 Peter 2:14). However, when we are praised, we must watch against the temptation to become proud and self-conceited.

Question 4: What caution must we apply with respect to receiving rebuke or praise?

Deborah, in her song, reserved a place of honor for those tribes in Israel who rose to the challenge of Jabin’s oppression. Among such tribes were Benjamin, Ephraim, Machir (half tribe of Manasseh), Zebulun, Issachar and Naphtali (verses 14, 15, 18).

Deborah also noted those tribes, who stood neutral on such a critical engagement; who did not actively identify with the glorious cause. Such were the tribes of Reuben, Dan, Asher, and Meroz. No mention was made of the tribes of Simeon and Judah because their geographical location was too far from the scene of the battle.

When the different attitudes of the various tribes of Israel are considered against the backdrop of Israel’s resounding victory and the prophetic expressions in Deborah’s song, some facts emerge. Firstly, God demonstrated clearly that He could do without any unwilling hearts such as Reuben, Dan, Asher and Meroz. No man is indispensable for the inevitable victory of the Lord’s army. Secondly, the Lord regards those who do not identify with Him in battle as being against Him though they may not actively fight on the enemy’s side. Such was the neutrality of Asher, Reuben, Dan and Meroz. This truth is reflected in the words of Christ: “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad”
(Matthew 12:30). Thirdly, the Lord will not hold it against us when our inaction is the result of situations truly beyond our control or out of our reach as was the case of the tribes of Judah and Simeon. Fourthly, every willing participant in the battle against the forces of darkness will be remembered in the victory song in heaven. Though our present contributions to the war efforts may be diverse, what is important and expected is that “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

**Question 5: What lesson can we learn from the victory of Israel even without the help of some tribes?**

Apart from Simeon and Judah who lacked opportunity to participate, none of the tribes who shirked their duty in the war could be excused. The division that existed among the tribe of Reuben was a bitter root that should not have been allowed to spring up. As the Scripture warns: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). As a consequence of their divisions, Reuben chose the safety of the sheepfold, preferring the sonorous bleating of their sheep to the martial trumpet that summoned them to the battle of the Lord. Today, some Christians are similarly kept away from their duties by the love of ease and excessive concern for their worldly businesses. Dan “remain in ships” (verse 17) under the pretext that leaving their ship for the battle would result in an incalculable loss or that they were used to the sea and unfitted for land battle. Dan, in that case, would be condemned by Zebulun, a fellow sea-faring tribe who abandoned their ship to identify with the Lord’s battle. Whatever cloak we seek to hide our loss of affection for the Lord would be exposed by some other people in similar situations whose courage and resolution for the Lord will condemn us. As for the tribe of Asher, their continuing on the sea shore during the battle ostensibly to repair the breeches the sea had made on her land, speaks of love waxed cold. The truth is that those who do not love God with all their heart will always find other
“duties” more compelling and urgent than the call to make sacrifice for God. Considering the fact that Meroz lay very close to the scene of the battle and had every opportunity to demonstrate obedience and concern for Israel but declined attracted a curse. “Curse ye Meroz... because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty” (verse 23). Those who are in the habit of comparing their efforts with those of others will do well to recognize the disparity in opportunities and endowments.

The truth is that we must sincerely and prayerfully ensure that no extremity in our circumstances or in our domestic affairs is allowed to override the Lord’s command.

On the last day, at the judgment seat of Christ, we cannot plead lack of opportunity for our not participating in the on-raging battle of snatching souls from Satan through the gospel message. Every situation or station in life affords us the opportunity for pious service unto the Lord.

**THE TRIUMPH OF GOD’S ARMY** (Judges 5:24-31; Job 9:4; Judges 4:17; Joshua 2:9-11; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 1:20)

When men make themselves enemies of God through disobedience, they incur the hostility of God’s entire creation. Thus, in the ensuing battle against God’s people, even the stars fought against Sisera by causing storms against him. River Kishon, usually a small river, swelled into a torrent that swept away Sisera’s soldiers who tried to escape through the river.

While acknowledging the commendable roles of the six tribes of Israel who participated in the battle, Deborah reserved a special praise for Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite: “Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent” (verse 24). Jael’s exploit in killing Sisera, captain of Jabin’s host, by driving a nail through his head becomes more illustrious when one considers the fact that she was a woman.

Just as Rahab, the Canaanite woman, preferred loyalty to the God of Israel to blind heathen patriotism, Jael placed peace with the God of Israel above peace with Jabin. Both
Gentile women’s exploits and the high honor their faith brought them are recorded in the Holy Writ to teach us that, “of a truth... God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34, 35). As both women’s faith in God was the result of what they saw and heard of God’s power, there is no excuse for anyone to disbelieve God. For even “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). By her faith, Jael, a woman in her home was able to achieve an honor as high as that which Barak achieved in the battle field. Those whose lot is to serve and labor in obscure and lonely spheres of ministry can attain a place of honor before God. And they shall not lose their reward if they serve God faithfully till the end.

**Question 6: What lessons can we learn from the faith manifested by Jael and the honor ascribed to her in Deborah’s song?**

The ignominious end of Sisera who had proudly designed the destruction of God’s people typifies the ruinous end of sinners whose seeming prosperity flatters them into thinking they have no need for God in their lives.

While the carcass of Sisera lay with a deadly wound in Jael’s tent, his mother was full of expectation of his glorious return. “Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?” (Verse 28). She and her maidens never thought of or considered the possibility of defeat and death. All they had in expectation was worldly honor, pleasure and wealth. They presented a pitiful picture of hope where there was no hope. Sinners who think that God will justify them without faith in Christ and that they will escape God’s wrath are like these people. When the Captain of our salvation returns in triumph and great glory, we shall sing our victory song. Our hope to share in His glory cannot be disappointed if we love Him in truth and are ready to enlist in the battle for truth (2 Timothy 12:12).
LESSON 615
GOD COMMISSIONS GIDEON

MEMORY VERSE: “And the LORD looked upon him, and said, go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” (Judges 6:14).

TEXT: Judges 6:1-32

Israel’s penchant for doing evil was yet to abate. The slide-back into evil which began after “there arose another generation... which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel” had continued for more than a hundred and sixty years (1425-1256 B.C.) after Joshua. Generation after generation and judges after judges, the people had refused to break loose from idolatry and disobedience to divine commands in spite of the attendant misery and defeat. They had refused to tackle their propensity to go back into evil as soon as their God-appointed deliverer was dead. They had continued to provoke the Lord to anger, yet God had continued to show His manifold mercies towards them each time they repented and cried unto Him.

In the text under consideration, the same scenario of going back to idol worship had played out again and the children of Israel had come under cruel hardship, plunder and destruction by the Midianites as a result. But as was their antecedent, they cried unto God when things became unbearable and God found a suitable, qualified vessel for the deliverance of the nation. He raised another deliverer for them in the person of Gideon. Despite his background and the challenges involved with the task, Gideon obeyed the call of God and was mightily used to do exploits against Israel’s enemies. He believed that the One who commissioned him would supply needed enablement to carry out the great task.

At different times, God often commissions His people to deliver those who are oppressed of the enemy and bring His children back to the path of righteousness. In our dispensation, the call to bring sinners to the Savior is an assignment all believers must carry out.
Question 1: What is the greatest commission that the Lord has given to His people today?

Every sinner is in bondage and under the cruel oppression of Satan. Just as God called Gideon, believers are called to preach the saving gospel of Christ to the sinning world and bring deliverance to Satan’s captives. Underscoring this, our Lord Jesus says, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Believers must not relent in the task to rescue sinners and backsliders before it is too late.

GREAT OPPRESSION, DEFEAT AND MISERY OF ISRAEL ( Judges 6:1-6; 3:12-14; 4:1, 2; Joshua 7:11, 12; Judges 16:17; 2 Kings 17:14-20; Ezra 9:7)

The children of Israel at this time had gone back into sin. They had forgotten that previous defeats at the hands of their enemies were due to their disobedience, sin, evil lifestyle and rebellion. Backsliding had brought on them great misery and impoverishment. They lost the favor of God and were punished. Here again, “the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel...” (Judges 6:1, 2). Sin, wickedness, rebellion, if unrepented of, brings defeat, downfall and utter destruction. It makes the enemy to prevail against the people of God. It opens a floodgate for the adversary to oppress and wreck havoc on God’s heritage. Believers who were superior to the enemy would suddenly become weak, humiliated and unable to stand before their enemies. Such was the experience of Israel here. In the days of their godly leaders, the Midianites could not withstand them in battle; they were utterly defeated (Numbers 31:7-12). But sin decimated their strength and caused their enemies to prevail against them.

Question 2: Mention instances when sin was the cause of the defeat of God’s people.

Joshua had a similar experience when Achan took of the accursed stuff and brought defeat on the whole nation (Joshua 7:1-5). They could not progress to Canaan until they had dealt with the cause of defeat. Samson lost his power, life and ministry as a result of his fraternity with
strange women (Judges 16:17). The nation of Israel could not challenge the Philistines because Saul was out of favor with God due to disobedience. They also lost their sovereignty and were carried into a foreign land, not once, not twice. “Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only. And the LORD rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight” (2 Kings 17:18, 20).

Question 3: What are the consequences of a life of sin and evil?

Israel’s untold misery and suffering under the Midianites continued until they acknowledged their backsliding and called upon the Lord. “And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD” (Judges 6:6). Sinners and backsliders should not take the grace of God for granted. Judgment will come upon all the unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 6:23). The mercy of God is reserved only for those who acknowledge their evil and are willing to forsake their sins (Proverbs 28:13). The way out of sin is to run to the Savior. God is not interested in the death of sinners and backsliders but that they should repent and return to the Lord with deep contrition and willingness to remain steadfast in the grace of God.

GOD’S CONCERN AND CONTROVERSY WITH ISRAEL (Judges 6:7-10; Hosea 4:1; 12:2; Micah 6:2; Jeremiah 25:31)

“And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage” (Judges 6:7,8).

Behold the mercy and kindness of the Lord! As soon as Israel cried to the Lord, He responded immediately. Though it would seem that their cry was a result of the weight of the oppression, yet the Lord sent a prophet and a deliverer to them. But not without first outlining the bases of His
rejection and controversy with them. First, He reminded them that He brought them out of bondage in Egypt where they served their taskmasters. Second, He delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians when they would have destroyed the whole nation. Third, He delivered them from the various oppressors and persecutors after they left Egypt. Fourth, He defeated all the adversaries that rose against them in battle; not one of them was able to stand before them as long as they obeyed His voice. Fifth, He drove away the inhabitants of Canaan and chased the beasts out of the land in readiness for their occupation. Sixth, He gave them a land flowing with milk and honey and caused them to inherit it. Seventh, He avouched Himself to be their God and adopted them as His own (Deuteronomy 26:18). Eighth, He assured them of His abiding presence: He said, “fear not…” (Judges 6:10). In spite of these, the Lord’s verdict on the children of Israel was: “but ye have not obeyed my voice” (Judges 6:10). Thus, Israel was guilty of ingratitude, disobedience and lack of faith. How many believers have been caught in the same sins!

**Question 4: Why did the Lord specify His acts towards the children of Israel?**

The reason the Lord outlined some of His manifold kindness to the children of Israel was to remind them of His benevolence, bring them to a sense of their sin and prepare them for deliverance. He wanted them to acknowledge their folly peradventure they would cease to fall back into it. The reason the Spirit of God points our sins and mistakes to us is to enable us repent and renounce them. The wise would hear and fear.

As soon as the Lord ended the bases of His controversies with Israel, He set out to deliver them. He charged Gideon to take the mantle of leadership in order to deliver His people from the oppression of the Midianites.

**GIDEON’S COMMISSION, COURAGE AND OBEDIENCE**

(Judges 6:11-32; 2 Corinthians 6:15-19; Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:5; Matthew 10:37; 6:24; Acts 4:19; Galatians 1:16; John 16:2; Isaiah 1:11-20)

“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of velour” (Judges 6:12).
A man of velour, Gideon became God’s ready instrument to deliver the children of Israel from the cruelty of the Midianites. The angel of God affirmed that the Lord was with them and declared him to be a man of courage, gallantry and victory. But Gideon could not reconcile these accolades with the reality on ground. He could not understand how they could be under such oppression when the Lord was with them. After all, his fathers had told them that when the Lord was with Israel, He brought them out of Egypt and wrought mighty miracles among them. He plagued the Egyptians with divers diseases, turned their water to blood and broke Pharaoh’s hold on Goshen where Israel dwelt. As soon as they left Egypt, He parted the Red Sea and drowned Pharaoh’s chariots in the ocean. When enemy kings fought against them, He discomfited them. He supplied their needs in the wilderness, gave them water from the rock; He rained manna from heaven. The pillar of cloud and of fire led them during the day as well as the night and He did not suffer any to harm them. How come they were now the laughingstock of their enemies? Why should they hide away to thresh their wheat to avoid it being destroyed? Gideon could not believe what he heard, and he asked: “Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?” (Judges 6:13). His conclusion was right. He said: “but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”

When an individual, a group of people or church assembly that was enjoying divine protection, provision and preservation goes back into sin, they risk being forsaken and left at the mercy of their enemies. Such would no longer enjoy the benefits of dwelling under the shadow of the Almighty where there is security, favor and mercy.

In spite of Gideon’s misgiving and distrust, “the LORD look upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” (Judges 6:14). As Christian believers, if we abide in the Lord, no matter our “infirmities”, we can do exploits for our God. Moreover, the Lord’s assertion underscores the way God views His children. He does not
see them as weaklings, wretches, failures, never-do-wells. He considers them as men and women of velour who “can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth” them (Philippians 4:13).

Still conscious of his background, human frailties and inadequacies, Gideon continued with his stream of excuses and why he would not want to be the deliverer. He said, “Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” But the Lord assured him of His presence, protection and certain victory. Such is the response of men whom God had called to assume a specific task for Him. Moses claimed he was a stammerer and could not stand before Pharaoh to speak for the children of Israel. When confronted with his choice as the first king of Israel, Saul asked, “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?” (1 Samuel 9:21). Solomon told the Lord, “I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in” (1 Kings 3:7). Prophet Jeremiah also screamed: “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child” (Jeremiah 1:6).

However, in spite of the seeming consciousness of their frailty and humanity, borne out of a sense of humility, the Lord mightily used those who acknowledged His power and obeyed His voice. God has all power and might to use the ‘weakest’ but prepared vessels for His glory: “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Question 5: What are the qualities God look for in a man He wants to use for His glory?

If we surrender our little talents, strength and efforts into God’s hands, there is no limit to what He can achieve through us. All we need is total and absolute yieldedness and His grace would accomplish the rest (2 Corinthians 12:9). Humility is a great virtue that all true believers must possess. True ministers of the gospel must never allow pride or self to tarnish the work of the Lord. “For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5).
Gideon was weak in faith when he got the commission. He desired to have his faith confirmed with specific signs before he would embark on the great assignment. God honored his sincerity and confirmed his calling. Believers today are under the influence of the Holy Spirit and should not wait for a sign before embarking on the task of *Discipling A Whole Nation* (DAWN). Prayer is a major tool a believer has in carrying out the divine and urgent task of delivering the captives of the mighty in our generation.

Gideon offered the angelic being a kid and unleavened cakes. But the angel turned the meat into an offering made by fire to show that God is not a man that needed meat, money or materials. He is Almighty and all He demands from us is our life. He must be worshipped, honored, adored and served with all our heart and soul in holiness.

Gideon obeyed the Lord’s command to pull down the monuments of idol in the family before embarking on his task. God’s marvelous grace raised him as a deliverer out of the family of a leader in idolatry to demolish idolatry “and build an altar unto the Lord” (Judges 6:26). If we must be used of God, we have to destroy all the altars in and around us.

**Question 6: What are some of the idolatries practiced today and what should be our attitude to them?**

Gideon obeyed divine demand “...and did as the Lord has said unto him...” (Judges 6:27). Obedience ensures that we have the support of the Lord. When we obey Him, He will work in our favor; He will defend us even when the whole world turns against us. For Gideon, the Lord influenced the heart of his father, Joash to defend him against the advocates of Baal who wanted to kill him because he destroyed its altar (Judges 6:28-32). In the same vein, believers are to engage in the great task of preaching the gospel and trust God for safety. He has promised that He will never leave nor forsake us. “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:6).
LESSON 616

GIDEON MOBILISES ISRAEL FOR WAR

MEMORY VERSE: And he sent messengers’ throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered unto Asher and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them (Judges 6:34).

TEXT: Judges 6:33-40

The preceding verses of this chapter show how the children of Israel were oppressed and afflicted for seven years by the Midianites as a result of their disobedience. They were greatly impoverished because of the constant attack from the Midianites and its allied forces. But when they cried to the Lord out of their predicament, He granted their request by sending them a deliverer. This study centers on Gideon whom the Lord found faithful to lead the children of Israel against their foes, namely, the Midianites, the Amalekites and the children of the east. The task of mobilizing and leading the Israelites to war against this confederacy of nations required moral rather than physical courage. Sin must be purged in the life of the burden-bearer before venturing into such campaign.

Gideon had met with God’s required standard of self-purification, destruction of Baal’s altar and the establishment of true worship before attempting to embark on this national assignment.

Question 1: How did Gideon prepare himself before God chose him to lead Israel in this battle?

Gideon’s life had been transformed as he separated himself from the culture and tradition of the people. He had broken the power of idol and was preserved by the Almighty. He had learnt to fear God only instead of idols. To qualify for God’s service, the believer is expected to separate from self, sin and Satan. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).
ATTACK ON ISRAEL BY THE MIDIANITES AND THEIR ALLIES (Judges 6:33; Exodus 17:8-16; 1 Samuel 15:2-9; Genesis 25:1,2; Numbers 31:1-20)

“Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel” (Judges 6:33). It is instructive to observe that this attack on the Israelites was spearheaded by the Midianites, descendants of Abraham (Genesis 25:1, 2). Years earlier, the same Midianites had battled the Israelites in the wilderness (Numbers 31:1-20). But because of the failure of Israel to completely eliminate them, they repopulated and became stronger; now in alliance with the Amalekites and the children of the east, they gathered together to oppress and afflict Israel with cruelty. They destroyed even the means of Israel’s subsistence. Unknown to these allied forces, however, God had raised Gideon who became an instrument of deliverance for Israel.

Question 2: What can we learn from the sudden attack on Israel by the allied forces?

Believers are to be vigilant and sober always as the adversary is never tired of seeking people to devour. They are to put on the whole armor of God. It is equally advisable that believers are not ignorant of the devices of the devil. He will always plan to attack at an unguarded moment. “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”. It was in keeping with His promise that the Lord raised Gideon for the war against these enemies.

GIDEON MOBILISES ISRAEL FOR WAR (Judges 6:34, 35; 3:10, 27; 1 Chronicles 12:18; 2 Chronicles 24:20; Judges 5:17)

“But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abi-ezer was gathered after him”. Gideon was moved by the Spirit which came upon him to blow the trumpet; and the men of Abiezer, his own people, were the first to rally round him. This clearly indicated that the reformation he carried out among them had a positive impact on them. With such encouragement from his people, he sent messengers throughout the neighboring tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali. These
four tribes were closer to the valley of Jezreel; therefore, they were affected mostly by the marauders.

**Question 3: What can leaders learn from the life of Gideon in depending on the Holy Spirit?**

The call and commission of Gideon was great and divine. It is instructive that he depended on the Holy Spirit to accomplish such a great task. Gideon released himself to the sole use of the Spirit. Leaders must learn from Gideon to yield their lives to the exclusive use of the Spirit. They can achieve this by ensuring consistent walk in the Spirit, practical holy living and deep hunger and thirst after the Spirit. The Lord has given us a promise that He “**will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring**” (Isaiah 44:3).

Believers who desire this experience must wait upon the Lord in prayers and supplication. They must seek and keep seeking until the answer comes. All these steps are very imperative if we are to be used by the Spirit of God.

All reformation must first begin with self. If we want changes in our communities and our nation, then this change must first begin with us. It is the desire of God for His Church to be pure and holy. Therefore, let us breakdown every altar of Baal and eject every idol from our hearts. Let us allow the holy flame of the Spirit to consume all images that is not of God. The church is in dire need of revival today. Our miracle and revival Programs would be richer and better if we can get the leaders and members closer to God. We must be determined to purge the church of everything that is contrary to God’s word.

**Question 4: How did the four tribes summoned by Gideon respond to the call to duty and what can we learn from their response?**

“And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them” (Judges 6:35). The people readily obeyed the call of Gideon as they now confidently looked up to him as their savior. God can make the enemies of a man to be at peace with him and to gladly come under
his wings. From the case of Gideon, we learn that no man who is conscious of God’s abiding presence should allow himself to be discouraged even if his fellow men do not duly appreciate him.

Today, believers have a call that is greater than that of Gideon. And it is the call to the great commission. We are to be spiritually and physically prepared if we must snatch the souls of men from the devil and his cohorts. Appropriate strategies must be adopted in line with God’s word. Prompt obedience is required from every believer in carrying out this great task. Personal goals should also be subordinated to corporate goals at the hour of emergency. Leadership and members should work as a united force to dislodge any opposition. Leaders must be God-fearing and exemplary in lifestyle to attract the level of unity and cooperation shown among these tribes.

The influence and impact of the Holy Spirit upon Gideon was not in doubt. Such should be the case with leaders seeking to mobilize the children of God against the forces of Satan in our time.

**GIDEON REQUESTS REASSURANCE OF DIVINE SUPPORT** (Judges 6:36-40; 6:14; Genesis 18:32; Exodus 4:3-7)

“And Gideon said unto God, if thou will save Israel by my hand, as thou has said, Behold I will put a fleece of wool in the floor...” (Judges 6:36, 37). Gideon had already witnessed the power of God as a proof of his calling. He had been assured already of the favor and presence of God by an angel of the Lord. Yet, he went ahead to seek further assurance.

We must not, however, be hasty in condemning Gideon in this matter. The assurance which he had received before now had given him strength; he had destroyed the altar of Baal, cut down the grove that was by it at the risk of his life. We should therefore not be surprised that he is seeking a fresh assurance. Many believers would have been spared of shameful defeat if they had sought additional reassurances from the Lord. A lot of mistakes would be avoided if we humble our soul to seek the face of God before embarking on any mission.
The omniscient God knew the condition of Gideon’s heart, hence He granted his request. Though fears and doubts were in the heart of this humble servant of God, he went to God for courage and confirmation. That the Lord granted the request of Bible characters like Abraham, Moses and Gideon shows that “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy” (Psalm 103:8).

Question 5: What lesson can believers learn from Gideon’s request for divine reassurance?

“Putting out a fleece” means asking God to guide in a decision by fulfilling some specific conditions. Those who practice this put a limitation on God. We must note that it is not a scriptural approach to determining God’s will. Our Lord Jesus Christ never adopted it as a method; the early apostles never practiced it. Gideon used it due to his declining faith and limited knowledge of God and the Scripture. The fact that God stooped to Gideon’s weakness only proves that the Lord is gracious; and that He understands our shortcomings (Psalm 103:14). Demanding extra signs was an indication of fear and unbelief on the part of Gideon. Visible signs are unnecessary if they only confirm what we already know is true. Today, the greatest means of God’s guidance is His Word. Unlike Gideon, we have the mind of God revealed to us through the Scripture. All we need is to prayerfully study it to know His mind on any issue (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). We should not allow a fleece to become a substitute for God’s Word.

Question 6: Why should believers not use fleece in determining the will of God?
TEXT: 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

The Corinthian church was bedeviled with many crises such as divisions, carnality, worldliness and incest which Apostle Paul had been addressing in the previous chapters. In this study, the absence of the fruit of the Spirit - peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness and temperance - made them to go before unbelieving judges in the law courts to settle their disputes.

Question 1: Why is it odd for believers in Christ to settle their disputes in the law court?

God is love. He imparts His love to all His children and expects that they should love one another. It is for this reason that He gave His Son to redeem us and empower us to love like Him. While on earth, He prayed that believers would be perfectly united in love because “love worketh no ill to his neighbor” (John 17:21-23; Romans 13:10). Though the Scripture affirms that there would be offences among the brethren (Luke 17:1), God expects amicable settlement since love always prevails. The definition and principles of love have borders which a Christian must not venture to cross if he desires to remain in the will of God.

It is against this background that the oddness of litigation among brethren in the Corinthian church and some churches today can be fully understood. The Christian ideal, if fully imbibed and wholeheartedly practiced, ensures a peaceful interrelationship among the brethren. That is why believers who have God as their Father should not drag themselves before “the unjust” judges in the law courts who have the god of this world as controller of their lives.
THE EXALTED POSITION OF BELIEVERS IN CHRIST:
(1 Corinthians 6:1-3; Ephesians 2:6; Revelation 1:5,6; 3:21; Matthew 19:28; Luke 19:17; 22:30; Daniel 7:22; Revelation 20:4)

Question 2: Is the existence of the judicial system in the society unscriptural?

The phrase “go to law” or “goeth to law” in verses 1, 6, 7 refers to resorting to the magistrates, courts or the judicial systems for arbitration. The Bible does not condemn the judicial system in our society as an instrument for maintaining peace, justice and equity. It also did not condemn a believer seeking redress against unjust treatments from an unbeliever. And should an unbeliever press charges for wrongdoing against a believer, Christ instructs that the believer should be wise and quick at reconciling with the offended (Matthew 5:25; Luke 12:58). The judicial system in a sane society is a means of peaceful settlement, redress and maintaining the peace which is crucial to the spread of the gospel. Note however that the law is made for the lawless; and since believers have the Prince of peace in them, they should not be lawless.

Question 3: Why did believers in Corinth resort to settling their disputes in court?

Litigation among brethren in the Corinthian church stemmed from their ignorance of the truth. They did err for not knowing the truth about their exalted position in Christ. Apostle Paul expounded these truths rhetorically: “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?” (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3).

Redeemed by His blood, believers are made kings and priests unto God. This royalty has conferred on us the privilege of sitting with Christ in the heavenly places now and with Him on the throne during His millennial reign. Saints will also have the privilege of judging the world and angels at Christ’s instance. Then, He will give believers authority to be judges and rulers; and we shall reign with Him. The Scripture declares plainly that after the rapture of the saints, Christ will come back to judge the world
with all His saints (Jude 1:14, 15; 1 Thessalonians 3:13). With this exalted position, it is debasing for saints not to be able to settle “the smallest matters” on “things that pertain to this life” among them but take themselves to court before unbelievers.

That a believer cannot sue another believer in any law court does not connote absence of misunderstanding or offences but the presence and power of the grace of God at work in their lives. Offences come because Christian experiences of believers as well as their knowledge of Scripture are at different levels. Every Christian assembly is composed of matured and immature, sanctified and unsanctified believers. They may also have careless or watchful, prayerless or prayerful believers. Christ, for instance, gave a panoramic view of the spiritual state of every church in every age in the opening chapters of the book of Revelation (Revelations 1-3). Before their sanctification, the twelve disciples manifested misunderstanding, indignation and immaturity. Paul and Barnabas had sharp disagreement and the early church also had a major dispute on the issue of circumcision of Gentile believers. As it were, none of these cases appeared in any secular law courts.

**CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS OF DISPUTES AMONG BELIEVERS** (1 Corinthians 6:1, 5-8; Proverbs 10:12; 29:22; Psalm 15:4; 1 Timothy 6:1-5; Exodus 22:14; 2 Kings 6:5; Proverbs 22:16; Jeremiah 17:11; Ezekiel 22:13; James 5:4; Luke 16:1-7; 1 Corinthians 7:5)

**Question 4: What are the implications of believers settling their disputes in law courts?**

The Scripture reveals hatred, pride, and contentious spirit, unfaithfulness to agreement, defamation, and foolish questions as causes of strife. Among the brethren in Corinth are also found contempt for their leader to whom they should have resorted for settlement. Besides, the offended were retaliatory, insisting on having redress and justice while those who “do wrong, and defraud” the brethren were unrepentant. The problem in the church at Corinth concerning litigation was sparked off by fraud. God’s command is, “Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor, neither rob him: the wages of him that
is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning” (Leviticus 19:13).

Deceit, dishonesty and greed are not virtues but vices that still cause strife among the brethren in many churches today. These works of the flesh show that the believers involved are straying far from godliness. Contrary to the will of God, fraudulent practices such as borrowing money and refusing to pay, returning borrowed item that is damaged without repair, misappropriation of funds, making unjust gain, denial of conjugal rights in marriage, delayed payments, refusal to pay or withholding wages of employees still characterize some professing believers today. These and other fraudulent activities have made affected brethren to take unscriptural actions of litigation. They are however not justified for taking matters involving fellow believers to law courts.

Fraudulent practices and litigations have grave implications in any living church. One, it shows that the world is entering the church. And such an assembly like the Corinthian church will become carnal, lacking spirituality. Two, for believers who profess faith in Christ to go before “the unjust” and “unbelievers” (verses 1, 6) for settlement show the undesirability of their faith to the world. Three, believers involved have given occasion for the church and the name of Christ to be blasphemed. Unresolved disputes and litigation involving brethren bring disgrace and reproach to God. Four, the church where disputes and litigation are allowed to fester will disintegrate (Matthew 12:25). Five, believers are commanded to fight the good fight of faith. But as believers take sides in conflict in the church, they leave the great commission unattended. Six, conflict and litigation leave a bad precedence for future generations. Seven, believers involved in unresolved disputes and those who go to court in defiance of God’s word risk losing heaven except there is repentance.

REBUKE FOR ERRING BELIEVERS IN CORINTH: (1 Corinthians 6:5-8; Proverbs 27:5; Luke 17:3; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:2; 3:16, 17; Titus 1:12, 13; 2:15; Acts 20:28)

In view of the folly of believers resolving their disputes in the court of law, Apostle Paul sternly rebuked the Corinthian
Christians. He said, “I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?” (Verse 5). It was baffling to him that not even a single believer was wise enough among them to adjudicate in their disputes.

**Question 5: What can we learn from the rebuke of errant believers in the Corinthian church?**

Apostle Paul’s rebuke was in line with Christ’s command (Luke 17:3). Believers who sin are to be rebuked openly to serve as deterrent to others. In Scripture, preaching, reprove, rebuke and exhortation always go together. Rebuke leads to soundness in the faith of erring believers through repentance, restoration and restitution. For this desirable outcome, rebuke must be done with all authority; it must be Scripture-based and done in love with the singular aim of ridding the body of Christ of sin and error.

Like Apostle Paul, Christian leaders then must “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2). They must not be tired of correcting sinful practices in any church like Apostle Paul did in almost all the chapters of this book.

**SCRIPTURAL BLUEPRINT FOR SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES** (1 Corinthians 6:1, 4, 5, 7; Galatians 5:22, 23; Luke 17:3, 4; Matthew 18:15-17; Acts 15:1-32; Exodus 18:19-27; 1 Kings 3:16-28)

**Question 6: Explain practical ways of settling dispute among believers in any local church.**

After rebuking them for their unwise decision to seek redress at law courts, Apostle Paul proffered a two-way solution of settling disputes among brethren. Settlement of disputes among believers ought to be “before the saints” who are “wise”; saints who will “be able to judge between his brethren” (verse 1, 5). Paul’s instruction to the church in Corinth is, “If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church” (verse 4).

The second solution was anchored on forbearance, longsuffering and meekness that are supposed to be the hallmarks of Christians. Apostle Paul expresses this
thus: “Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” (Verse 7). The practical implications of this is for the believer to forebear and forego his right if that will foster peace and bring glory to God.

Before Paul’s conversion, there was a dispute among the brethren in the early church because of perceived neglect of some widows in the distribution of food. It was amicably resolved (Acts 6:1-7). When dispute about circumcision of Gentile believers came up and could not be resolved, it was brought before the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. In this particular instance, the apostles referred to the Old Testament scriptures to reach amicable settlement.

Conflict resolution among believers should follow Christ’s blueprint as revealed in Scripture (Matthew 18:15-17). But if the offender remains unrepentant, the church leadership should wade into the matter in order to settle it. With Christ, the church is the ‘supreme court’ for arbitration among believers.

There could also be instances where a brother that is offended is hard to win (Proverbs 18:19). When the offender or offended believer refuses to repent or be appeased, his obstinacy is proof that he has backslidden. According to Christ, such a person should be counted henceforth “as a heathen man and a publican”.

Question 7: What attributes do Christians involved in dispute and those mediating need for peaceful settlement?

Solomon, for instance, demonstrated wisdom in the case of a conflict between two women over a living child brought before him (1 Kings 3:16-28). There are still other attributes needed for settlement of disputes among the brethren. Moses appointed “able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness” to judge matters among the people.

From the foregoing, believers need to cultivate the fruits of the Spirit; pray earnestly for the cleansing of the inbred sin; be Spirit-filled, possess the gift of the Spirit; walk in the Spirit; live in the consciousness of God and rapture; fear God and divine judgment; love and obey God’s word;
commit themselves to following peace with all men and mediating for amicable settlement of disputes among the brethren. The believer must also maintain a reasonable distance in a situation where “any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat” (1 Corinthians 5:11-13). Such could fan the embers of discord with the hope of benefitting from the proceeds of damages from court cases, where it occurs. While believers should devote themselves to studying God’s word, Christian assemblies should give priority to teaching the whole counsel of God so that ignorance of the right biblical steps in handling peculiar conflict situations can be avoided. Believers should seek counselling from mature and spiritual leaders so as to continue to remain in the path of peaceful inter-relationship.

In all, believers must love and not defraud one another; they must forgive one another and apply scripture guidelines in resolving conflict; they must not fan the embers of conflict but be peacemakers. All believers are required to, at all cost, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).
LESSON 618

SANCTITY OF THE BELIEVER’S BODY

MEMORY VERSE: “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

The importance of this study is underscored by the fact that many Christian believers do not understand the sanctity that God attaches to the human body. They are only concerned about the state of their hearts and minds. By their reckoning, once the heart and mind are in good state, there is no problem. But such believers need to know that man is a tripartite being comprising the soul, spirit and body. As a Bible scholar puts it, “Man is a spirit being, he has a soul and he lives in a body.”

Before God, the human body is sacred, and every human being ought to have the same disposition towards the human body. And even if others decide to downplay this fact, it should not be so done by the Christian believer. The Bible states that the human body was created in the image of God, and that the body is the property of the Creator. This implies that man simply has custodial rights to his body, and has no more right to harm or destroy his body than the caretaker has to ransack the building he is hired to maintain. The children of Israel knew that they were not to abuse their bodies or give their bodies over to Satan to use for his glory but only to things that would bring glory to God alone at all times.

Question 1: Explain why the believer’s body should be treated with sanctity.

A careful study of how the human body works shows that the human body is delicate and carefully wired in such a way that everything is interwoven. This, of course, advocates that all body parts should be taken care of in a way that its harmonious working is not disrupted. Bearing this in mind, the believer cannot afford to overlook how he
treats his body. Rather, the believer should be cautious to ensure the sanctity of his body just as he cares for the purity of his heart and the soundness of his mind. Our duties as crowns of God’s creation and as redeemed of the Lord demands that we respect and guard our bodies against harmful and risky activities and imbibe living a healthy lifestyle.

**SALVATION AND FREEDOM FROM SIN** (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5-8; John 3:3-8; 1 Corinthians 3:3; Titus 1:9; Hebrews 12:14; 13:4; Revelation 22:15; James 3:14-15)

The problem of sin is such that man has never been able to find solution to in spite of his ingenuity and technological breakthroughs. While an average sinner may have been able to conquer his environment, he is nonetheless in a fallen state, unable to subdue his sinful passions. He is neither under the guidance of the Spirit of God nor in his right reason. Rather, he is under beastly passions: a worse state than the brute, and unable to conquer his sinful habits. Whatever good works such a sinner does in that spiritual state is nothing but acts of self-righteousness which cannot save him. Being a member of a popular church, a moralist, priding oneself in philanthropic, hospitable or generous activities, having a good report of ‘good works’ in a neighborhood, church or denomination does not atone for past sins.

Though some people have outward form of godliness in dressing, talking or alms-giving, inwardly they are dirty. It should be made clear that as long as an individual still gets involved in sins, he is yet to be saved however religious he claims. None can be saved by his works without faith in the redemptive work of Christ on Calvary. In fact, not depending on the finished works of Christ is akin to biblical labor of the fool. “The labor of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city” (Ecclesiastes 10:15).

**Question 2: What is the place of deception in all of these?**

Paul, the apostle, warns the Corinthian church and by extension the Church today against being deceived: “**Be not deceived**”. He knew the ease of being deceived by the
fact that when a man is involved in one religious activity or the other, he could easily be carried away by such activities. By “be not deceived”, the apostle implies that being deceived is dangerous and that people could easily be deceived by good works. As in the days of Paul, the apostle, the danger of being deceived by false prophets, who are after pecuniary gain is still rife today. Every sin, committed but not repented of, shuts the sinner out of the kingdom of heaven. This is why he warned, “Be not deceived.”

Many people are inclined to flatter themselves that their involvements in religious activities would take them to heaven but they may find that to be untrue too late when they die in sin and go to hell. But the wise should not expect to reap where he has not sown: none can sow to the flesh and hope to reap everlasting life. None can atone for his own sins nor appease God by his own religious efforts. Rather, salvation is entirely the work of God, given by grace and received by faith. To be saved, sinners should forget about what they have done or what they can do because salvation is by faith in Christ. He should just come to the Lord just as he is with a penitent heart.

**Question 3: What is repentance?**

Repentance indicates sorrow for past offences and a full purpose to turn from transgression and lead a holy life. Anyone who claims to be truly penitent has sorrow for sin, not only because it is ruinous to his soul, but mainly because sin is an offence against God.

Repentance and faith are like two legs on which a man stands. Repentance is turning away from all sins. Without repentance, there is no forgiveness. Although we are saved by grace through faith, that faith must be preceded by repentance. However sinful you think you are, the Lord will forgive you the moment you repent of your past sins, and confess those sins and accept Christ as your Lord and personal Savior.

Like the Corinthian believers were warned against returning to past sins, so are believers being warned against their past sins. This is because salvation as a definite Christian experience gives power to live a morally clean life and sets free from the judgment to come.
SELF-DISCIPLINE AND LIMITS OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM (1 Corinthians 6:12-14; 10:23; Romans 6:12; 1 Corinthians 9:27)

“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

The apostle’s concern here is that the gospel be not turned into a means of gratifying self without consideration for others. When some seemingly legitimate act violates the conscience of another or jeopardizes the peace or edification of others, it would make weak minds stumble. So, the mature and knowledgeable believer should refrain from such acts. That the Christian has been forgiven his past sins does not give him license to continue in sin or do anything that will not bring honor to God. True, as a believer and an apostle “all things are lawful” to him, but “all things edify not” (1 Corinthians 10:23). All manner of “meats” are lawful to be eaten because they have been sanctified by the word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:3-5), but not one in an idol’s temple. The apostle opines that though it might not be sin to him to eat anything, if it would hurt the conscience of others, he had better refrained from it.

It is not enough to be forgiven one’s past sins, one must continue in righteousness. “As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:30, 31). It is in continuing in the word of God that Christ-likeness is made manifest. It is only the past sins that are forgiven, not present and future sins.

SANCTITY OF THE BELIEVER’S BODY (1 Corinthians 6:15-20; Leviticus 19:28; 21:5; Deuteronomy 14:1; Jeremiah 16:6)

As believers, holding our lives sacred before God means that we must protect our bodies from harm and do everything possible to take care of any damage that occurs. This includes taking precautionary measures against illnesses by means of vaccination or immunization of ourselves and our children against preventable diseases. It also means that we are required to live a healthy life and to seek
medical care when necessary. According to a renowned Jewish philosopher and rabbi who also doubled as one of the earliest medical proponents of preventive medicine, “clean air and environment, and the value of a healthy diet and exercise”, must be pursued and maintained.

In the same way, believers should, where necessary, undergo medical checkups and treatments because they have the potential to save their lives. It is obvious that believers must avoid cigarette smoking; they should also avoid exposure to second-hand cigarette smoke as much as possible because it is more dangerous and causes sickness and death to third parties.

The Old Testament dispensation forbids tattooing because it mars the body. Tattooing can be likened to graffiti on a magnificent building (Leviticus 19:28). Therefore, tattooing or imprinting figures of flowers, leaves, stars, and other fanciful devices on various parts of the bodies is forbidden because it degrades the body. Historically, printing of marks on the body is a very ancient tradition where people carry marks on the body in honor of the object of their worship. Till this day, all the castes of a certain religion in an Arab country still bear sectarian marks on their foreheads or elsewhere which distinguish them from others, not only in a civil but also in a religious point of view.

Although some people argue that piercing is permitted because it is not a permanent change and will heal if the posts are not continuously kept in place, it should be stated that any kind of piercing is seeking for aesthetics outside the confine of the will of God. Those who argue and claim that they are beautifying God’s creation need to re-examine their motivation: glorification of themselves or God.

In the same vein, other actions like body piercing of earlobes, tongues, noses, eyebrow, or any part of the body for that matter is not permitted because it is like assaulting the sensibility of the Creator who created human beings and, upon review, concluded that “it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).
Suicide and homicide are strictly prohibited in scriptures. This is because they make a man to prematurely destroy the body he is duty-bound to protect (Genesis 9:5). Even physicians are not permitted to accelerate the death of a patient, not only because of his duty to preserve life, but also because he has no right to destroy the property of God. In the same breadth, the life of the unborn child should be held sacred.

**Question 4: Enumerate some ways believers bodies are not treated with sanctity.**

Knowing that our bodies are God’s sacred creation and gift from God, we should accord them the deserved respect and not defile it in any way. Our dressings and appearances are indicative of how precious we hold our bodies. Our dressing is a reflection of what we are on the inside. The watchword of the believer who holds his body sacred is through modesty. Modesty goes beyond a matter of avoiding revealing attire. It describes the attitude of our hearts reflected in the believer’s thought, speech, dressing, and conduct. Moderation and appropriateness should govern all of our physical desires.

Besides dressing, adorning or speech, the Apostle deals extensively with the evil of sexual immorality. Fornication is sexual immorality between two unmarried individuals. He distinguishes it from all other sins because it corrupts both soul and body. Whereas “every sin that a man doeth is without the body;” “he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Most sins are committed by the abuse of other things but fornication involves a defiling, dishonoring and destruction of the body. This act could result into an infection and a contact with a terminal disease. Therefore, he counsels us to “flee” fornication because of the hurt, harm and scandal it brings.

Second, as the temple of the Holy Ghost, our bodies should be preserved from pollution and corruption. As the vessel housing the third Person in the Godhead, nothing should be done to defile it. Third, by virtue of our redemption and the divine ownership on us, we have no right to spoil what does not belong to us.
For everyone who claim to be born-again and Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, “ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20).
LESSON 619

SCRIPTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON MARRIAGE

MEMORY VERSE: “Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 7:1-40

The first epistle of Paul the apostle to the Corinthians was written to correct some anomalies and answer some questions in their fellowship. In the first six chapters, he had dealt with the reports he received on issues of contentions, divisions, immorality and litigation among the brethren. In our text, he began to address the issue of marriage and to offer proper Christian perspective on it in this corrupt world.

One major problem of the Corinthian church was the negative influence of their environment. The general attitudes and opinions of people were putting pressure on their convictions. They also had many unanswered questions on the relatively new Christian faith which they had just received.

On marriage principles, practice and procedures, the scriptures must be the guide, and everything must be done decently and in order. In our text, Paul the apostle, by the Spirit of God sets forth the scriptural perspective on the issues of marriage, celibacy, separation, divorce and remarriage of widows.

DIVINE PRECEPTS CONCERNING MARRIAGE: (1 Corinthians 7:1-9, 25-39; Genesis 2:20-25; Matthew 19:3-12; 5:31, 32; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7)

The Corinthian believers had obviously written to the apostle on marriage and other issues. In answering their questions, the apostle stated the basic precepts and guidelines on marriage for believers. These scriptural guidelines need to be reiterated especially in our present day when the marriage institution is undergoing intense pressure from the secular society.

Question 1: State some basic scriptural precepts on marriage.
To begin with, Paul pointed out that marriage is good and proper for Christians because God ordained it (Genesis 2:18-25). It is His solution to man’s problem of loneliness and lack of a suitable help meet. It is also designed to be a means of procreation, ensuring purity, and deriving pleasure for both husband and wife. In our text, the Apostle emphasizes both the purity and pleasure benefits of the marriage union: “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband” (1 Corinthians 7:2, 3).

While emphasizing the benefits of marriage, the apostle also hints that heterosexual monogamy is the scriptural standard in marriage. That is, marriage should be between a man and a woman, and it should be one-man-one-wife. Every man should have his own wife, and every woman should have her own husband. This prohibits the sharing of a marriage partner, as it happens in polygamy; and also the abominable practice of homosexual marriage.

Another basic precept here is that marriage should be by volition, not by compulsion. The decision to marry or not should be left to individuals. But it should be stated that people should not settle for celibacy until they have prayed and be fully persuaded by the Lord. Moreover, the decision to be unmarried should only be taken after much prayer and proper counselling from mature ministers of God.

In Paul’s day, the issue of whether a Christian should marry or not generated a serious controversy. There were two major reasons for this. One, the persecutions against Christians was intense and to have a family in such circumstances was really a big problem. Two, the popular teaching in some religious circles, as well as the general leaning of society at the time aggravated the controversy. While some eminent Greek philosophers asserted that marriage was a burden and an encumbrance or at best a necessary evil, the Jews with some Greek hardliners considered marriage a compulsory duty which must not be deferred or denied. As a matter of fact, there were places where unmarried people were denied some basic rights such as watching the popular games, receiving any public
honor, speaking to a congregation of married people, and the like. Some Jewish Rabbis even taught that for a man to exceed age twenty without getting married was wrong, and not to marry at all was evil. They based their argument on God’s statement in Genesis. “It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him a help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18). These conflicting opinions, coupled with the fact that Paul himself was unmarried, made the Corinthians ask directly whether it was right to marry or not.

It is required that husband and wife fulfill conjugal rights to one another. In saying this, the apostle used a general word “benevolence” which connotes mutual good will, friendliness, helpfulness, loving kindness, mercy, understanding, gentleness, tolerance, forgiveness and generosity.

Question 2: Explain the meaning and scope of the command to render mutual benevolence in marriage.

Rendering mutual benevolence is not limited to the matter of conjugal union which is the main reference in this context, but it covers every aspect of the marriage relationship. Conjugal union cannot be fulfilling when the basic ingredients of love, friendliness and mutual understanding are missing. God demands that husband/wife should play their roles in a marriage union. Conjugal union is an integral part of the marriage relationship and each couple should work out how to make their marriages fulfill the divine purpose. The union should not be misused or abused by either partner. Denying each other is not advisable. Even on occasions when both partners agree to refrain from conjugal union for a specific purpose, they should come together again to avoid being taken advantage of by the enemy. Christian couples who live far apart as a result of job transfer, business trips, mission work, among others expose themselves and their spouses to serious temptations. The notion that total or prolonged abstinence confers more spiritual power is unscriptural.

THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE (1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 39, 40; Genesis 2:24; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:32; Romans 7:2)
Paul the apostle also emphasizes the sanctity of marriage. He states that marriage should be held as sacred and as such there should be no divorce or remarriage while one’s spouse is living. This is God’s plan and Christ’s cardinal teaching on marriage (Matthew 5:32; 19:6). God hates and prohibits divorce and remarriage (Malachi 2:14-16). His perfect will is that marriage should be a lifetime commitment between a man and his wife to the exclusion of all others. What God joined together should not be put asunder by any man. Breaking up the family unit, for any reason at all, is never God’s intention. Anywhere the cord that binds a couple breaks, individual members of the same family suffer bruises that are hard to heal. This is because hearts are broken and destinies are shattered.

However, there are certain grounds upon which separation may be allowed in a marriage. But these are extreme cases. And even at that, the right to separate does not confer the right to remarry. One of such grounds for allowing separation is when an unbelieveing partner decides to leave the marriage (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). Obviously, this is in reference to a couple who married as unbelievers and one of the partners later got converted to Christ. In such a case, the believer should continue in the marriage if the unbelieving partner agrees to stay; but if, despite all legitimate efforts to make peace, he/she decides to leave, the unbelieving partner should be allowed to go. Now, the question then is: is the believing partner free to remarry a believer after separating from the unbeliever? The plain answer is: “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39). The right to remarry is only conferred upon the death of one’s spouse. Therefore, separation may be allowed but remarriage is not allowed while the estranged spouse lives.

Another ground for separation in marriage is a clause in Christ’s teaching on marriage. “And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery, and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matthew 19:9). But in this context, fornication refers to immorality with another
person before marriage. Among the Jews, after a woman has been betrothed or espoused to a man, even before the actual wedding, she was referred to as his wife. At that stage, if the woman commits fornication, as Mary was erroneously thought to have done, she would be put away by the husband. That was what Joseph planned to do until he was guided aright by God (Matthew 1:18-20). Now, according to Mosaic Law, any person caught in immorality would be stoned to death and that would set the innocent party free to remarry. So, for the Jews who were the primary audience of Jesus Christ, there was no controversy on the matter of remarriage.

However, under the dispensation of grace, the standards are higher. The grace of God cancels the death penalty and rescues the offending party; and it also can enable the innocent party to forgive and forbear. Therefore, when people argue about the right to divorce and remarry, it is a sure sign that, to some extent, we undermine what the grace of God can do. Otherwise, if we allow God’s grace to have its full effect, both the offending party and the innocent can still have a wonderful relationship.

**Question 3: What are the scriptural grounds for allowing separation in a marriage? Does the right to separate confer the right to remarry?**

To buttress the fact that it is not God’s will for men to divorce and remarry, Jesus referred the religious Pharisees to the beginning of the marriage institution. He said, “**Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so**” (Matthew 19:8). God’s perfect will for marriage from the beginning is that a man should cleave to his wife, and the two of them should be one flesh (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:46). Divorce and remarriage while the former partner lives is man’s contraption that is not in consonance with divine directive.

**Question 4: In what sense does the presence of a converted spouse sanctify the unconverted members of the family as expressed in our text?**

In our text, Apostle Paul offered a strong reason why a believing spouse should rather stay in the marriage relationship with an unconverted partner. “**For the**
unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy” (1 Corinthians 7:14). The presence of a believing spouse in the family predisposes the entire household to believe in the Lord. A Christian man or woman who manifests the fruit of the Spirit at home will most likely be an instrument of conversion to his/her spouse. Moreover, the grace of God is sufficient for every believing partner to stay in the marriage.

THE PRIORITY OF SPIRITUAL PURSUITS (1 Corinthians 7:29-35; 1 John 2:17; 1 Timothy 5:5; Matthew 6:33; Luke 10:38-42)

Paul the apostle emphasizes the fact that believers, married and unmarried, should make spiritual pursuits a priority in life. “But this I say brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none...” (1 Corinthians 7:29). Believers should not be bogged down with marriage to the extent that they lose proper focus on heavenly realities. This admonition is especially needful now that many people are backsliding on account of marriage-related issues. The single person who seeks to marry as well as the concerned parents who are anxious that their children get married should put eternity in view and not allow the matter of marriage to distract them from pleasing the Lord. Jesus said that in the days before His coming, many people will be preoccupied with marriage just as it was in the days of Noah (Matthew 24:38). For this reason, believers who are heaven-conscious should be watchful against the tendency to become carnal and unnecessarily worked up when it comes to the issue of marriage. The issues of a marriage partner, wedding, reception, etc. should be handled with eternity in view.

There is a general misunderstanding of Paul’s assertion in verses 32-35 of our text. To a casual reader, it would appear Paul was making a case for celibacy or stating that the married state is inferior to being single. But this is not so. Rather, he points out that marriage confers additional responsibility on a person, and if not properly handled, could become a distraction in our personal walk with God. Obviously, being single does not automatically make a
person more spiritual, neither does being married make a couple less spiritual. What makes the difference is the priority one places on spiritual pursuits and the readiness to make the necessary sacrifice for personal growth in the Lord. At different times, God had used both single and married couples to accomplish His purpose among men.

**Question 5: What is the scriptural counsel to parents on the marriage of their children, widows and widowers?**

The chapter ends with a general counsel to parents over the decision to give out their daughters in marriage. The issue of remarriage of widows and, by implication, widowers was also mentioned. Parents have a major role to play but they should not constitute a stumbling block in the marriage of their children. They should give them all the necessary support, guidance and encouragement in line with the word of God. Then, widows and widowers are free to remarry whom they will, but they must marry believers; and such decision should be taken after much prayer and diligent consideration and consultation.
LESSON 620
LIMITS OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

MEMORY VERSE: “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

In the preceding chapter, Paul the apostle had already treated some issues that cropped up among the Corinthian brethren. They had written to him, seeking clarifications on problems in their church and several questions relating to the Christian faith. In his reply, Paul threw more light on the issue of marriage and other sundry matters.

Our text deals with another sensitive issue in the Corinthian church - the believer’s attitude to “things offered unto idols”. They wanted to know how to handle buying and eating of things that were offered in sacrifice to idols. They wondered if they were participating in the worship of idols by partaking in such meals. It was against this backdrop that the apostle wrote to explain the Christian’s position and what our attitudes ought to be so “...that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:28).

It is worthy of note that the apostle was always on hand to counsel the brethren, answer their questions, address issues bothering them and reveal to them the mind and will of God.

Question 1: What should be the primary responsibilities of Christian ministers to their congregation?

It is the duty of Christian ministers to teach their flock the whole counsel of God and watch against apostasy and grievous wolves that may seek to destroy the flock. It is not enough to win souls for Christ: we must be available to assist them grow in grace, answer their questions touching the doctrines, and clear their doubts and uncertainties through God’s word. Like Apostle Paul, Christian leaders must be ready to take proper care of the sheep entrusted to them and ensure that the congregation is fed and prepared for the coming of the Lord.
ENRICHING KNOWLEDGE OF GOD’S LOVE: THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT (1 Corinthians 8:1-3; Ephesians 3:17-19; Colossians 1:10; 2:6, 7)

The Church at Corinth was peculiar for spiritual gifts, talents and knowledge. They seemed to be ahead of others and were said to “come behind in no gift” (1 Corinthians 1:7). Right as it is to acquire good knowledge, Paul cautioned them not to allow it to lead to pride. This is because “knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth”. The effect of mere knowledge is that it causes men to be proud. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that acting on the basis of knowledge without consideration for other believers could hurt the faith of such saints. Instead, the love of God should be the basis of the true Christians’ actions so that they would not destroy the faith of others in the name of liberty.

The Scripture remains the only source of true knowledge. All the philosophies and ideas of this world cannot replace the knowledge and wisdom that God’s word teaches. As Christians, whatever knowledge we acquire in this world must be subjected to the infallible word of God, and those that negate its standard must be set aside.

Question 2: How can a believer be enriched in the knowledge of Christ?

In answering the Corinthian believers’ question, the apostle to the Gentiles places much emphasis on love (charity) as the defining element in our relationship one with another. The love he refers to here is no less than *agape* - God’s kind of love.

Jesus Christ is the expression of God’s love to humanity. Christ also loved us and gave Himself to us through His vicarious death on the Cross. Through His love, we are saved, separated from the world and sanctified. The more our knowledge about His love, the more we would love others and the greater our consideration for the spiritual welfare of other believers. Apostle Paul understood this better. No wonder his yearning was to “know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10). Christians who fill their head with knowledge without corresponding heart experience, cannot
“know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge...” (Ephesians 3:19).

Question 3: How is the love of Christ revealed to humanity?

God’s grace offers the penitent sinner salvation from sin. And through confession and forsaking of sins, accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, the love of God is shed abroad in his heart. The amount of God’s love in our heart is directly proportional to our obedience to His commandments. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:2, 3).

EXHORTATION REGARDING THE LIMITS OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY (1 Corinthians 8:4-8; 10:19,20; Psalm 115:4-8; Jeremiah 51:17,18)

“As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4). The apostle here addresses the issue at stake specifically. Drawing inspiration from the Old Testament (Isaiah 49:9, 10), he describes an idol as a nonentity, and the pagan ritual of sacrificing to it meaningless. As far as the Scripture is concerned, there is no god but God. Some people may dissipate energy trying to create idols and reverence same, but they are altogether worse than nothing. To the apostle therefore, there is nothing awesome about an idol and what is sacrificed to it.

“Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge...” Not everyone is mature enough to handle this knowledge about idols; not everyone has this understanding; hence, the exhortation to be circumspect and considerate. After all, “charity” that “edifieth” also “seeketh not her own”. For the sake of believers with “weak” conscience, eating meats sacrificed to idols can defile their conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7).

Weakness here is interpreted to mean ignorance; that is, some are unaware of the non-existence of idols. They do not know that beside the Almighty God, there cannot
be any other living god. The result of their ignorance is that they go about believing that an idol god has a real existence. It means that such believers still carry the remains of heathen opinion and superstition.

**Question 4: How can strong believers help the weak brethren?**

Paul the apostle admonishes the strong believers to be mindful of the weak ones in the exercise of their Christian liberty. He maintains that food or meat does not commend us to God; “...for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse” (1 Corinthians 8:8). The believer’s liberty should not be a stumbling block to others. As we interact with one another on daily basis, our actions and inactions should be to glorify God. We must be willing at all times to jettison anything that will not edify other brethren and lead to the glory of God.

The love of God should constrain us to be mindful of believers who are not as spiritually strong and mature as we are. Those who have just given their lives to Christ are babes in the Lord and must be handled as such. We must not do anything that will weaken or cause a shipwreck of their faith. Bearing this in mind, we should care for and nourish them with God’s word until they attain spiritual maturity.

**Question 5: What are the principles that should guide Christian liberty?**

The liberty of believers should be guided by the principle of *What Would Jesus Do?* If others were to follow our example, will it honor Christ or bring reproach to His name? Our liberty should not be used as a license to make others stumble and fall. Paul’s assertion that, “if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend”, is a timeless lesson for all believers. We, too, must weigh our actions in the light of how helpful, useful or expedient they are to others. Some things may appear lawful or legitimate “but all things are not expedient...” (1 Corinthians 6:12). The disadvantages of some actions far outweigh their advantage; hence, they can be avoided. Our characters and conduct should not be repelling; instead, they should serve to attract others to Christ. We
must follow the footsteps of our Master. “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:6).

CAUTION ON SINNING AGAINST THE BODY OF CHRIST (1 Corinthians 8:9-13; Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42; 1 Corinthians 10:14,19-31; Colossians 2:16-22; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:10; Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 5:3)

“But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9). Though Paul’s scriptural submission on the matter of meats is, whether we eat or not makes no difference, brotherly consideration is much more the reason to refrain and abstain from certain actions where such would cause offence against others.

Christian freedom is inseparably tied to Christian responsibility. Some actions may be justifiable and lawful but they may be harmful to others due to their limited exposure or age in the faith. Christian believers should be spiritually sensitive enough to avoid those things that will affect others negatively.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ warns us to avoid offending “one of these little ones which believe in me” (Mark 9:42). He places much premium on the soul. Therefore, we must be careful not to offend believers who are still young in the faith. Heavy judgment is even prescribed for such people. For, “whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

The priority of our relationship and interaction in the household of faith must be to edify one another. In all areas of life, our character and conduct must be Christ-like. “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

Question 6: What areas of life should we edify the body of Christ in exemplary lifestyle and conduct?
There must be a clear distinction between the believer and unbeliever. In conducting Christian marriages, naming ceremonies, burial rites, graduation Programs and other social activities, we must seek Christ’s glory. We must not be found doing whatever is questionable – whether in the secret or in the open. Our love for others and the glory of God will make us exercise our freedom with caution and prudence, lest we become a stumbling block on their way to heaven.
Apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthian Christians on the need for self-denial in the preceding chapter. Lack of this virtue and fruit of the Spirit makes believers extend their liberty beyond the borders of grace. It leads to a life of freedom without responsibility towards fellow Christians who are weak. Apostle Paul revealed that lack of self-control makes knowledgeable believers hurt fellow Christians and sin against the Lord.

In our present study, we are brought face to face with his remarkable example in self-denial for the good of others which the apostle himself practiced as a matter of lifestyle. This noble virtue of practicing what he preached revealed itself while the apostle assayed to respond to questions raised by some in the Corinthian church impinging on his apostolic credentials and rights. It should shock us that a man of such unassailable spiritual stature and indefatigable zeal for Christ should still have some who labored to lessen his character, and that, of all places in Corinth where he bestowed much selfless labor to plant the church (Acts 18:9-11). While we admire the exemplary calmness and eloquence with which the apostle responded to his detractors, we learn not to think it strange or new to be assaulted with unkind insinuation where our goodwill, self-sacrifice and successful labor should have drawn commendation. Paul’s defense turned out to be a lesson in self-denial and an abiding example in ministerial conduct and character.

**Question 1:** What lesson can we draw from the belittling of Paul’s apostleship by some believers in the Corinthian church and his response?
The rhetorical questions which the apostle asked in the early verses of our text and which he tried to answer may have arisen from the words of some in the Corinthian church who suggested that because the apostleship of Paul stood on such unsure ground and is the reason he did not insist on the rights, privileges and maintenance which the other apostles appropriated. They inferred that it was a clear admission of the deficiency of his apostolic credentials that made him refrain from demanding and enjoying the privileges that they consider to be the proof of apostleship. Responding to these notions, the apostle went on to show his high standing on all true apostolic benchmarks. By giving answers to his own rhetorical questions he highlighted the virtues that are the hallmarks of a true apostle and minister of the gospel.

“Am I not an apostle?” (Verse 1). The proof of whether he is an apostle can be found in the answers to the three other rhetorical questions in this verse. Undoubtedly, an apostle is one who has a genuine experience of salvation and is free from both outward and inbred sins. To the question ‘Am I not free?’ he shares his testimony of salvation by grace in 1 Timothy 1:13-16; Galatians 1:13-16; 1 Thessalonians 2:10 that he was one “Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief... Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe”.

Question 2: What are the proofs of true Christian ministers?

Since an apostle is a believer who is commissioned by Christ such as the twelve apostles, it was expected that anyone who claimed to be one have a personal experience of seeing the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21, 22). The question from Apostle Paul then is, “Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?” On this criterion, Paul was eminently qualified as an apostle. On the day of his call, Ananias, a devout man, speaking by the Spirit said concerning him, “The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know
his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:14, 15). His commission was unmistakable and direct from the Lord. On the day of his conversion, the Lord Jesus spoke to him directly: "I am Jesus whom thou persecuted 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 26:15-17).

"Are not ye my work in the Lord?" In answer to this question, the apostle pointed to the success of his ministry among the Corinthians themselves and his spiritual benevolence to them as proof of his apostleship. The truth of his claim in this regard was self-evident. "If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you; for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord” (verse 2). Earlier, many Corinthians turned to God from idolatry and were endowed with spiritual gifts. These were proofs of his apostolic commission since God approves His true ministers by confirming their word and work with the stamp of His power (Hebrews 2:4).

The city of Corinth was a very difficult place to minister. That the apostle accomplished such a great work in it could only have been by divine enablement. A commentator writes: “In the presence of a finished structure that draws the world to gaze, it is too late to ask if he who builds it is an architect.”

In contemporary times, none can claim to be a minister of Christ who does not have a personal spiritual encounter with the living Christ and who does not believe that He “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). Apostles bear witness of His resurrection as those who have been reconciled unto God by Jesus Christ and given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). To this extent, all believers have a ministerial responsibility to the world at large. They must bear testimony of His power of resurrection by their lifestyle of victory over sin and the flesh; for if those who claim to
be ministers of Christ themselves “also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid” (Galatians 2:17).

THE LABOURER’S WAGES OF A TRUE MINISTER: (1 Corinthian 9: 3-14; 1 Timothy 5:2)

After proving his apostleship, Paul went on to assert his authority and right to expect sustenance from the Corinthian church while laboring for their salvation and edification. Though he did not write so that “it should be so done unto” him, he firmly anchored his advocacy of ministerial sustenance and maintenance on five unassailable proofs. “Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard and eateth not the fruit therefore? Or who feedeth a flock and eateth not the milk of the flock?” (Verse 7). He showed, first of all, that it is normal that those who labor in any business should expect a livelihood out of their occupation. It is therefore very reasonable for ministers to expect a livelihood out of their ministerial labors. He also showed that out of the Jewish law. “Say I these things as a man? Or saith not the law the same also?” He maintained that it was in consonance with Old Testament laws in which God ordered that the ox treading out the corn must not have its mouth muzzled or hindered from eating out of its labor while preparing the corn. The apostle reveals that the primary intent of this law was not the ox but to teach men to encourage those who are employed in any service for their good, by adequate remuneration. “He that plougheth should plough in hope and he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.”

The apostle also supported his position from a sense of equity. “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?” (Verse 11). His point here is that what the minister sows to his church or audience (spiritual things) are much higher than what they may reap (carnal things). Should a congregation receive so much good (eternal life) by the teaching and exhortation of a minister and yet grudge about his subsistence and maintenance?

Paul argued further from what they give to others who are not ministers. “If others be partakers of this power over
you are not we rather?” Who had a better claim than Paul from the Corinthian church where he manifested so much apostolic evidence and sincere selfless labor? If the real value of the labor of Christ’s true ministers are rightly evaluated, there could be no question about the need to “esteem them very highly for their works sake” (1 Thessalonians 5:13).

Finally, the apostle relied on the established Old Testament tradition. “Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?” If the Jewish priests were maintained out of the sacrifices then offered, certainly Christ’s ministers should be maintained by their ministry. “Even so hath the Lord ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (verse 14).

Question 3: Give at least 3 cogent reasons why true ministers of Christ should be maintained by those they minister to.

“Nevertheless, we have not used this power, but suffer all things lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ” (verse 12). The apostle must have felt freer to advocate ministerial privileges and maintenance while in the Corinthian church because his custom there was to forego them. When the apostle asked, “Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife...?”, he was using the two words interchangeably, for he would have considered it improper to go about with any sister or any woman other than a wife, not even a woman servant (1 Timothy 5:2). We ought to take notice of the noble spirit manifested by the apostle by his fighting for a cause he believes to be just, though in which he did not intend to benefit. It was here like a warrior who fights for the weak and declines to participate in the spoils of victory. We may degrade our self-denial by a dogmatic insistence that others follow our steps or by sneering at those who cannot follow our heroic examples. On the contrary, Paul rather than dwelling on the merits of his self-denial made it seem as if his self-denial was a duty he had to do in the circumstance in order not to hinder the salvation of some in the church.
Apostle Paul renounced his rights rather than hinder the salvation of souls which he considered his ultimate success and topmost priority. This must be the highest aspiration and purpose of every true minister, and should inform his attitude and priorities always.

Question 4: What should be the highest priority of every Christian and minister of Christ apart from their own salvation?

LIBERTY’S SUBJUGATION TO DIVINE GLORIFICATION
(1 Corinthians 9:16-19 ;)

Though the apostle asserts his right, it was not with the intent to claim them. “But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:15, 16). His reason for vacating his right and liberty is lest “any man should make my glorying void”. This glorying refers to nothing of man’s admiration, applause, blasting or self-conceit but to a higher pleasure arising from a voluntary self-denial which is neither commanded nor compulsory but which enhances success in God-given assignment. It is the glory that is expected from God for a job well-done. He cheerfully relinquished those privileges for the greater success of that which will guarantee glory for God alone.

Question 5: What do you understand to be the “glorying” which the apostle would never part with and why?

We learn that going beyond our duty to make extra sacrifices with a willing and cheerful mind will attract God’s gracious reward. We ought therefore to see our duties under God a pleasure and whatever may impede the successful accomplishment of our objective under the Lord must be jettisoned for the greater reward of the glory which comes from Him (John 5:44).

In his pursuit of glory from God only, the apostle made himself adaptable to various classes of men, with a view to accomplishing the greater glory of and from God. “For
though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain some. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law that I might gain them that are under the law…” (1 Corinthians 9:19, 20). The desire for God’s glorification made the apostle not only willing to forego his rights but to subsume his own preference to his ministerial assignment of soul-winning. As far as he could go, he adjusted his approach to make it effective to reaching different classes and cultures. This is not the same in application with the worldly saying, “when in Rome do as the Romans”. It rather implies accommodating himself with different people wherever he can do so without compromising the standard of the word of God so that he could overcome their weakness or breakthrough their prejudices, to be able to preach to them. It teaches us that a minister who has zeal for Christ’s commission must be resourceful and wise (both virtue received by earnest prayer) so that men’s diverse cultures and norms do not constitute a barrier to the great commission.

Question 6: **Differentiate between Paul’s policy of being all things to all men and the worldly notion of “when in Rome do as the Romans”**.

Finally, the Apostle explains what drives his self-denial and willful self-effacement – the hope of a glorious incorruptible crown. He sees and compares the Christian race with their familiar/Isthmian games in which many people contest but only one wins the prize. “**Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain**” (1 Corinthians 9:24). This was the apostle’s way of encouraging Corinthian believers to steadfastness and perseverance in the Christian race. Unlike the Isthmian race where only one winner is declared, the Christian race admits all who run faithfully, constantly, diligently and perseveringly in the faith to the end. Though there is room for all to win, we must so run as if we aim to outrun our fellows and so win the best prize in heaven. In this, we please the Lord and sharpen the spiritual countenance of fellow believers and achieve the greater glory of God.
Question 7: What lessons can believers learn from comparison of the Grecian race with the Christian race?

“And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible” (1 Corinthians 9:25). The apostles’ message of encouragement is clear: if Greek sportsmen kept themselves to abstract menu and disciplined habits, keeping off some delectable foods, denying bodily appetites all in pursuit of a prize of a bough of withering olive leaves, a Christian ought to much more bring his bodily appetites and fleshly inclination to stricter control for the sake of “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:14).
SPECIAL STUDIES

LESSON 622

THE LORD’S SUPPER

MEMORY VERSE: “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

TEXT: Matthew 26:17-30; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34

Two major ordinances are commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ to be carried out physically by all believers. The first, water baptism, is a once-for-all ceremony symbolizing the believer’s identification with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. This is to be submitted unto after an individual has repented, exercised saving faith in Christ’s atoning blood and received the grace to live a life above sin. The second ordinance is what we have for this study - the Lord’s Supper - a perpetual observance instituted by the Lord Himself and commanded for all born again believers.

Question 1: What are the two major ordinances left by Christ for believers’ observance in the dispensation of grace?

A careful study of the gospels reveals that the most outstanding issues of the Christian faith are those recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John who wrote, each from different perspectives of the Savior’s life. It is important to note that all the four evangelists kept a record of this important event in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides, Paul the apostle who got converted some years after the ascension, had a revelation about this and kept the record (1 Corinthians 11:23, 24).


It was the practice of Christ to observe the yearly Jewish Passover, which was a commemoration of the great deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The ceremony was a pointer to the anticipated vicarious sacrifice of the Messiah. Not much record is kept of these
occasions during the first two years of the Lord’s ministry but the last Passover is of such unforgettable significance that its record rings through the gospels and the epistles.

**Question 2: What is the correlation between the last Passover and the Lord’s Supper?**

The Lord’s Supper was instituted during the course of the Lord’s last Passover with the disciples. This is because there is a correlation between the two. The Passover was kept as a remembrance of God’s great deliverance that brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt. The high point of this momentous event, the Passover, was the slaying of a paschal lamb without blemish which symbolically and typologically occupies the place of a substitutionary sacrifice. This was about three millennia ago. The Lord observed this ordinance more than two millennia ago and reiterated its significance. On that night, He intimated that a Great Sacrifice, the actual Lamb of God who has come to take away the sin of the world would soon be made. He therefore initiated the Lord’s Supper and brought it in the place of the Passover. Henceforth, we are to remember Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice, and that through the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:14-20). Unlike the Passover, the Lord’s Supper is not once a year but “as oft as ye do it” (1 Corinthians 11:25). The Lord’s Supper is to be kept in remembrance of Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice. After Christ’s passion, an end was to be put to the observance of the Passover as with other Old Testament ordinances (Hebrews 10:1, 14-20). The Lord’s Supper is now to be celebrated perpetually by the redeemed in remembrance of the Lord’s death.


**Question 3: What emblems are to be used for the Lord’s Supper and what do they symbolize?**

Two emblems are to be used for the Lord’s Supper, namely, unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. Leaven means yeast. Yeast, from the Old Testament times, has always been symbolic of sin. The unleavened bread is symbolic of the sinless body of Christ “which is broken” for us. It will therefore be wrong to use bread baked with yeast to serve
the Lord’s Supper. However, the unleavened bread is not the actual body of Christ; it is only representative.

The fruit of the vine is symbolic of the blood of Christ which was “shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Jesus gave this to the disciples after He had blessed and given them the unleavened bread. Again, this is representative; it is not the actual blood of Christ. It would be wrong to substitute the vine juice with fermented or intoxicating wine, black currant, any other artificial juices or water. In fact, the fruit of the vine will still be used when we have the supper with the Lord after the rapture at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Matthew 26:29). These are the only two emblems approved for use by the Lord.

Christ commanded the perpetual observance of this ordinance “till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26). And every believer ought to partake of the same on a regular basis (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17). The early church did this (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7). There is, however, no law in the New Testament on the frequency of the observance of the Lord’s Supper by any group or assembly.

**Question 4: What are the purposes of the Lord’s Supper?**

The purposes of the Lord’s Supper are: for remembrance (Luke 22:19); to show His death (1 Corinthians 11:26); and to anticipate His promised return (1 Corinthians 11:26; John 14:1-3). In partaking, believers look upward to heaven, back to Calvary, and forward to His coming and our eternal fellowship with Him (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 5:6-8; Revelation 19:7-9).

**Question 5: How should believers approach the Lord’s Table?**

Basic as the Lord’s Supper is in the church and for the Christian, it cannot be approached carelessly, listlessly or presumptuously. It should always be preceded by a personal preparation just as the Old Testament Passover was preceded by seven-day abstinence of leaven from the home and bread of the Jews. New Testament Lord’s Supper is essentially preceded by a lifetime adherence to holiness and abhorrence of sin and evil. Whoever would
come to the table for the observance of the Lord’s Supper must of necessity examine himself or herself lest he eats unworthily. Whole self-examination – life, conduct, character, word, thought, heart and even motives – cannot be traded off with the zeal to partake at the Lord’s Table. Second, a church whose membership is rife with suspicion, ill-feeling, mudslinging, backbiting, hypocrisy, bootlicking and acrimony should not come to the Lord’s Table without confession, repentance, restoration and renewal.

**CONSEQUENCE OF PARTAKING UNWORTHILY** (1 Corinthians 11:27, 29, 30).

**Question 6: What are the consequences of partaking unworthily in the Lord’s Supper?**

The consequence of partaking at His table unworthily is disastrous both on the church and her individual membership. “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (1 Corinthians 11:27, 29, 30).

First, the irreverent partaker is guilty of violating the sacredness of the institution of the Lord’s Supper. He is guilty of despising the body and blood of Christ. He profanes the ordinance and in that respect crucifies the Savior once again. And instead of being cleansed and healed by His blood, he is guilty of it. This is a contract with death and doom. It is sowing in the flesh, and reaping corruption. It is a great hazard he courts: he eats and drinks judgment and damnation unto himself. He provokes God and will, doubtlessly, bring punishment upon himself.

Sad enough, the punishment could take the form of death – physical, spiritual and eternal. And in its mild form, it could be sickness or infirmity. “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (1 Corinthians 11:30).

Should this divine ire against irreverence deter fearful, holy and earnest believers from attending at this holy
ordinance? Certainly not. Watchful, waiting and holy Christians are encouraged to attend the Lord’s Table and enjoy the blessings thereby but not without examining themselves.

**SELF-EXAMINATION BEFORE PARTICIPATION** (1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5).

“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28). Self-examination includes trying and approving oneself in the mirror of the word of God. In this wise, the communicant should consider the sacredness of this holy ordinance and compare his own thought, conscience, motive and general lifestyle. Such self-examination is both necessary and helpful when the Christian is contemplating participating in Lord’s Supper.

For the worthy communicants and churches, the blessings are numerous. The ordinance brings unity and love among believers and in the process stifles division and strife (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17). The Lord’s Supper, when administered with all its spiritual import, brings the fullness of life and grace to communicants. The benefits procured by the death of Christ and all other gospel benefits are refreshingly delivered again by the remembrance evoked at the Lord’s Table. If eating unworthily attracts sickness, certainly true believers who worthily go to the table will receive healing, health, spiritual vitality and other blessings.
LESSON 623

PATTERN OF SCRIPTURAL GODLINESS

MEMORY VERSE: “In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing incorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you” (Titus 2:7, 8).

TEXT: Titus 2:7-10

Apostle Paul instructed Titus to teach different categories of people in the church the lifestyles expected of them. His message was painstaking, pungent and panoramic.

Sequel to this, the great apostle, in our text, charges Titus, the pastor of the church in Crete, to set the pace and lay the example for others to follow. As a minister of the gospel, he must match his morals with his message. Else, he would pull down with one hand what he spent years to build with the other.

Paul seems to say: “Titus, you may be a dynamic, eloquent and persuasive preacher but, if you labor hard to teach sound doctrine without backing it up with your own life, your preaching will be ineffective. Paul himself had striven to follow this pattern all through his ministry. Reflecting on his life, he told the Philippian Christian: “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example” (Philippians 3:17).

Question 1: In your own opinion, why was Paul bold enough to instruct Titus on exemplary living?

EXAMPLE TO THE WORLD (Titus 2:7, 8; Matthew 11:29; Acts 20:35)

Paul the apostle held the issue of Christian character and integrity in high esteem. He had little or no room for those whose lives are diametrically opposed to their profession and teaching. He lived the Christian life and saw himself as a pattern worthy of emulation. To Timothy, he confidently testified: “But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life...” (2 Timothy 3:10). His manner was
consistent with his message. Expectedly, he knew Titus would not make the desired impact if he did not conduct himself well before the saints. “In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing incorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you” (Titus 2:7,8).

On account of Titus’ position in the church, he must be ahead in practicing these things, if he expects the virtues of sobriety, temperance, charity, patience and godliness in his members. To instruct others in the specifics of their responsibilities is good and commendable, but the example of the teacher is more important. Good life must tally with good doctrine. In all things, Titus, and by extension, all believers must show themselves models of good works. Men are wont to say: “we are not perfect; therefore we cannot live holy”. This is not scriptural. Every New Testament saint is expected to be perfect even as his Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

Every Christian must be a pattern of good works. Goodness, as we know it, is a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit. Christians must be good to one another and to those outside the church. In all we do, we must have good purpose and esteem the good of others. Believers are to be beautiful specimens of the grace of goodness.

Moreover, Titus is admonished to teach the whole counsel of God while maintaining purity. Corruption of the Word, frivolity and shallowness in doctrine and teaching will not make the desired impact. Rather, sincerity, singleness of purpose and commitment to truth, must underline his ministry.

The calling of the servant of God is not secular; it is not meant to be used as a cloak to make merchandise of people but to highlight the glory and honor of God. Our speech must be sound, devoid of the fallible human knowledge. Scriptural truths must be explained in scriptural terms and, as much as possible, in Scripture language.

The idea of being examples to the world and the Church runs through the length and breadth of Paul’s writings. In his valedictory sermon to the Ephesians, he said: “I have
shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). And to the Thessalonians, he wrote: “For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you” (2 Thessalonians 3:7). Jesus Christ, the greatest Teacher and Example, also told His disciples to follow Him. “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15).

Question 2: Why must Christian leaders be at the forefront of uprightness?

EFFECTS OF EXEMPLARY LIVING (Titus 2:5, 8; Philippians 3:17; Luke 20:20, 26; Roman 2:24; 2 Samuel 12:14; 2 Peter 2:2)

“To be discreet, chaste... that the word of God be not blasphemed. Sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you” (Titus 2:5, 8).

It is pretty good to preach the gospel, read the Bible and give out tracts and literature to others but our priority should be to be specimens of the Bible in life and conduct. The fastest way to destroy our sermons and doctrines is to contradict them by our lives. What we spend an hour or two to preach, we live the rest of our lives. Our adversaries constantly seek occasion to find fault with us that they might hold us in derision and contempt. This was why, the apostle, on two occasions, gave Titus reasons why the believer must live righteously (verse 5, 8).

David was favored as a man after God’s own heart, but because he erred in a matter of morals, he gave the enemies of God opportunity to speak blasphemosly: “Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die” (2 Samuel 12:14).

The critics of Jesus’ day also kept vigil on Him to seek occasion to accuse Him: “And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority
of the governor” (Luke 20:20). But they failed woefully (verse 26). Our lives preach more powerfully than our precepts and sermons. Majority of the unbelievers do not have a copy of the Bible but can well read the epistles in us. If we live true to our vocation, skeptics will not have occasion to blaspheme the worthy name by which we are called. “For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:15). Finally, they will lack grounds for their evil allegations.

Question 3: What impact does a godly life make on the world?

EXHORTATIONS TO THE GODLY (Titus 2:9, 10; Matthew 16:24; Ephesians 6:5-8; Hebrews 3:1; 1 Peter 2:21)

“Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things” (Titus 2:9,10).

The apostle, here, charges servants in all categories to be obedient to their masters according to the will of God. They are to render service to their masters as unto the Lord. “Not with eye service, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; 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 6:6-8). They are not to steal but to elevate honesty and faithfulness which bring glory to God. This same admonition applies to every servant of Christ.

Question 4: As servants of Christ, what should be our attitude in service?

Christ calls Himself our Master: “But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ” (Matthew 23:8, 10). He has chosen, called and commissioned us to love one another (John 13:35). Moreover, we are mandated to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). As servants of
Christ, our will, time and substance must be placed at the Master’s disposal and use. Servants of Christ should be obedient to Him.

In upholding and demonstrating scriptural godliness, Christ remains our perfect Example. He is the spotless Son of God, worthy of our whole-hearted imitation. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). In spite of difficulties, we must exalt godly living above all things. Our light must shine enough for God’s name to be glorified. “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Question 5: Who is our perfect example in godly living and how can we be like Him?
LESSON 624  
SOWING AND REAPING  

MEMORY VERSE: "But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly: and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 9:1-15; Malachi 3:8-12; Galatians 6:7  

The teaching of the Scriptures on sowing and reaping is clear. The believer who sows will reap; if he fails to sow, there will be nothing to reap. If he gives to God, he will reap, not just what he has given but more. Somebody puts it this way: "When I shovel to God He shovels back to me". Prophet Malachi puts it another way: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse ... and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10).


There have been inspiring testimonies in the Bible and in contemporary times of people who have been blessed as a result of giving unto God. The practice of tithing and offering is more than a duty that one does mechanically. A business enterprise does not expect a bank to pay interest on money that was not deposited with it. Yet, some Christians expect God to bless them financially when they are not committed to Him financially. Many sing: “Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold”, only to be reluctant each time they have opportunity to demonstrate their love and commitment to God.

In the economy of God, to receive, we must give. The mistake made by man is to want to receive without attempting to give. Many people desire and pray for prosperity but refuse to make use of the divine key to enjoying prosperity - sowing.

Just like farmers who expect to reap must sow, so also believers who expect to reap blessings of prosperity must
sow by giving to God. Paul the Apostle said, “Let every one of you lay by him in store...” No member of the church is excluded. If we sow, we shall all reap.

Giving is like investing in God’s bank and it is indeed a spiritual sacrifice that brings fruit into the account of the giver. God is interested in your material needs. When you give to God, you reap untold blessings from Him. He says, “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:11, 12).

Question 1: In what ways can one give to God?

Although God is in heaven, He works actively among men. We may not see Him physically, but we know that the work of the gospel is His major concern on earth. The local church or Christian ministry is synonymous with the storehouse in the Old Testament. We can gladden the heart of God today by entering into partnership with Him and giving our tithes and offerings regularly so that there will be meat “in my (His) house.” Evangelistic crusades, Christian literature, church projects and other evangelistic ventures are carried out by the church. God will not send funds from heaven in order to advance His cause on earth. He expects His people to “play” the role of His partners on earth. He rewards those who are faithful.

We must obey the word of God if we want Him to prosper us. There may be economic depression all over the world, God still showers prosperity on those who adhere to the divine blueprint for financial prosperity. In Deuteronomy chapter twenty-eight, prosperity, wealth and abundance are promised to the obedient. “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God” (Deuteronomy 28:1, 2). God has not promised that blessings of prosperity will
come to you in small measure, but that they will overtake you. What a blessing!

Just as God will bless the obedient, the word of God clearly reserves curses for the disobedient. “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee” (Deuteronomy 28:15). Can this be true? Read the words of Prophet Malachi: “Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me...” (Malachi 3:9). To prosper financially, you must obey the word of God on giving.

**Question 2: Why is it necessary to give bountifully to God?**

What is the secret of prosperity? Giving. What is the essence of Biblical giving? Biblical giving centers on the ability to earn material resources and the willingness to use these resources for the maximum benefit of the Kingdom of God. God’s material and financial assets have been put in the believers charge and he is called to give out of them for the progress of His work on earth. This kind of giving is over and above the tithe.

All Bible believers must cultivate the habit of giving. Jesus said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). One does not get into prosperity by hoarding. Have you ever wondered why many dear saints of God are ever incurring debts and finding it difficult to be balanced financially? It is because of their failure to give. “There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself” (Proverbs 11:24, 25).

How are we sure that we shall reap when we give to God? Here is a divine assurance. “…prove me now herewith saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven” (Malachi 3:10). Prove God and you will experience overflowing financial prosperity. Your obedience and faith will attract bountiful harvest. What you give to God (in tithe and freewill offering) will be returned to you in full and overflowing measure.
Question 3: Explain the law of sowing and reaping.

**MANNER AND MOTIVE OF SOWING** (2 Corinthians 9:7, 8; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Proverbs 11:24, 25; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7)

God blesses both our manner of giving and motive when we give. Giving should not be done reluctantly but cheerfully. Giving is one of the greatest challenges of the Christian life and one of the greatest privileges that we enjoy as believers. However, many are yet to discover the great potential in giving. The church often runs short of money because of lack of giving on the part of the members. Church projects and evangelistic outreaches are often abandoned, delayed or hindered as a result of lack of funds. Why is this so? It is because many are yet to understand the Bible doctrine of stewardship and the biblical principle of giving. Lack of money is not the problem, but a lack of clear understanding of our responsibilities as stewards of God’s money.

Ministers of the gospel who have surrendered their lives for the spiritual benefit of members of the church should be supported. The missionary outreach of the church should also be supported. This is only possible if we give heartily and continuously. A proper estimate of the benefits that we enjoy from a faithful ministry and a true Bible church should propel us to give cheerfully. It is no secret that spiritual benefits cannot be really quantified. The only way of showing appreciation for what God is doing in and through the church is to give sacrificially, cheerfully and consistently towards the progress of His work.

According to our text, our giving should be characterized by bountifulness. Giving should be done with an open, generous heart and a willing mind. The metaphor of the harvest implies that the more generous the gift, the greater will be the return. Bountiful sowing attracts bountiful reaping. God will bless you materially when you give to Him. He will also bless you spiritually. “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things may abound to every good work... Being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God” (2 Corinthians 9:8, 11). Other benefits of giving include being loved of God “…for God loveth a cheerful
giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Also, the Pastor and other ministers of God will glorify God for your liberality and their prayers for you will bring great blessings and they will “glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you” (2 Corinthians 9:13, 14).

Giving is not measured by the amount of money you give. In spite of their poverty, the Macedonian believers gave to the Lord: “How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality” (2 Corinthians 8:2). There were cases of individuals who made pledges to God without really knowing how to fulfil the pledge but soon found that God gave abundantly above what they even pledged. And they were able to pay their pledges. God is faithful. And giving is a venture of faith.

The Bible says, “Let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him…” (1 Corinthians 16:2). Does God expect a wealthy believer to pay his tithes? How about those who have little or no money? The unchanging word of God is the same for all and sundry: “Let every one of you lay by him in store.” Whoever you are and whatever your position, make conscious effort always to pay your tithe promptly. Those who are poor are not exempted from giving and the rich too should make conscious efforts to give - we should all give.

Question 4: What are God’s conditions for giving and to what extent can a believer give?

BENEFITS OF SOWING (2 Corinthians 9:8-11; Malachi 3:10-12; Luke 6:38)

Liberal and cheerful giving, though, may be forgotten by the giver - who may not “let his left hand know what his right hand doeth” - it is never forgotten by God. Those who see giving as a pleasurable act rather than a painful act will reap abundant fruits. The short-sighted always feel that giving means losing, and that saving in the bank or some other way, means gaining. But the Bible says, “There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it
tendeth to poverty” (Proverbs 11:24). Those who sow little will reap little. The niggardly farmer reaps a lean, scanty harvest. A reluctant, miserly giver will reap a lean harvest. It becomes clear therefore that, in the providence of God, liberality in giving is the way of prosperity.

If God expects you to give, then you need to give priority to giving to Him, as you draw your budget week after week or month after month. You must cultivate the habit of giving to God first, before you start spending on your personal or family needs. “Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first firsts of thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty...” (Proverbs 3:9, 10). God expects you to give the first fruits of your income or gain to Him. In practical terms, that means you give to God before you start spending what God has given you. Many people who are convinced and are willing to give, often fail to pay their tithe and offerings. This is because they often want to delay their giving a little bit and, before they know it, some other pressing expenses crop up and so they find it difficult to fulfill their financial obligation to God. “First-fruits” giving is the biblical pattern of giving. Give to God first. Get into the experience of giving to God today and He will give unto you “good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over...” Remember, what you sow is what you reap. Give to the Lord and in so doing, plant the seed so He can bless it and multiply it back to you many times.

Finally, expect a miracle. Believe that the windows of heaven will be opened and God will pour blessings of prosperity on you. Have you ever heard of a farmer who labored tirelessly but refused to gather the proceeds at harvest time? That would be strange. As you give, expect God to give you. “...Prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10).

THE LIFESTYLE OF THE SOWER (Hosea 10:12; Matthew 5:23-25)

One fundamental principle of acceptable giving is righteousness. For God to receive your tithe and offering, you must first give your life to Him. If you are a sinner or
backslider, you must repent of your sins, confess them to God, forsake them, and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and personal Savior. Otherwise, God will not delight in your giving, and He will not reward you. “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8). God loves your soul more than your substance. He does not take delight in the sacrifice of fools. Saul believed more in sacrifice rather than in obedience to God’s word and he lost everything, including his life. “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). Your sacrifice and your heavy fats of rams burning with enticing aroma cannot please God. They are an abomination to the Lord if you are still living in sin and trespasses. Give your life first, then give your substances to the Greatest Giver.

Question 5: What is the most important thing you can give to God, and why should it be given first before anything else?
OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

LESSON 625

DIVINE TEST FOR GIDEON’S ARMY

MEMORY VERSE: “And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go” (Judges 7:4).

TEXT: Judges 7:1-15

The previous chapter concluded with Gideon’s test to confirm God’s promised victory in the impending battle. But this study focuses on God’s test to determine the size and composition of the army required for the battle. The text presents us an army mobilized by Gideon to confront the Midian-led coalition who had come not merely to plunder, as at other times, but to crush and destroy the entire nation.

The enemy army was so large, numbering at least 135,000, whereas all the Israelite volunteers were only 32,000 (Judges 7:8; 8:10). The obvious disadvantage of this notwithstanding, the Lord decreed that Gideon’s army should be reduced. In spite of this, Gideon displayed rare courage as he cooperated with God all the way.

THE PURPOSE OF DOWNSIZING THE ARMY (Judges 7:1, 2; Deuteronomy 20:1-4; 1 Samuel 14:6; 2 Chronicles 20:15-29; Psalm 20:7, 8; 33:16-22)

Having been assured of God’s commitment to the success of the impending military campaign by the result of his fleece tests, Gideon’s army “rose up early...” (Judges 7:1). This is evidence of diligence, passion and a sense of responsibility. It reminds believers of the scriptural admonition against sloth and the call to diligence in ministerial as well as personal business (Proverbs 31:15; Romans 12:11). This enviable commitment of the army notwithstanding, the Lord decreed that the size be pruned.
Question 1: Why did God decide that Gideon’s army must be reduced?

The purpose of the divine instruction to downgrade is so clear. “And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me” ( Judges 7:2). The Lord could see the tendency in the Israelites to attribute the glory of a successful battle to themselves or their human heroes (1 Samuel 18:6, 7). Obviously, God did not want a repeat of such a situation. He wanted His people to realize that He was their Source of victory in the battles of life. Therefore, as believers, whenever we secure any victory or breakthrough, we should ascribe all the glory to God without whom human efforts would amount to nothing (Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 3:5-7; Colossians 1:16-18). God will not share His glory with anyone, and for this reason, He often removes every prop of human confidence from the man He uses so that the Excellency of the power will be of God and not of man (Isaiah 42:8; 2 Corinthians 4:7).

The command to reduce the number of soldiers was also to teach the Israelites to rely only on God for their victory and to make them realize that “there is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength” and “there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few” (Psalm 33:16; 1 Samuel 14:6). In view of the outcome of the battle, it was also to instill confidence in the heart of God’s people in every generation that no matter how tense or trying a situation is, trusting God brings definite victory.

Question 2: What challenge can we receive from Gideon’s response to God’s command to downsize his army?

Gideon’s response is an example to contemporary Christians. He neither overtly nor covertly argued with God. Rather, he instantly complied with divine directives. Evidently, he had control over any apprehension such a situation could evoke, and he was ready to obey God and leave the consequences to Him. Firstly, His implicit submission challenges us to always acknowledge the
superiority of divine intelligence as may be reflected in instructions or guidance we may receive from God’s word directly or through His appointed Christian leaders (Haggai 1:12-14).

Secondly, Gideon’s disposition teaches Christian leaders to always submit to God’s input in the recruitment process for ministerial assignments. Also, each contemporary church worker must reckon himself as God’s choice for specific responsibilities and should therefore serve faithfully to accomplish the divine purpose for his life.

Thirdly, Gideon’s comportment reveals his faith in the infallibility of the Almighty. Like Him, Christians must avoid the presumptive tendencies that tempt people to succumb to faithlessness and self-management.

The secret of Gideon’s confidence was obvious. Between the time of his call and the time he became an army commander, he had series of spiritual experiences which changed him from a timid to a confident personality, aided his consecration, prepared him for the Spirit-assisted ministry, and helped in confirming God’s promised victory in the battle ahead. This shows that sound Christian experiences enhance a believer’s level of faith and fruitfulness. Therefore, a Christian should not only maintain right relationship with God, but also constantly seek to improve on it. In contemporary times, this can be achieved by employing every scriptural means – personal study, prayer, corporate fellowship, attendance at specially organized church Programs, seeking counselling from mature leaders, and consistent obedience to all the counsels of God – to aid spiritual growth and development (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 10:25).

PROCESS OF DISENGAGING THE ARMY (Judges 7:3-8; 2 Chronicles 19:6-7; 2 Timothy 2:3-5)

“Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand” (Judges 7:3). The divine directive to reduce the size of the army specifically and progressively dictated the test forms as well as the grading guide. This was to ensure that the disengagement would
not be done arbitrarily: the fate of every volunteer soldier was to be determined through verifiable criteria.

The first was a self-assessment test. It was an application of the last scriptural condition for exclusion from warfare – “…What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren’s heart faint as well as his heart…” (Deuteronomy 20:8).

From the position of Gideon’s army by the well of Harod, they had a clear view of the enemies in the valley of Jezreel. The sheer numeric size and artillery doused the patriotic zeal of many volunteers; the anticipated outcome of the encounter quickly replaced their earlier confidence with instant paralyzing fear. Consequently, twenty-two thousand soldiers opted out. But their fear was needless given the abundant records of supernatural interventions on behalf of God’s people and promises of divine assistance in such situations (Exodus 14:5-7,13-16,26-31; Deuteronomy 20:1-4).

**Question 3: How can one be free from fear?**

Fear could be an indication of spiritual weakness owing to an absence of right relationship with God (Proverbs 28:1). To be free from its effects requires repentance, restitution and consistent righteous living. On the other hand, a standing believer can neutralize fear by faith. This can be cultivated by hearing, constantly meditating, refusing to doubt, and contending for the sanctity of the word of God. Faith can be carefully built up by prayer, consciously refusing to walk by sight and trusting in the invincible God in every battle (Romans 10:17; Joshua 1:8; Matthew 21:21; Jude 3; 2 Corinthians 5:7). With faith in the heart, a child of God has no cause to fear in the course of God-appointed assignments.

Given the antecedents of the children of Israel, those who passed the faith test were very few. In spite of this, God still declared the number too large for the operation; therefore, He recommended another test to further reduce the number. The second test was quite simple: “…bring them down unto the water…” to drink (Judges 7:4). As simple as this appears, 97 percent failed it. Like the vast majority of these soldiers, many others like Lot’s wife, kings Saul and Joash, etc. have failed divine tests (Genesis 19:22-26;
2 Kings 13:14-19). However, a good number of believers like Abraham, Job, Daniel and his three friends, etc. have passed tests and trials which God permitted in their lives (Genesis 22:2-13; Job 1:13-22). This indicates that the outcome of a test is not as dependent on its nature as on the character of the candidate. To be victorious in life trials, every believer must maintain Christ-like character and firm confidence in God’s promises at all times.

**Question 4: What can Christians learn from the condition for the final selection?**

The condition for the final selection was to lap at the water instead of bowing down upon the knees to drink. This emphasizes the importance of discipline and vigilance as credentials of a good soldier of Christ (2 Timothy 2:3-5).

**COURAGE THROUGH DISCERNMENT (Judges 7:9-15; Psalm 37:34-38; 56:3, 4; Acts 15:36-38; Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Timothy 4:11)**

The prospect of 300 men confronting such a large army could be disheartening. Yet, Gideon did not betray any feeling of uneasiness. This is because he could discern God’s involvement in the matter, and he was convinced that the result would turn out for his good and the praise of God. Therefore, having finally selected the three hundred soldiers by divine guidance, he sent others back to their homes, not minding any unpleasant reaction that might result from his decision because he was sure God was involved. Christians are thus challenged to always keep faith in God’s promises and power in spite of seemingly unfavorable conditions. Also, those who were sent back did not manifest any sign of rebellion or strife; they went back peacefully.

**Question 5: What lessons can we learn from the comportment of the disengaged volunteer soldiers?**

Like Gideon their leader, the disengaged soldiers could discern God’s involvement in the whole process. So, they went back without grumbling or lobbying. Their exit glorified God rather than vilified them. Contemporary believers who miss opportunity of spiritual service as a result of divine preference of another person should not engage in petty jealousy or feel consigned to failure.
Rather, the experience should lead them to enhance their qualification and usefulness at other times. They should also render every physical, financial, moral and spiritual support to aid the success of God’s Program through whoever He chooses (1 Samuel 23:16-18; 1 Chronicles 29:2-12).

“And it came to pass the same night that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand. But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host... and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant...” (Judges 7:9-11). Gideon was not superhuman; he had his own natural apprehension. But God did not leave him in that condition. Following God’s leading, he went in company of a trusted servant, heard the divinely initiated dream as well as its inspired interpretation and rightly discerned it as a revelation of the enemies’ already-defeated mindset. Thus encouraged, he praised the Lord and immediately proceeded with his army to obtain the divinely determined victory for his nation. Like Gideon’s army, the New Testament church can always count on divine support in its fight against enemies of the gospel. When believers are able to discern the move of God and cooperate fully with Him, much progress will be made in the course of gospel work (Acts 16:9, 10).

God’s tests in the text actually applied to Gideon first. If he had succumbed to doubt, the whole army would have failed to actualize God’s plan and the nation would have suffered for it. This then places a great responsibility on those in leadership positions to always allow God have His way. It is as this becomes the norm that others will be able to follow God’s Program and enjoy His blessings in full.
LESSON 626

GIDEON DEFEATS THE MIDIANITES

MEMORY VERSE: “Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us” (Psalm 44:5).

TEXT: Judges 7:16-25

In the earlier verses of this chapter, Gideon gathered an army to fight the Midianites. With an inspired strategy, the Israeli army used unconventional weapons and methods to scare and scatter their enemies, who in confusion slew one another. Divinely assisted, Gideon’s three hundred men defeated the over one hundred and thirty-five thousand Midian-led army. The victory shows the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His promise, the commendable cooperation of the Israelites and the courage of God’s people in the capture and execution of two fleeing Midianite princes. The whole episode shows that if we must win life’s battles, we must not dread the enemy, no matter how formidable they appear to be; neither must we depend on carnal weapons.

DIVINE STRATEGIES FOR CONQUEST IN BATTLE (Judges 7:16-18; Joshua 8:3-8; 1 Samuel 17:38-40, 45-50; Psalm 20:7; Proverbs 20:18; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Question 1: Why is it important to follow God’s strategy and leading in the battles of life?

Following the divine plan, Gideon divided his already whittled-down army of 300 into three equal groups each. One wonders what 300 soldiers were to accomplish against 135,000 allied forces of the enemy (Judges 8:10). But God who is always wiser, dictated the weapons to be used namely: empty pitchers, lamps and trumpets. These are feeble means by human standard to accomplish great victory for the people but God said, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

God showed that the battle belonged to Him and He inspired
the strategy to be used. Every battle has its own strategy and weapons. Believers can always secure victory over enemy forces by employing divine strategies and spiritual weapons. The lamp was hid in the empty pitcher until the appointed time when the pitcher was broken to reveal the lamp. The trumpet was also blown at the appropriate time. Though these were not conventional weapons of war, God used them to grant His people victory. The strategy of Gideon depicted a brilliant use of the elements of surprise attack and sudden fear to destabilize the enemy. As a matter of fact, the use of appropriate strategies in warfare is a common feature in scripture. Examples are that of Joshua against Ai and David against Goliath.

**Question 2: Itemize the factors that aided Gideon’s victory.**

Apart from the use of appropriate strategy, Gideon and his army won the victory as a result of leadership example that inspires confidence. Gideon led by showing example in time of war. He said, “look on me, and do likewise... as I do, so shall ye do”. As leaders, we must radiate faith and confidence in the face of challenges to inspire and encourage the people of God to confront their challenges (verse 17).

There was also unanimity that generated concentration. The soldiers were unanimous in their operation; they focused on the leader and did exactly what they saw him do. In the early church, when believers prayed with one accord, they had boldness and courage to forge ahead in spite of severe persecution.

The unanimous action of the people was an act of obedience. It was this obedience to divine instruction revealed through the leadership of Gideon that brought the victory. Believers must obey instruction from their spiritual leaders. We also see confession of faith by the people. They confessed with one voice, “the sword of the LORD, and of Gideon”. In the face of challenges, believers must base their confession on the word of God and not feelings or human opinions. The recognition of divine-human partnership in overcoming the enemy is another valuable lesson we learn from Gideon’s campaign against the foes. They depended absolutely on “The sword of
the LORD...” and carried out their own responsibilities represented by the sword of Gideon.

DILIGENT STEPS FOR CONQUEST IN BATTLE (Judges 7:19-23; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6; 1 Samuel 17:48-51; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 6:14-17)

“And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, the sword of the LORD, and of Gideon” (Judges 7:20).

Question 3: Explain why time is essential for Christian warriors. Give examples of saints who waited for the appointed time and the results of their onslaught.

God’s 300 soldiers led by Gideon came against the Midianites at God’s timing; in the beginning of the middle watch, when “...they had but newly set the watch”. Bible scholars affirm that the change of watch is the time when there is greatest confusion as it is difficult to know who is in charge in case of emergency. Besides, at such time, it is easy to catch soldiers off guard because they tend to relax. There is a perfect timing for every purpose (Ecclesiastes 3:1). It is great wisdom to wait for God’s time in every endeavor of life, for it is then we can confound the enemy and take the victory. David had to wait for “the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees” before smiting the host of the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:23, 24). Jesus refused to be rushed into performing the miracle that turned water to wine (John 2:1-11). Paul was initially restrained from going to Asia and Bithynia but later he had a fruitful ministry in the same Asia (Acts 19:9, 10).

To gain victory, the soldiers blew the trumpets, broke their pitchers, beamed the light of the lamp and shout, “The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon”. This scenario created bewilderment and confusion in the camp of the enemy and so they fled. To conquer evil forces and extend Christ’s kingdom on earth, Christians must ‘blow the trumpet’ of the gospel. The Israelites had no visible sword but they believed in the invisible sword of the Spirit and confessed it. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit. Our victory in life’s battle is guaranteed with the confession of faith in His word. The Scripture affirms that
we shall have whatsoever we confess with our mouth (Mark 11:23). Gideon and his army manifested the steadfastness of courage as “they stood every man in his place and about the camp” (Judges 7:21a). God took over the battle and set the enemy against one another. God, not Gideon, is the Hero of this victory. In every age and any assembly where Christ is put at the center, the enemy camp cannot stand. If we will proclaim Christ in every nook and cranny of our community and engage in constant spiritual warfare against the host of darkness, it is certain that God will grant us victory.

**DESIRABLE SUPPORT FOR CONQUEST IN BATTLE**
(Judges 7:23-25; 5:9, 23; 2 Samuel 10:11; Exodus 17:11-13; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20)

“And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali and out of Asher, and out of Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites. And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, come down against the Midianites and take before them the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan. Then all the men gathered themselves together and took the waters of Beth-barah and Jordan” (Judges 7:24).

Fear and confusion gripped the Midianites. They fled and were discomfited. Other men of Israel who were not among the 300 but possibly of the 31,700 that returned re-gathered and joined in finishing up the work of pursuing and spoiling the enemy. Eventually, they brought the heads of the princes – Oreb and Zeeb – to Gideon (Judges 7:25). The cooperation of the Israelites at this point is very instructive. We are all to cooperate to accomplish God’s work. Not being selected for a task presently is not exclusion, as the need may arise later for involvement. At such times, believers are to demonstrate unity and maturity.

**Question 5: What are the roles of believers in finishing the unfinished task?**

Advancing the kingdom of Christ is every believer’s ministry. Completing the unfinished task and exercising spiritual dominion is left for blood-washed saints to accomplish. We cannot fold our hands and sit on the fence. There is a call to enlist in God’s army for the final war in this end-time.
Christ has spoiled principalities and powers and made an open show of them. Believers therefore must join forces to root out every remnant of the prince of darkness through unrelenting gospel proclamation. No true believer should refuse the call to go after souls for Christ. “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”, our Master commands.
LESSON 627

GIDEON’S CONQUEST OF ISRAEL’S ENEMIES

MEMORY VERSE: “And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host” (Judges 8:12).

TEXT: Judges 8:1-21

In the previous chapter, we learnt how Gideon encountered the host of Midian with three hundred men and how the Midianites fled to Bethshittah and Tabbath, the border of Abelmeholah. We also saw how he sought the assistance of the tribe of Ephraim against the Midianites leading to the killing of the two princes of Midian – Oreb and Zeeb. This chapter now gives us an account of how Gideon, through God’s help, conquered Zebah and Zalmunna, the two kings of Midian and discomfited all the host of Midian despite various distractions on his way to victory.

GODLY WISDOM FOR PACIFYING ANGRY ACCUSERS
(Judges 8:1-3; Proverbs 15:1, 18; Leviticus 10:16-20; 1 Samuel 25:23; Joshua 22:15-34; Hebrews 13:1)

“And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply. And he said unto them, what have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer? God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that” (Judges 8:1-3).

Though the men of Ephraim yielded to Gideon’s call to come down against the Midianites as they were being pursued by men of Israel (Judges 7:24), they were not happy that they were not involved in the campaign against the Midianites from the beginning and so expressed their displeasure very sharply. This expression of anger either showed the desire of the men of Ephraim to cooperate
with the other tribes to fight their common enemy, or was a manifestation of their tendency to complain when not given special recognition (Judges 8:1; 12:1). Whatever the case, Gideon had to abate their anger in order to maintain peace and avoid unnecessary distraction in the campaign against the real enemies whom they pursued. He therefore employed wisdom by exalting the exploits of the Ephraimites, praising them for doing even more than he himself had done.

**Question 1: Explain the basis of the anger of the men of Ephraim against Gideon. What lessons do we learn from Gideon’s response?**

Gideon used the illustration of how the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim was better than the whole crop of Abiezer; and that pacified their anger. We need godly wisdom to pacify accusers, fault-finders and critics. We cannot but have people who will criticize our actions and deeds and, when they do, it needs not result to disagreement that will mar our relationship or slow the work as it would have done if Gideon had not pacified the Ephraimites. Criticisms have a way of putting us on our toes to make our conducts better. Some critics have good intentions as their criticisms can make us perform better or give us better understanding of the task at hand. It would be better to evaluate criticisms in order to ascertain the motive and the profit before we react negatively. We gain our brethren who criticize us if we apply godly wisdom in our answer. But when we respond negatively to all criticisms, we may miss important checks and balances that could help us perform better; and invariably, we get bogged down by unnecessary warfare with our brethren while the real enemy we ought to fight gets an opportunity to escape. This is one of the chief methods of Satan against believers that we should avoid.

“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife” (Proverbs 15:1, 18). The answer of Aaron to Moses’ anger against Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron, for not eating the sin offering in the holy place pacified the anger of Moses against them (Leviticus 10:16-20). Also the answer of Hannah to Eli when she was accused of drunkenness
made Eli to pray for her (1 Samuel 1:15-17). The answer of Abigail to David when David was enraged against Nabal, her husband, pacified David’s anger (1 Samuel 25:23). The soft and reasonable reaction of the Reubenites, Gadites and half tribe of Manasseh to the accusation of their brethren also pacified the anger of the children of Israel (Joshua 22:15-34). We therefore learn that: (i) we should be patient in the face of serious accusation or criticism before we react; (ii) we should pray for godly wisdom to answer our accusers or critics; (iii) our so-called critics or accusers may not be our enemies as their contribution to our actions may make us better.

GIDEON’S PERSISTENCE DESPITE WEAKNESS AND DISTRACTIONS (Judges 8:4-17; John 8:31; Acts 26:22; 1 Timothy 4:16; Colossians 4:2)

“And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them” (Judges 8:4).

Gideon never allowed the distractions from the Ephraimites to stop him and his 300 men from pursuing the Midianites. He offered his reply to their question and continued to pursue the Midianites. Although his men were fainting, they were able to cross river Jordan yet pursuing because of their persistence. They must have expended much energy in pursuing and trumpeting, yet they were pursuing. The Christian race is not for the faint-hearted; it is for those who can remain steadfast even amidst serious distractions. Paul claimed that he continued because he received the help of God (Acts 26:22).

In order to strengthen his fainting army, Gideon approached the princes of Succoth and the elders of Penuel for bread which they deliberately refused to offer. He did not yield to the temptation to fight these people, but continued to pursue the Midianites, planning to come back to them after winning the victory over Zebah and Zalmunna. This portrays Gideon as a very focused, persistent and determined man despite distractions and physical exhaustion of his army. We also need to remain steadfast in our journey towards heaven despite distractions and oppositions from the enemies of the Cross! The battle for heaven can only be won through persistence in prayer,
watchfulness and thanksgiving. Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in the east of Nobah and Jogbehah and smote the host. This caused Zebah and Zalmunna to flee. He pursued them until he was able to capture them alive, thus discomfiting the host. The reward of persistence is manifested here as they were able to conquer their enemies eventually.

**Question 2: How can we overcome distractions in our journey towards heaven?**

After capturing the two kings, Gideon returned to Succoth as promised. He caught a young man who helped him to identify the princes and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven of whom he encountered and displayed the two kings of Midian that God helped him to capture. He afterwards taught them lessons with the thorns and briers of the wilderness. He also went to the city of Penuel beating down their tower and slaying the men of the city. The princes, elders and the people of Succoth and Penuel suffered such a bad fate because they refused to help the people of God in the battle against their enemies by denying them food and by implication the needed strength for the battle when they had the means. They never believed the Israelites could defeat the Midianites. “And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?” (Judges 8:6). We need not give conditions before helping people especially when they are in the good course of the Lord. When we help the people of God, we are indirectly helping God. We are to do good unto all men, especially men of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

**Question 3: What is the significance of helping people in their time of need?**

Gideon had his priorities right and never allowed anything to deter him from them. We need to be focused on anything we do if we want to ride above all our circumstances. He was also able to return from the battle before the sun was up because he set his mind on it. We can easily accomplish our daunting tasks through good planning, focus and persistence.
Zebah and Zalmunna camped their host in Karkor, about 15,000 men that were left of 135,000. Traversing the camp from the east of Noba and Jogbehah, Gideon was able to smite the host in a secured state without any hindrance. Hence, he quickly accomplished his purpose because God was with him in fighting the battle against the Midianites. We need to align with God as we fight the battle of life against sin, sickness, disease, poverty and other grievous foes in order to have a very easy ride against them. It was clear that God really fought for Israel and helped them to defeat their enemies. It is also instructive that their leaders cooperated with God by not giving up when they were weak as they pursued their enemies. They minded the same thing; their goal was to defeat their enemies and never allow any form of distractions.

Question 4: **What were the secrets of Israel’s victory over their enemies?**

“Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, as thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king. And he said, they were my brethren, even the sons of my mother: as the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you” (Judges 8:18, 19).

The two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, killed Gideon’s brethren. This particular deed portrayed their wickedness and ruthlessness. It was a deliberate show and act of wickedness on the part of these kings. They displayed their hatred for the people of God by killing Gideon’s own brothers. Gideon never hesitated to give them the judgment they deserved. Gideon would have spared their lives if they had been more merciful. They failed the test of compassion that would have saved their own lives. We need to be compassionate even when under serious pressure! Though their actions are condemnable, the two kings did well in confessing their evil deed. It is, however, sad to note that they did not show any repentance for this deed. It is only the sins confessed and repented of that God
forgives. Also, we note that time or circumstances never cancelled their sin of murder. No sin will go unnoticed by God except it is confessed, repented of and forsaken (Proverbs 28:13).

Jether, Gideon’s firstborn, was given the assignment to complete God’s judgment on the enemies but he feared, being youthful and inexperienced. The kings, knowing they deserved death, requested Gideon to slay them probably to avoid further punishment or torture. They preferred to die quickly without considering the future judgment.

Here, we see the final defeat of Israel’s enemies. The enemies of God’s people will be finally defeated at the end of age and those who refuse to repent of their sins will be eternally judged when the kingdom of the earth will be turned to that of Christ. To escape the imminent judgment, every sinner is being called upon to repent of his sins, forsake them and have faith in the atoning work of Christ at Calvary.

**Question 5: What can a sinner do to escape God’s judgment?**
LESSON 628  

GIDEON DESCENDS INTO IDOLATRY  

MEMORY VERSE: “And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house” (Judges 8:27).

TEXT: Judges 8:22-35

Our previous lesson focused on how Gideon conquered and punished those Israelites who refused to assist him in the capture of the fleeing Midianite kings. He also subdued the faultfinding Ephraimites with a soft answer that turned away their wrath; whereas he overpowered the men of Succoth and Penuel forcefully (Judges 8:1-9, 13-14). In this study, we see the conclusion of the ministry of Gideon as a judge in Israel. Though he began with God in a very humble way and was used to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Midianites, his ministry ended on a sad note. His case is typical of how some servants of God end their ministries.

Indeed, Gideon was mighty as a military commander and strategist. He was strengthened by God until he became unwavering in faith; but our text portrays some of his weaknesses which marred what would have been a flawless life of a sacrificial servant of God.

The account of Gideon’s last days serves as a warning to believers not to allow any root of sin to spring up in their hearts. The sanctification experience must be diligently sought and obtained so that every form of hidden lust may be discovered and purged from the heart. The catastrophic end of Gideon’s ministry teaches us that regardless of what God has used a person to accomplish in the past, there is need for constant watchfulness and absolute dependence on the Lord to avoid falling into sin. “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Question 1: Why is it absolutely necessary for a Christian to possess the sanctification experience?
GIDEON’S HUMILITY IN REJECTING THE OFFER OF KINGSHIP (Judges 8:22, 23; John 6:15; Jeremiah 45:5; 1 Samuel 10:20-22; Acts 14:11-18)

“Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian” (Judges 8:22). After the defeat of the Midianites, the children of Israel expressed their appreciation to Gideon by offering him a hereditary monarchy. They made this offer to Gideon apparently out of gratitude and appreciation for delivering them from servitude and leading them to victory.

Question 2: What challenge does the response of the Israelites to Gideon’s heroic leadership role pose to believers today?

From the response of the Israelites to Gideon’s heroic leadership, we are challenged to always show gratitude to God for the victories He gives us in the battles of life. We should be thankful and appreciative of His leading and interventions which always make us triumphant over the enemies of our soul. The best way to show gratitude to God is to enthrone Him as King over our lives and be willing to surrender all to Him. Though the children of Israel missed the point by looking unto Gideon as the worthy king over them rather than the Almighty God, their motive and enthusiasm to show gratitude to their benefactor is instructive. When Gideon requested for the golden prey that they should have proudly kept as tokens of their conquest, they willingly parted with them. Are we as willing or ready to give our talents, time and possessions unto God who we claim to be our King? Do we so much appreciate God’s interventions in our lives to the point that we are ready to surrender unto Him whatsoever He asks of us?

However, it should be noted that the children of Israel made the offer of kingship to Gideon without thinking about its full implications. To appoint Gideon as their king would amount to setting God aside from ruling over them (1 Samuel 8:4-9). By making this offer, they inadvertently ascribed to Gideon the honor meant for God. Unknowingly too, they were asking Gideon to replace God in their lives.
But Gideon declined this offer. He said, “I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you” (Judges 8:23). The offer to have Gideon and his descendants rule over them showed how unthinking and ungrateful men could be. Rather than see God as the Source of their victory, they ascribed the glory to a mortal man. This teaches us that, inasmuch as we should appreciate the human instruments God uses for our deliverance, we should beware lest they displace Him in our lives. We must avoid hero-worship or ascribing the glory due to God to any human being.

Question 3: What is the significance of Gideon’s response to Israel’s offer of kingship?

First, Gideon’s response in rejecting Israel’s offer of kingship portrays his humility. He was not seeking position or power. Second, he was able to discern the implication of the people’s offer and would not take the place meant exclusively for God in their lives. It shows that Gideon had high regards for God’s rule over His people and would not usurp His position, no matter the pressure. Third, the strength of Gideon’s character was made visible in what he rejected: the honor conferred on him by men because it conflicted with God’s purpose for his life as a person and also for Israel as a nation. God’s purpose for Gideon was to be a judge, not a king; and His purpose for Israel was to be a theocracy, not a monarchy.

This attitude of Gideon is actually a Christ-like virtue. Jesus Christ declined the prospect of being made a king when it was the Father’s purpose for Him to be a suffering Servant. As believers, we must ever be discerning and sensitive to know the will of God for our lives and ensure we conform to it. We must also learn to discern when to receive honor and when to reject it.

The fourth significant instruction from Gideon’s rejection of kingship is that leaders should beware lest they allow the emotional response and appreciation from their admirers push them into the common pitfall of sharing God’s glory. If a leader allows the praise of men in his heart, it may bring divine judgment (Acts 12:20-23). Fifth, the Israelites had a tendency to imitate other nations around them. Those nations had kings who ruled over and led them out in
battle, but Israel was under a theocracy whereby God was their Ruler and Captain. By this request to have Gideon rule over them, it appeared they were subtly seeking to fulfil that desire to be like other nations. But Gideon would not be a party to such an agenda. We should be watchful lest we, in any way, encourage or support those who want to execute evil agenda in the church or society which may appear to hold a promise of personal gain for us.

**GIDEON’S REGRESSION INTO IDOLATRY** (Judges 8:24-27; 2:5-12; Exodus 32:1-5; 2 Kings 18:4; Galatians 2:18; 1 John 5:21)

“And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites)” (Judges 8:24). Though Gideon rejected the offer of kingship, he requested for the golden prey which the Israelites collected in battle, and they willingly gave him. Then Gideon used the gold to form an ephod which he put in the city of Ophrah. This became a stumbling block to him and the entire nation because they began to worship it. The ephod was part of the attire of Jewish priests.

This tragic mistake of Gideon began with the strange request for all the gold taken as spoils by the Israelites. If only he had resisted the lust for gold as he had stoutly rejected the crown, his story would have ended differently. But sadly, what the sword of the Midianites, the harsh criticism of the Ephraimites, the uncooperative attitude of the men of Succoth and Penuel could not do to Gideon, the gold of Midian did. His unbroken run of victory was cut short because of his unsubdued lust for gold, and he eventually slipped into idolatry.

**Question 4: Point out the steps that led to Gideon’s downfall.**

Backsliding takes a gradual process. The steps that led to the downfall of Gideon should be well marked and avoided by every believer in Christ. First, he collected the gold and made an ephod without asking counsel of God. Though the Bible is silent on his motive or aim, it was clear that he did not consult God before this fatal adventure. Moreover, at the time of Gideon, the Ark was in Shechem, and that was
the proper place he should have set up the golden ephod if actually he did not have an ulterior motive. By this act, Gideon manifested an attitude of self-dependence that was the bane of many believers who were totally dependent on God at the beginning of their ministry, but as soon as they climbed the ladder of success, they became presumptuous and resorted to self-management.

Another notable step in Gideon’s downfall was that he disregarded God’s specific instruction that forbade rulers of the people from multiplying silver, gold and wives to themselves (Deuteronomy 17:15-17). The inevitable consequence of such violations of divine precepts was the kind of disaster Gideon experienced. The Bible warns against the love of money and the tendency to accumulate riches on earth (1 Timothy 6:6-10; Matthew 6:19-21). As a matter of fact, it is not only the love of money that becomes an idol in the heart, but anything we desire so strongly and exalt over and above the will of God for our lives. The Bible commands: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen” (1 John 5:21).

The third step in Gideon’s downfall was his relapse to the idolatrous practice which he had discarded at the beginning of his ministry. Earlier, he had destroyed his family idol when God commanded him to do so (Judges 6:25-32). How tragic then that at the end of his life, he raised another idol in his family. In effect, he built again the thing he once destroyed, and by that he made himself a transgressor (Galatians 2:18). Believers should beware and not turn around to the evils they left behind. Under no guise should the people of God bring back into their lives or fellowship the idolatrous practices or methods they once repudiated.

The fourth step in Gideon’s downward journey was that he did not consider the evil effect his golden ephod would have on the Israelites later. To a casual observer, the making of a golden ephod might appear to be a creative and ingenious religious innovation in the worship of God, but its potential evil would be foreseeable only to a discerning mind. The point is, the Israelites were known to be prone to idolatry – partly because of their association with Egypt and partly the influence of other nations around them. For a people of such background or pedigree, any monument, even the
legitimate and inspired ones could easily be turned into an object of worship. A case is the brazen serpent that Moses made for the healing of those who were bitten by fiery serpents in the wilderness. Though it was made as a result of divine instruction, and typified an aspect of Christ’s redemptive work, the children of Israel turned it into an object of worship and King Hezekiah had to destroy it later (Numbers 21:8,9; 2 Kings 18:4). We should be wary of taking decisions, or initiating anything that could predispose other people to sin and produce negative results in the lives of upcoming generations.

**Question 5: Is the action of the Israelites justifiable in going a whoring after Gideon’s ephod?**

The action of Gideon in making the golden ephod was wrong, but the Israelites too were not justified for turning it into an object of worship and idolatry. This is a challenge to the church that the membership should be on guard irrespective of their status against unscriptural innovations that some may want to introduce in the church. People are prone to venerate mere religious objects which are designed to illustrate some deeper and basic spiritual truths. In our day, people have almost idolized personalities, so-called holy water, anointing oil, mantle, apron, handkerchief, etc. Even the emblem of the Cross or the Bible as a book can become idols in the hands of the ignorant. Believers should avoid such abominable error and realize that whatever tokens God decides to use in teaching us some basic spiritual concepts should not be turned into objects of worship.

**GIDEON’S FAMILY LIFE AND DEATH** (Judges 8:28-35; 9:1-6; Deuteronomy 17:17; 1 Corinthians 7:2; 1 Kings 11:1-9)

“And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives” (Judges 8:29, 30). Our text concludes with a brief summary of the family life of Gideon. Though he was a successful warrior who overcame the Midianites, his family life portrayed his moral laxness and tendency to a life of excess. He was a polygamist. Although he rejected the offer of kingship over Israel, he dabbled into those things which were forbidden by God (Deuteronomy 17:17).
Question 6: How can believers avoid the kind of failure we observe in the family of Gideon?

As believers, we must identify and deal with those tendencies in our lives that may ensnare or imperceptibly lead us to evil. We must allow God to uproot completely from our hearts every inordinate desire for wealth, pleasure, praise of men, power, leadership position and prominence. From Gideon, we learn that it is possible to be heroic and very strong in battle but morally weak.

In order to avoid the tragic consequences in the family of Gideon, believers must keep the standards of marriage as shown in the Holy Scriptures. Monogamy is God’s unchanging standard for marriage. Therefore, all forms of multiple marriage – polygamy, wife-swapping, adultery, concubinage, divorce and remarriage (while other partner is still alive) – must be avoided.

Gideon lived long and died in a good old age. But after his death, the children of Israel forgot the Lord and plunged into full-scale idolatry. What began in the twilight of Gideon’s life as a small spiritual digression snowballed into full-blown idol worship. They worshiped Baalim and ascribed the covenant pact they had with the Lord to Baal-berith (meaning the lord of the covenant). They also forgot Gideon and did not show kindness to his family. The end of Gideon was disastrous and his ministry did not outlive him.

As we conclude on the latter years of Gideon, we are reminded to emulate his faith which helped him to subdue kingdoms (Hebrews 11:32, 33); his focus and tenacity of purpose which motivated him and his men to keep pursuing, though fainting (Judges 8:4); as well as his self-effacement that made him defer to the criticizing people of Ephraim, and his rejection of the offer of kingship (Judges 8:1, 22, 23). We are, however, warned to avoid his lusts and presumption that swayed him into idolatry.
LESSON 629

THE CONSPIRACY OF ABIMELECH

MEMORY VERSE: “He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail” (Proverbs 22:8).

TEXT: Judges 9:1-33

The last study ended with the unscriptural family life of Gideon and the decent of Israel into idolatry. The current study presents a clear picture of the dire consequences of polygamy and deviation from the path of righteousness. Truly, “the way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble” (Proverbs 4:19). This is reflected in the family life and regression of Gideon.

Abimelech, the son of Gideon’s concubine, aspired to become king. This he pursued by unscriptural means: he killed his father’s sons and usurped kingship. He used tribal sentiment to achieve his goal. Shortly after usurping the kingship, God began the process of retribution for his ominous act.

People who desire power always seem to outnumber those who are able to use the power wisely once they have it. This is because power has a way of taking over the control of the person wielding it. This is especially true in the case of inherited or usurped but unmerited power. Abimelech’s life showcased corruption through power-mongering.

Question 1: What was the driving force that made Abimelech to kill his half-brothers and the repercussions of his unguided quest for power?

Abimelech’s lust for power pushed him to wipe out not only his brothers, but a whole city that would not submit to him (Judges 9:5, 45). Ironically, he was fatally bruised by a woman. Believers should submit to the control of God. They should not be occupied with the quest and lust for power or position (Jeremiah 45:5a; James 1:14-16).

CRAFTINESS AND CARNAL PLOT OF ABIMELECH
(Judges 9:1-16; 2 Samuel 15:1-6, 10-18; Proverbs 13:10, 11; 1 John 3:15)
And he went unto his father’s house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being three scores and ten persons upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself” (Judges 9:5).

Sequel to the death of Gideon, Abimelech wanted to reign over Israel. In order to achieve this, he went to the city of Shechem, his mother’s hometown to drum support for himself. In the course of seeking the position his father humbly reserved for God alone, Abimelech slew all his half-brothers, except Jotham who managed to escape. God’s word is against carnal ambition and self-exaltation. “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased…” (Matthew 23:12). This was the type of unscriptural audacity manifested by Absalom that eventually led to his untimely death.

Question 2: What are the pitfalls a believer must avoid on his path to progress?

Believers should not use any carnal means such as lobbying, campaign, calumny, god-fatherism, etc. to get to position of authority, whether in the church, place of work or the society at large. Some today even send assassins to terminate the lives of individuals whom they intend to overthrow, or cunningly destroy them with their tongues. This kind of attitude is unethical, ungodly and unscriptural.

Israel’s king was to be the Lord and not man, but Abimelech wanted to usurp the position reserved for God alone. In his selfish quest, he killed all but one of his seventy half-brothers. People with selfish desires often seek to fulfill them in ruthless ways. Check your ambitions to fathom if they are approved of God or they are egocentric.

Question 3: Apart from the bloody action of Abimelech, mention at least four other events that took place at Shechem.

“And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver…” (Judges 9:4). The complicity of Abimelech’s kinsmen in Shechem is condemnable. It is unfortunate that the inhabitants of the city where Israel renewed their national covenant with God could descend so low as to
support the open dissent against the word of God (Joshua 24:32). Their financial support aided Abimelech’s plan to kill his half-brothers. Besides, they collaborated to install him as king thereby displacing God as King in the land. It is disturbing that there was no record of any dissenting voice against this move. Believers should be careful not to partake in evil through overt or covert support of the same (Exodus 23:2; 1 Timothy 5:22). Also, Christian parents and guardians should be bold enough to correct any wrong move or tendency they may notice in their children or wards.

**JOTHAM’S PARABLE AND ITS INTERPRETATION**

**Question 4: What is a parable? In Jotham’s parable, what do the trees and the brambles signify?**

A parable is a short prose which illustrates one or more principles or lessons. Nathan used a parable to speak to David when he took Uriah’s wife after terminating his life in the battlefield. Our Lord Jesus also made use of parables to convey His messages to the hearers (Matthew 13:3).

In Jotham’s parable, the trees represented Gideon’s seventy sons, and the bramble represented Abimelech. The parable stressed that a productive person would be occupied with good activities that glorify God and benefit humans other than power politicking. Believers who vie for political posts may be easily influenced negatively by the carnal majority who surround them. A worthless person on the other hand would be glad to seek or accept the honor but would destroy his subjects. Like the bramble, no real security or protection could come from Abimelech. Jotham’s parable came true when he destroyed the city of Shechem and burned “the tower of Shechem” (Judges 9:45-49). He was finally killed through the instrumentality of a woman who broke his skull with a piece of millstone and one of his armor bearers who slew him eventually at Thebez (Judges 9:53,54).

Jotham told the story about the trees in order to help the people order their priorities right. He did not want them to appoint a leader of low character. This is the first allegory
in the Bible, and perhaps the most ancient parable on record. Jotham’s interpretation and application of this allegory to the present anointing of Abimelech makes clear the purpose of his speech. It was prophetic of the curse upon the reign of Abimelech and of the destruction of the men of Shechem and Millo (Judges 9:19, 20). Our motive of serving as leaders should be critically examined. It should not be for the purpose of praises, prestige or power. In the parable, the good trees chose to be productive and to provide benefits to the people. As we aspire to leadership positions, we should make sure our priorities are right. In choosing leaders in the church, favoritism, tribalism and sectionalism must be shunned. It should be done based on scriptural qualifications and the Spirit’s guidance which will involve seeking the face of God earnestly and not just by outward judgment. For “man looketh on the outward appearance but the Lord looketh on the heart.”

GOD’S VENGEANCE AND FULFILMENT OF JOTHAM’S PARABLE (Judges 9:22-29; 1 Samuel 16:14; Exodus 9:1-7; Acts 9:1-9; Ecclesiastes 8:12, 13)

After reigning for three years over Israel, God allowed an evil spirit of disunity and contention to cause disagreement between Abimelech and the men of Shechem who dealt treacherously with him (Judges 9:22, 23). The demon worked through Gaal to trigger the trouble between Shechem and Abimelech. God allowed this judgment for two reasons: to punish Abimelech for killing his half-brothers and the men of Shechem for aiding Abimelech in carrying out murderous acts against his brothers. The men of Shechem who aided him to accomplish his plan were the first to turn against Abimelech in his downfall.

**Question 5: Why is God’s judgment delayed in some cases?**

During Abimelech’s short reign, it appeared there would be no retribution for mass murder of his brothers. Eventually, the day of divine recompense came. Those who persist in their evil and pernicious ways should also expect God’s judgment, if they fail to repent and restitute their ways. We are at sea sometimes as we ponder on why evil seems to prevail. But the scripture has established it that no matter how long, sinners and wicked people
will not go unpunished. “Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God” (Ecclesiastes 8:12, 13; Job 18:1-21; Jeremiah 12:1; Ecclesiastes 8:10, 11).

God promised to deal with sin but in his own appointed time, not ours. God gives space for sinners to repent because of His tender mercy. If they remain adamant and unyielding, He will then execute His wrath on them. Pharaoh had opportunities to repent but he resisted God’s mercy and was judged. Saul of Tarsus embraced the opportunity and privilege of God’s mercy; he bowed before Christ in repentance and recognition of His lordship. He was transformed and became an apostle and winner of souls. God is patient with evildoers only because He does not want them to perish. He is “longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”. Sinners and evildoers are called upon to repent before divine judgment falls.
LESSON 630
WARNING AGAINST BACKSLIDING

MEMORY VERSE: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 10:1-15

In the preceding chapter, Apostle Paul pointed out the possibility of a believer becoming a castaway after an initial experience of salvation and a lifetime of service to God. Comparing the Christian life to a race, he emphasized the fact that a participant could be disqualified from receiving the prize if he/she does not run according to the rules. Therefore, there is the need to maintain self-discipline and avoid those things that can cause a person to be rejected by God.

In the present chapter, Apostle Paul continues this train of thought, apparently to warn some people in the church who felt eternally secured in their salvation even though they lived in sin. He warned believers against the danger of backsliding and thereby debunked the damnable heresy of the doctrine of eternal security. He emphasized that the great privileges that the Israelites enjoyed in their relationship with God were typical or illustrative of what believers in the New Testament enjoy. But it is sad to note that despite those privileges the Israelites enjoyed, many among them who went into sin were destroyed. And the account of their failure was written to warn subsequent believers of all ages against the danger of falling back into sin.

There is no truth in the doctrine of unconditional security of believers. Those who are secured in Christ are those who continue in the word of God and in true righteousness to the end.

Question 1: From the example of the children of Israel, how true is the doctrine of eternal security?

The Corinthian church which is the focus of our study had a special place in the heart of Paul the apostle. They enjoyed very deep teaching of the word of God and witnessed the great manifestation of God’s power. They became a
very strong church but later began to lose the grace of God. Like Israel of old, the Corinthian church enjoyed great privileges and spiritual blessings from the Lord but they backslid. Their records are shown to contemporary Christians “to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted”; and their backsliding should serve as a warning to us, “upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11).

PROPER PERSPECTIVE OF DIVINE PRIVILEGES: (1 Corinthians 10:1-5; Zechariah 9:16,17; Romans 2:4; 11:18-22; Hosea 4:6; 2 Chronicles 14:2; 16:9-12; Nehemiah 8:8)

In our text, Apostle Paul enumerated some of the special privileges that the children of Israel enjoyed as a result of their covenant relationship with God. They were under the cloud and they crossed the Red Sea. These were tokens of divine protection, deliverance and guidance. They were also identified with Moses, ate manna and drank of the spiritual Rock, which was Christ. But despite these peculiar privileges, they backslid and incurred the wrath of God. This reminds ministers of their responsibility to always ensure that God’s people are clearly taught the word of God “line upon line” (Isaiah 28:10). This is to avoid the trap of ignorance that pervades the community of many so-called Christians today. Knowledge of the truth is the panacea to the destructive bait of false teaching and satanic deceptions that make many steadfast believers backslide. Apostle Paul’s statement, “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant...” buttresses this point. Believers need to be enlightened on the essence of God’s goodness so as to avoid the error of thinking that the enjoyment of God’s favor can be equated to His approval of one’s life even when lived in sin. In our contemporary age when men seek after miracles, signs and wonders and are careless about holiness and righteousness, we must not fail to declare all the counsel of God. We must not be negligent, “to put [them] always in remembrance of these things...” (2 Peter 1:12).

This study drives home the often forgotten truth that a person can partake in astounding miracles and yet miss the kingdom of God if careless with his Christian stand and commitment. It is often said that “privilege is no insurance against ultimate failure”. The same people who
enjoyed special favor and great privileges from God were punished by Him when they backslid.

**Question 2: Why should ministers of the gospel be committed to emphasizing the truth from time to time?**

Paul rehearsed the examples of the Jews in order to dissuade the Corinthian Christians from communion with idolaters and a false sense of security in any sinful course. Divine blessings and privileges not seen in the right perspective can lead to unrestrained euphoria which makes the believer forget where he started and thus lead him to eternal damnation.

The teaching on eternal or unconditional security has no scriptural basis. There exists the possibility of departing from the faith once delivered to the saints if we allow our hearts to be “overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life...” (Luke 21:34). You can fall from grace to grass through spiritual pride. God’s favor will continue to abide only with those who are living right and whose lives are constantly glorifying His name. At the time Judas was chosen, he also had the prospect of being faithful to the end. He was a disciple and apostle of Christ. He was called like others, he witnessed the miracles and blessings of Christ’s ministry like others, yet he fell from grace. You might have come out of Egypt but you have not reached Canaan land. You might have been redeemed from sin but you have not reached the heavenly portal. It is not the beginning of the journey that matters most but making it to the end. We must not presume upon our great privileges or profession of the truth. “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Hebrews 4:1).

**Question 3: What do you understand by eternal security? And how can a believer be secured eternally?**

**PERTINENT PRECEPTS FROM PREVIOUS PARTAKERS OF DIVINE PRIVILEGE** (1 Corinthians 10:6-11; Hebrews 12:1; Proverbs 14:14; Romans 12:3; 15:4; Judges 8:22-27; 2 Chronicles 26:5, 15-20; Matthew 26:69-75)
As a faithful minister, Paul put the church in remembrance of those things which led to the fall of previous partakers of God’s grace. This was done to caution them against falling into similar sins. The devil has not changed his pattern or strategy. He still plays upon man’s intense and passionate desire for prosperity, pleasure, power, progress, popularity, possession and pre-eminence. He uses the bait that is relevant and related to our inward desire, pleasure and liking to draw us to himself. True children of God must therefore be cautious to not only flee idolatrous ceremonies, festivals and events but ensure that they do not turn their career, family, pursuit, wealth or academic laurel to an idol. Idolatry is a precursor to frivolity, lewdness and hardness of heart. Therefore, beware!

Question 4: How do contemporary believers practice idolatry today?

Murmuring against God or against His servants under any circumstance is not a tag for heaven-minded saints. It is a sin that greatly provokes God. Corrections from the pulpit should be taken with humility so that it can bring “peaceable fruit of righteousness” in our lives. Those who reject correction are not children but bastards. “But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Hebrews 12:8).

That Bible characters like Noah, Gideon, Asa, Uzziah, David, Peter, etc. fell into sin after they had good testimonies underscores the need for us to be watchful at all times. If you are redeemed and made righteous by the precious blood of Jesus, then you need to be careful. If others fell, you too can fall. Presumptuous and self-confident people often fall into sin. Peter wanted to honor the Lord. He wanted to stand by the Lord till the very end. But he was too self-confident and therefore denied the Savior thrice. “Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Question 5: How can a believer avoid backsliding in these last days?

Believers can avoid backsliding by laying aside the things that bring temptations and taking necessary steps to
victory through vigilance (1 Peter 5:8), prayer (Matthew 26:41), conviction (2 Timothy 3:14), trust (2 Timothy 1:2), obedience (Psalm 119:60), resistance (James 4:7), and yieldedness to God (Romans 6:13). As heaven-bound pilgrims, we must depend on the Lord for His sustaining grace and power.

PERTINENT PLEA AGAINST OVERCONFIDENCE AND EXHORTATION AGAINST DESPAIR (1 Corinthians 10:12-15; Judges 16:20, 21; 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5; Jude 21, 24)

Our salvation, boldness at the throne of grace, conviction and uncompromising stand on the truth are all by grace. Without grace, we are as ordinary as other people.

Some moral weakness was shown by King Asa. For thirty-five years he reigned as king, he ruled with the fear of God. There was no idolatry but peace, rest and tranquility in his domain. But later, he began to waver in his commitment to the Lord. He became oppressive and dictatorial. The Lord sent His prophet to warn him. But he would not listen. Instead of taking corrections, in his pride, he became angry at the prophet’s rebuke. Chastisement came by way of disease. The warning was meant to draw him back to the Lord. But he was unrepentant. He could not seek the Lord. Instead, he sought cure from the hands of herbalists and witch doctors. He died from the disease. Uzziah was helped by the Lord to become a highly successful inventor and an engineer but success made him to swell with pride. He became high-minded, arrogant and incorrigible. He died a leper. David, the man after God’s heart became so morally weak that he killed the husband of a woman with whom he committed adultery. Peter walked on the water, witnessed the transfiguration of Christ and stoutly defended the Lord by cutting off someone’s ear when they came to arrest Him. Thereafter, he denied the Lord thrice.

Question 6: Mention two characters in the Old and New Testaments who fell due to self-confidence.

From the example of Israel as recounted in our text, we can identify the causes of backsliding. First, ignorance of the word and ways of God. Second, belief in false doctrine. When a person believes the lie of eternal security and other perverted notions of the gospel, there
is every tendency for that individual to be careless. Third, overconfidence. The feeling that one has come a long way in following the Lord and can no longer fall is a serious mistake that has led to the fall of many frontline soldiers of the Cross. This was the mistake of Peter when the Lord warned him concerning his impending fall (Matthew 26:31-35). As a Christian, the devil is battling for your soul. To be victorious in the battle, you need to be violent with self, bad habits or anything that can hinder you from getting into the Kingdom.

Fourth, failure to watch. Fifth, permitting so-called ‘small sins’ like murmuring and lusts to remain in our lives. This will open the door to other sins. Sixth, failure to take the way of escape that God graciously provides in times of temptation. Seventh, presuming that God’s judgment against sin is remote simply because it is delayed.

In most cases, backsliding occurs among God’s people when there is no strong leadership; when there is compromise and unequal yoke; inability to manage worldly success and love for the world (Exodus 32:1-8; 1 Kings 11:4; 2 Chronicles 25:2-14; Luke 8:12-14; 2 Timothy 4:10).

**Question 7: How can a believer avoid despair and maintain victory over Satan and sin?**

We are most likely to fall when we are most confident of our own strength. Distrust of our strength makes us to be vigilant and to put our trust and dependence on God. This gives us the best security against all sins. God is able and indeed has promised to keep us from falling but we must look to ourselves (2 John 8).

While warning us against the danger of backsliding, the Lord adds a word of comfort. As much as he warns against presumption, He would also keep us from despair and undue feeling of insecurity. God is faithful to keep us from the tempting world full of snares. Though we are to be watchful and vigilant, he will proportion our burden to our strength. Hence, we should not be terrified or amazed when temptation comes.

We have all the encouragement in the world to flee sin and prove faithful to God. We cannot fall by a temptation if we cleave fast to Him. To keep and maintain our victory,
we are warned to be wise, walk uprightly, wash and be clean, wage war against the flesh and Satan. If we remain watchful and faithful to the end, we shall win the crown of life from our Savior.
LESSON 631

CAUTION AGAINST COMPROMISE

MEMORY VERSE: “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s Table, and of the table of devils” (1 Corinthians 10:21).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 10:16-33

The possibility of backsliding after conversion has been highlighted in the last lesson. Backsliding starts with little acts of compromise such as feasting with unbelievers at worldly ceremonies or partaking of food dedicated to idols. Our text examines the differences of opinions among Christians concerning food sold or presented in public and the propriety of Christians eating such meats. In the first century Corinth, most meat sold in the market may have been offered in worship to different gods.

In our text, Paul the apostle addressed the controversy of what the believer’s attitude ought to be in order to avoid any form of compromise with the world. He also talked of the exercise of Christian liberty and consideration for the conscience and faith of other people. Here, the apostle encourages believers to maintain sound Christian conviction without compromise.

After being saved from sin, a believer still lives in the world and continues his normal relationship with other people. But the challenge to every heaven-bound Christian is to live a righteous life in spite of the evil and possible allurements of the world (Titus 2:12). Compromise is evil; it is a canker that can destroy faith and lead to backsliding of many true worshippers of God.

Question 1: What is compromise?

A dictionary defines compromise as “a settlement of differences by mutual concessions; an agreement reached by adjustment of conflicting or opposing claims, principles etc. by reciprocal modification of demands”. In scripture, compromise is when a believer adjusts God’s standard of righteousness to accommodate or agree with his own or a worldly standard. A compromiser tries to live in two
worlds at the same time. He wants to live as a Christian and also as a worldling. Thus, he modifies God’s strict demands and lowers His standard of holiness to the level that is comfortable to him. So, compromise is having fellowship, conformity and agreement with the world in any form. A person may compromise in doctrine or in practice. There are those who profess and preach sound doctrine but compromise when it comes to practice. But the Bible warns believers against compromise of any form (Proverbs 1:10).

**COMMON CAUSES OF COMPROMISE AMONG CHRISTIANS** (1 Corinthians 10:16-19; 8:1-13; Romans 14:1-8; Genesis 3:3,4; Judges 13:14; 14:3; 1 Kings 13:1-19; 22:1-4; Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Colossians 2:16-23)

Redeemed, believers are integrated into the body of Christ. Their fellowship in not only with God but also with fellow believers. They partake of the communion of the body of Christ as their spiritual lives continue to blossom (1 Corinthians 10:16).

However, the believer begins to lose spiritual steam whenever he starts admiring and associating with the people of the world. The scripture said the believer should steer clear of any form of association with the world (2 John 2:15-17). Even in face of scientific advancement, information technology and the resultant modernization, civilization and globalization, God’s standard remains unchanging. Believers should remain free from worldly entanglements and religious syncretism.

Idolatry in any form is sin. Verses 16 to 19 of the text show that to eat things offered to idols is utterly inconsistent with true Christianity and it is downright idolatry. It amounts to having fellowship with devils and it is a disconnection of fellowship with God.

Christians are admonished to accept, pray and eat food or meat presented to them in the name of the Lord without doubting in as much it is certain that it was not connected with idol worship.

**Question 2:** Mention some causes of compromise among Christians.
Temptation to compromise may come from peers, ungodly colleagues, family members and through interactions with people. Some unsaved friends and relations may be used of the devil against us to shift our ground on wholesome truths which we have believed. This comes in the following ways: (i) wrong relationship and association with backsliders or carriers of false doctrine (1 Corinthians 15:33; 2 John 9-11); (ii) performing dubious functions and engaging in or promoting falsehood; (iii) collection of gifts that lures into immorality or dresses that expose nakedness (Ecclesiastes 7:7); (iv) giving or receiving money or gifts to have favor or give advantage; (v) desire to compete with others in fashion and socialization; (vi) desire to please peers, business partners or kinsmen (1 Kings 11:4; Hosea 7:8,9); (vii) low persuasion and lack of knowledge of the Word (Hosea 4:6); (viii) unequal yoke in pursuit of ambition, career, partnership or sourcing for financial assistance; (ix) fear of men; (x) desire for pleasure (1 Timothy 5:6); (xi) intimidation by the crowd; (xii) satanic influence and deceit (2 Corinthians 2:11; 11:11-14); (xiii) uncontrolled appetite (Genesis 25:31-34; Hebrews 12:16,17; Judges 14:1-3).

**CONSEQUENCES OF COMPROMISE** (1 Corinthians 10:20-30; Genesis 3:4-19; 16:5-12; 34:1,2; 1 Kings 13:18-25; 22:4, 31-33; 2 Chronicles 20:35-37; Judges 16:20; Matthew 27:5; Acts 1:16-20; 2 Timothy 4:10; Hebrews 12:16,17)

“But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils” (1 Corinthians 10:20). It is inconsistent as well as shocking for believers to partake at the tables of the Lord and of devils. The Apostle dissuades from such idolatrous practice which culminates into the dangerous consequence of stirring up the Lord’s jealousy, fighting against Him and attracting His anger and judgment. “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?” (Verse 22).

Compromise with the world is nothing but abomination to God. It is not possible to be in alliance with Christ as true children of God and still worship idol in any form. The expression of social and religious lives in Corinth was rooted in idolatry. Virtually every aspect of their lives was linked with idolatry. But the nature of idolatry
might not necessarily be a physical idol: money, position, power, pleasure and fame are idols that people worship with passion and dedication today. Yet, God is jealous and warns His children not to get involved in idolatry in which ever form it appears.

A life of compromise puts a Christian in a situation where he/she comes under pressure to go contrary to God’s commandments. For instance, a close alliance, friendship or joint business venture with a non-believer would, sooner or later, press a believer to succumb to unscriptural practices. Unbelieving friends would expect believers to respect and accept their idolatrous practices and partake of their dainties. And, in a bid not to offend them, the believer is tempted to compromise his stand. The only safeguard for believers then is to remain separated from the world and be committed to God.

Question 3: **Mention some people in the Bible that compromised or formed alliance with the ungodly, and state the consequences.**

Adam and Eve, Saul, Esau, Dinah, the young prophet, Jehoshaphat, Demas, Judas Iscariot, all had their sore spots of compromise. This led to defeat, destruction and even death for some of them. Compromise has hindered many believers who began their Christian race in a glorious style from finishing well and strong.

There is always a high premium to pay for compromise. Esau compromised his birthright and lost it forever. Eli’s weakness brought generational curse upon him. Jehoshaphat had unnecessary wars and almost lost his life prematurely. Judas Iscariot died without repentance and found no place in the kingdom of God. Demas also left the fellowship of God’s people to associate with the evil world. Moreover, compromise leads to failure (2 Chronicles 20:35-37), cuts off from fellowship with God, brings defeat and suffering, renders its victims powerless (Judges 16:20), brings curse (Galatians 1:8, 9), changes the course of history, may lead to untimely death and loss of heaven if there is no repentance (Matthew 27:5). In the midst of a perverted gospel, worldly music, fashion, satanic worship and abuse of modern technology, the Lord commands the believer to remain uncompromising.
While warning against compromise, Apostle Paul also emphasized the need to use our Christian liberty with discretion and moderation. He said: “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (1 Corinthians 10:23). This is an obvious call to self-sacrifice and deliberate moderation of our liberty in Christ for the benefit of others. “Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth.” True believers should not exercise Christian liberty in such a manner that it would embolden weak believers to do things that would hurt their consciences. Rather than insist on our own liberty, we should be eager to edify our fellow believers even if that would demand that we sacrifice our rights and privileges in the process.

CHRISTIAN PILGRIMS’ CONSECRATION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLE (1 Corinthians 10:31-33; Colossians 2:16-23; Galatians 1:6-9; 2:18-20; Leviticus 18:3-4; Romans 12:1,2;14:13-15; Jeremiah 35:1-8; Exodus 34:12-15; Psalm 15:4; 101:4; Jude 3)

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). This is the hallmark of Christian walk, work and worship in this present world. The admonition given by Paul the Apostle to the church at Corinth is a divine charge to all pilgrims on their way to heaven. He enjoined believers to seek the glory of God as their priority. Whatever we do as believers, our major preoccupation should be that God be glorified in all things. This should be our consecration and guiding principle, and it is one index of genuine discipleship. True followers of Christ would not want to be a stumbling block to other persons; neither would they ever want to please themselves at the detriment of another.

Question 4: Mention some Bible characters that lived uncompromising lives.

The Bible remains the only standard of godly living for all Christians, in all generations, across races, tribes, languages and gender, irrespective of their background or educational status. The likes of Gideon, Samuel, Josiah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Ruth etc. all stood at different times despite pressures and challenges of life. Apostle Paul would not imitate those who were before him
when he saw that they were lowering the standard. This is a challenge to us today to take our stand on the side of truth no matter who is involved in enticing us to do something short of Bible precepts.

**Question 5: What is the secret of uncompromising stand for the Lord?**

All the Bible characters that stood in their time had genuine encounter with God. They were able to withstand negative pressures because they had strong determination to stand for God despite pressures and threats. Intimate fellowship with God and people of like faith is not negotiable. We must be prayerful all the time and fortify ourselves with the word of God, coupled with a purposeful heart, if we want to be like them (Daniel 1:8; 3:16-18). We must also be on our guard (1 Peter 5:8, 9; James 4:7; Romans 6:12), avoid worldliness like a plague (1 John 2:15-17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18), love no one above God (Luke 14:25, 26), and put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:12-18). Daniel and his three Hebrew colleagues were honored by God when they stood for Him. Joseph was honored in a strange land for his refusal to sin despite the strong temptation. Paul was granted special ability to perform outstanding exploits.

Stand up for Jesus now and always so that others may be saved and follow Him (1 Corinthians 11:1). Your consistent stand for the truth will enhance the fulfillment of the vision to Disciple A Whole Nation, Discover A Waiting Neighborhood, Destroy Adversaries’ Wicked Network and Double A Written Number, and populate the kingdom of Christ.
LESSON 632

BELIEVERS’ COMPORTEMENT IN GOD’S HOUSE

MEMORY VERSE: “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 11:1-19

The preceding chapter of this book ended with exhortation to selfless living for the spiritual benefits of others. This is because the believer is a living epistle of Christ-like character for others to emulate. Today’s lesson still bothers on acceptable conduct and comportment, this time, in God’s house. As used in this study, God’s house does not only refer to the building where believers gather for worship but also the assembly of true children of God. And the Bible contains principles that guide believers’ conduct and practice during worship in God’s house. Whether in a cathedral or modest church house, due honor and respect for God must characterize our worship (Psalm 33:8).

Therefore, an atmosphere of serenity, orderliness, decency and decorum must be maintained. Also, neatness and moderation should characterize our appearance as our demeanor should depict reverence for God and His house. Although we may not see Him with our bare eyes, every worshipper must acknowledge the divine presence and majesty in the congregation either in urban or rural areas. God is everywhere. Wherever God is worshipped in truth and Spirit must be regarded as a sacred place. “For the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee” (Deuteronomy 23:14).

Question 1: Explain why believers must take care of their conduct and appearance in the house of God.
THE STEADFASTNESS THAT ATTRACTS FELLOWSHIP
(1 Corinthians 11:1, 2; 4:16; John 13:15; 1 Peter 2: 21; 2 Thessalonians 3:9; Philippians 3:17)

In the opening verse of the text, Apostle Paul presented himself as a worthy example for believers to follow. “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). He was a leading light, a steadfast believer, an exemplary leader. Our Lord and Savior was a great Teacher during His earthly ministry. He also practiced what He preached and inspired His disciples to a life of godliness, humility and obedience. In the same manner, every true Christian leader should live such an exemplary life for the followers to emulate. God-approved leaders are supposed to be pacesetters of godly conducts. The pharisaic lifestyle of “do what I say and not what I do” is condemned by God. Those who live contrary to what they teach come under the same denunciation of woe that the Lord pronounced on the Pharisees. In his epistle to Timothy, Paul charged him to be “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). To teach sound doctrine of scriptures and live contrary to such tenets brings greater condemnation upon such teachers and preachers.

Apostle Paul went further to commend the Corinthian brethren for putting him in remembrance and keeping the ordinances he gave them. Praise and commendation are stimulants which should be utilized at appropriate times by Church leaders to encourage, promote and elicit further positive actions from followers, parents, church leaders and masters. Generally, every human being acknowledges praise (1 Corinthians 3:3; 1:10-12; 11:16; 1 Timothy 6:4).

SCRIPTURAL INJUNCTIONS ON CHRISTIAN COMPORTMENT DURING CHURCH SERVICE: (1 Corinthians 11:3-15; Deuteronomy 22:5; Zephaniah 1:8; Habakkuk 2:20; Psalm 33:8; 1 Corinthians 1:10-12; 11:16; 1 Timothy 6:4)

Having established the truth about the headship of God and Christ overall and that of man over the woman, Paul corrected the observed impropriety of a Christian brother covering his head and Christian sister uncovering her
head while praying or prophesying that became the norm in the Corinthian church.

Right from creation, God put distinctions between the nature and appearance of a man and a woman. The Bible forbids assuming the disposition of the opposite gender in dressing, appearance and behavior. Hence Apostle Paul wrote to correct the indecent, improper and immodest unveiling of the head by women when they come together to worship God. He clarifies that “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels” (1 Corinthians 11:4, 5, 7, 10).

This erroneous practice Apostle Paul set out to correct is still prevalent in many Christian assemblies today in defiance of holy principles of scriptures. In many modern-day worship centers, it is common to see women uncovering their heads during church service. The motivating factor of this unwholesome practice is either to display their ostentatious hairdos or sheer spiritual ignorance. Obviously, leaving the head uncovered may attract the male-folk and thereby becoming a tool the devil uses to distract attention of worshippers. The devil uses this diversionary tactics to lure people away from true and holy worship of God into impure thoughts, lust and immorality. Thus, the church environment which should be characterized with sobriety and sanctity is turned into an arena of ostentatious display and hilarity.

However, God’s word declares that “true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23, 24). Prayer is addressed to God and prophecy is the revelation of His mind to worshippers. These are spiritual exercises that give no allowance for manifestation of self and the flesh. Every believer must
Question 2: Explain why Christian women should cover their head while men should remain uncovered during worship.

Believers need to understand that God is the One who sets the standard of acceptable outfit, conduct and attitude for pure worship. He does not accept just anything in the name of worship. People who disagree or disobey His prescribed standard of comportment in His house worship in vain as Christian liberty that violates basic scriptural injunctions is unacceptable.

While men generally comply with this instruction and uncover their head during worship, there have been a lot of arguments on the part of the women. The scripture gives clear explanation for everyone to understand. One, the Bible unequivocally stated that “every woman” should cover her head while praying so as not to dishonor her head and God who is the Head of all. Besides, women must cover their heads because of the angels. The Bible affirms that angels are “all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). Paul reminds us that our worship services are regularly attended by angels. As a result, we should be careful to adhere to the established order during worship and other services. We should be careful not to act in a manner that displeases the Lord when we come to His presence for worship.

Covering the head for women is not a matter of culture meant for the Corinthian church as some claim today but a mark of honor and reverence to the Lord. Every woman should honor God by covering her head during service to show her acceptance of the word of God and obedience to the authority of Christ. Such posture is a wonderful expression of a Christian woman’s piety.

Question 3: Enumerate improper conducts that should be avoided during worship.

Aside our outfits, other conducts that do not glorify God that we must shun include allowing children to litter the place of worship; causing distractions by putting...
on shoes that distract or buying foot wears that whistle in the church for the children, wearing dresses meant for the opposite gender, transparent clothes or skimpy skirts, fumbling with mobile phones, allowing them to ring or answering phone calls during service, side-talks/comments, whispering and whistling when the service is on, reading magazines, newspaper or literature during messages, eating and chewing gum, etc. during worship. These amount to coming into God’s house to “give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil” (Ecclesiastes 5:1).

Worship time is a period to pay homage to the Lord, focus on Him and listen to His word. Worship is not about us but Christ whom we have come to reverence and adore. Therefore, the underlying principles on which apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church are still applicable to us today irrespective of geographical location, race or creed.

A man usually doffs his cap before his superior as a mark of respect. Therefore, upon entering a church building or outside church building, men should uncover their head as a mark of reverence, honor and obedience to God while women are to cover their heads.

**SERIOUS REBUKE FOR DISORDERLY CONDUCTS:** (1 Corinthians 11:16-19; 1 Timothy 6:3,4,20; 1 Corinthians 14:33; 2 Timothy 2:16; 1 Corinthians 6:3; 1 Timothy 1:3; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:4-6)

Leaders have the responsibility to reprove, rebuke and correct so as to perfect the saints. This is exactly what Apostle Paul did while addressing cases of divisions, arguments and contentions among the Corinthian believers. “Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse” (1 Corinthians 11:17). The Corinthian Christians were not enjoying the benefit of spiritual growth which church attendance offers. They were engaged in frivolous arguments, party-spirit and divisional insinuation. These actions are not acceptable under any guise. Some of the Corinthians were found blatantly disobeying the plain truth of the Scriptures on acceptable pattern of appearance and conduct as they come to worship.
Question 4: (a) Enumerate the evil effects of argument and contention in the Church. (b) What should be the attitude of a believer whenever argument ensues?

In an environment of argument, debate, dispute and disagreement, spiritual progress is stalled; love evaporates; harmony and unity are disturbed. Carnality, confusion and evil works take over (James 3:16). Evil passions that tend to mar the peace of the assembly also manifest. The experience in such assembly will not differ from that of the tower of Babel as there will be no union of purpose and plan. The members will lack cooperation in promoting a common goal. The Holy Spirit cannot remain in such assembly. Every true worshiper must “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”. We must be subject to one another and be ready to hold back personal opinions and suggestions and follow the prescription of Scripture for acceptable comportment and attitude during worship of God.
LESSON 633

PREPARATION FOR THE LORD’S SUPPER

MEMORY VERSE: “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 11:20-34

In the previous chapters of the first epistle to the Corinthians, Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, had sought to correct several abuses and wrong practices that were prevalent in the church at Corinth. In the current text, he focused on the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, pointing out its abuse by the Corinthians, necessary preparations before partaking, proper mode of observance, and the consequences of participating unworthily.

The Lord’s Supper is one of the two ordinances bequeathed to the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ; the other being water baptism (Matthew 26:26-30; 28:19, 20). Water baptism is observed by each believer, once and for all, shortly after conversion. Through it, the new believer identifies publicly with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. However, the Lord’s Supper is to be repeated from time to time by true believers in fellowship; and it commemorates the death of Jesus Christ for our sins, and also points to His coming back again in glory.

The ordinance of the Lord’s Supper is so important that detailed account of its institution is recorded in four places in the New Testament (Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). It is called different names by believers: The Lord’s Supper, the Lord’s Table, Holy Communion, Eucharist, and Holy Sacrament.

Question 1: Mention the two ordinances Jesus Christ commanded the Church to observe.


The Lord’s Supper was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ on the night he was betrayed. Though Apostle Paul was not present at the time the ordinance was originally instituted, he received a direct revelation from the Lord concerning
it. “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you...” (1 Corinthians 11:23a).

**Question 2: State the purpose of the Lord’s Supper.**

The ordinance of the Lord’s Supper was instituted for a commemorative purpose. It gives participants the opportunity to look back and remember the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary; and in that sense, they are reminded that the work of their redemption is an accomplished task, and now they can sit and eat in enjoyment of all its benefits.

In addition to the commemorative purpose, the Lord’s Supper also affords believers the opportunity of thorough self-examination from time to time. At the Lord’s Table, each participant can look inward and check to see if there is any iota of sin or things that can make them unworthy partakers and, by extension, unfit for heaven. Such things are properly dealt with through confession and necessary restitution. Furthermore, it is an opportunity to look forward in anticipation of the Lord’s glorious return. “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Also, the Lord’s Supper promotes unity and fellowship among the brethren. The sharing of the same bread and drinking of the same cup give a practical expression to the oneness and mutual fellowship that exist among believers. Every time believers share this Holy Communion, there is a strengthening of that spiritual bond of brotherly love among them (1 Corinthians 10:14-16).

**THE PERVERSION OF THE LORD’S SUPPER:** (1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 29; 5:7, 8; 10:21; 2 Peter 2:1)

**Question 3: Explain what you understand by the perversion of the Lord’s Supper in the Corinthian Church.**

In our text, the Corinthian church had virtually trivialized this highly significant ordinance both by the attitude with which they participated and other extraneous practices they had come to associate with it. In order to properly understand the abuse which the Apostle talked about, a short explanation of the historical setting and the context
of his message are needful. Apart from the Lord’s Supper itself, believers in the Corinthian church had a love feast, wherein the participants brought food from their houses to be eaten in fellowship with others. But with time, this practice brought many problems. There was disorderliness in service, ostentatious display of sumptuous meals by the rich, and this eventually resulted in divisions between the rich and the poor. The wealthy brethren brought and ate their dainties to the chagrin of the poor ones who had little or nothing to bring from home. In fact, these problems became so serious that the Council of Carthage, AD 397, had to ban the love feasts. Due to the carnal practices the Corinthians associated with the Lord’s Supper, Paul the apostle said it could no longer be seen as the Lord’s Supper. “When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord’s Supper” (1 Corinthians 11:20).

Question 4: Mention some ways the Lord’s Supper is being abused in some religious circles today.

In our present day, there are various ways the Lord’s Supper is being abused or perverted. Some of these perversions pertain to the attitude of the participants on the one hand, as well as the notions and methods of conducting it by various assemblies on the other. First, there is problem of misrepresentation of the Lord’s Supper. Some use the wrong emblems such as alcoholic juice, soft drinks, and bread that contain yeast. But the point is: once the emblems are perverted, they lose their significance at the Lord’s Table.

Another misrepresentation of the Lord’s Supper is the notion that the bread and the wine actually change to the real body and blood of Jesus respectively. This tends to portray the Lord’s Supper as something mystical or superstitious, and this attracts uncomplimentary remarks from non-believers. Then there is also the teaching that the real body and blood of Jesus are present with the bread and wine. This is not true. Rather, the unleavened bread and the juice of the fruit of the vine are only symbolic of the body of Jesus that was broken and His blood that was poured for the remission of our sins.

But apart from the misrepresentation of the Lord’s Supper, some people neglect the ordinance altogether,
either because they place little value on it or in an attempt to avoid eating unworthily. This is wrong. The right thing to do if one feels unworthy to participate is to correct whatever thing one is convicted of and partake worthily. The scriptural injunction is: “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28). If a person stays away perpetually from the Lord’s Supper because he feels unworthy to partake, it is an indication that such a person is not ready for heaven and needs to take urgent steps to repent and put his life in order.

One of the greatest abuses of the Lord’s Supper is the presumption of those who partake in an unworthy manner. This happens when a person deliberately harbors sin and yet, with impudence, partakes at the Lord’s Table. To be living in secret immorality, fraud, dishonesty, pride, and keeping grudges or malice against fellow believers while participating at the Lord’s Table would amount to a total disregard for the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which the emblems of the Lord’s Supper represent. Paul the apostle said people who participate at the table of the Lord in an unworthy manner are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

There is also the perversion of focusing on the emblems and physical service of the Lord’s Supper rather than on Jesus Christ whom the emblems represent and who the entire Supper is designed to remember. Christ said: “this do in remembrance of me…” (1 Corinthians 11:24, 25). The way and manner the Lord’s Supper is celebrated should draw the attention of participants to Christ, not only to their sins, weaknesses and failures. Of course, the participants should look inwards and examine themselves so as to purge all hidden iniquities but in doing so they should remember Jesus Christ and trust Him for their cleansing. At the Lord’s Table, we should avoid being so sin-conscious to the point that we lose sight of the power of God to forgive and cleanse all the pollution of sin.

Another common error we should avoid is the tendency to take the ordinance as another shortcut to getting miracles, especially these days when religious people exploit virtually every scriptural ordinance as a means of actualizing their personal pursuit after material blessings.
THE PROPER MODE OF OBSERVING THE LORD’S SUPPER (1 Corinthians 11:23-26, 33, 34; Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20)

The proper mode of conducting the Lord’s Supper is for believers to come together in fellowship and share the bread and wine with grateful hearts to the Lord who died for their sins. The atmosphere should be such that the participants can both have a sober reflection of what Christ has done for us at Calvary, and also be able to look forward with great expectation to His glorious return. The Church must ensure the Lord’s Supper is celebrated on a regular basis and believers, too, must participate as often as it is served. We must not allow trivial excuses or personal engagements to hinder us from attending the Lord’s Table.

In the Old Testament, participation at the feast of Passover was mandatory for all Israelites; how much more then should believers see the Lord’s Supper as more compelling and an obligation not to trifle with.

**Question 5**: What are the requisites for partaking worthily at the Lord’s Supper?

The proper emblems for the Lord’s Supper are unleavened bread and fresh juice of the fruit of the vine (grapes). These emblems, though very simple and common, are very deep in significance. The simplicity of the emblems instructs us that the expressions of our faith and communion with God need not be complex or complicated. The bread represents the broken body of Christ while the wine represents his blood that was poured for the remission of our sins. In conducting the Lord’s Supper, the bread is served before the fruit of the vine.

To participate worthily at the Lord’s Table, there must be adequate preparation and self-examination. We cannot approach the Lord’s Supper in a careless manner. Any participant must be born again and maintain a vital fellowship with the Lord. An unconverted individual can neither honestly celebrate the death of Christ nor confidently anticipate His return unless he genuinely repents and gets washed from his sins. Furthermore, participants must be in fellowship and at peace with other
believers. To this end, each participant must avoid being a promoter of division in the fellowship.

**Question 6: What are the consequences of partaking in the Lord’s Supper unworthily?**

Our text points out grave consequences for those who partake of the Lord’s Supper unworthily. These are people who are unrepentant. They harden themselves against the Lord, yet they want to partake of the emblems that are symbolic of His bruised body and shed blood. For such people, there will be divine judgment in form of sickness, physical weakness and death.

But there are blessings for those who participate in a worthy manner. They will inherit the blessings which God has reserved for those who obey Him. Worthy partakers will enjoy sound health, peace with God, prosperity and long life. Eventually, they will eat with Christ at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in heaven and enjoy everlasting bliss with God in eternity.
Lesson 634

DIVERSITY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

MEMORY VERSE: “Now there are diversity of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:4)

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:1-31

Apostle Paul has been correcting the many ills bedeviling the Corinthian church arising from their ignorance of scripture and operation of God. In the last chapter, for instance, he corrected their improper conducts towards the Lord’s Supper. Among the Corinthian brethren also were some who, in our text, misconstrued the purpose of spiritual gifts. Those who had some gifts considered themselves more spiritual than others. This showed they had a serious misconception of the gifts and misused them. Though spiritual gifts are meant to build the body of Christ, the Corinthians used them to factionalize the church. But Apostle Paul, by the inspiration of God, corrects their views of spiritual gifts as status symbol given only to a privileged few in the Church. He clarified that it was a necessary equipment to enable each believer perform their roles in the body of Christ.

The Apostle would have us know that spiritual gifts are meant to foster unity of the church in diversity. They are given to ensure that the different areas of work in God’s kingdom are well taken care of. No gift is superior or inferior but they are complementary. All the gifts are essential for the proper functioning and smooth running of the body of Christ. A proper understanding of this lesson should send us on our knees to pray for a genuine manifestation of the Spirit in our midst in order to profit everyone.

This chapter is the most explicit on the subject of spiritual gifts in the entire Bible. It sets forth the Source and diversity of the gifts; their purpose, interdependence, and possibility of abuse; the five-fold ministry gifts in the church, and the exhortation to follow the more excellent way of love. The primary purpose of spiritual gifts is to glorify God and edify believers.

Question 1: What is the significance of spiritual gifts in the Church?
PROPER PERSPECTIVE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS: (1 Corinthians 12:1-5; Romans 12:6; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 3:3)

Apostle Paul declares that people who are living in sin cannot receive or manifest spiritual gifts until they are converted from dumb idols they serve and other sinful practices of the world. He also clarifies that the Spirit of God engenders and speaks the truth. He is not the spirit of error and blasphemy that can call Jesus accursed. The Spirit of God in any professing believer acknowledges the lordship of Christ.

The Holy Spirit manifests Himself through the diverse gifts of the Spirit given to believers. These gifts are manifested to foster the growth of the church. Believers have different gifts as well as different levels of faith in manifesting those gifts. A believer can have more than one gift (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1). We also need to understand that agents of Satan can also manifest counterfeit gifts. Therefore, we must painstakingly try all spirits whether they are of God or not (Matthew 7:21-23; 24:11, 24; 1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21).

Question 2: Mention some misconceptions about spiritual gifts today.

Some believers erroneously believe that the operation of the gift of the Spirit is confined to the apostolic age. Others feel that with the completion of the canon of scriptures, spiritual gifts are no longer necessary. In some other assemblies, the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit is demonstrated in such an unscriptural manner that tends towards exhibitionism and disorderliness. None of these extremes is correct. Those who reject the manifestation of the gifts quench the Spirit while others who abuse the gifts grieve the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19; Ephesians 4:30).

CLASSIFICATION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (1 Corinthians 12:6-11; Colossians 1:29; 1 Kings 3:16-28; 2 Kings 6:8-12; Acts 13:9,10; 11:28; 2:4; 10:44-48; Romans 4:17-21; Exodus 7:10; 14:21)

Question 3: State three natural divisions of spiritual gifts and mention the gifts that fall under each division.
The gifts of the Spirit fall into three natural divisions. In the first division, we have the gifts of revelation also called mind gifts, discerning gifts or gifts of perception. These include the **word of wisdom** – the supernatural revelation or insight into the divine will and purpose, revealing how to solve any problem that may arise, as manifested by Solomon in the case of two harlots who had argument on the issue of a dead and a living child (1 Kings 3:16-28; Matthew 2:20; Luke 22:10-12; Acts 26:16); the **word of knowledge** – the supernatural knowledge or insight into the divine will or plan and the plans of others that are not open to the natural man (2 Kings 6:8-12; Acts 9:11,12; Acts 5:3-5); and **discerning of spirits** – the supernatural revelation or insight into the realm of spirits to detect them, their plans and activities (Matthew 9:4; Luke 13:16; John 2:25; Acts 13:9,10).

**Question 4:** Explain the differences between the gifts of the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge.

In the second category, we have the gifts of inspiration also called vocal gifts, declarative gifts or gifts of proclamation. These are **prophecy** – supernatural utterance in the common language (1 Corinthians 14:3); divine utterance, not conceived by human thought or reasoning (Acts 3:21; 11:28; 21:1,2; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Corinthians 14:23-32) and involves speaking unto men for edification, exhortation and comfort; **diverse kinds of tongues** – supernatural utterance in other languages not previously known or learnt by the speakers (Isaiah 28:11; Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4; 10:44-48; 19:1-7; 1 Corinthians 12:10,28-31); and the **interpretation of tongues** – the supernatural ability to interpret in the native tongue what is uttered in other languages unknown to the believer who interprets by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:5,13-15,27,28).

The gifts of power also called working or dynamic gifts are in the third group. The gifts of faith, healing and working of miracles come under this group associated with dynamism. **Faith** – This is supernatural ability to believe God without doubt, unbelief and human reasoning (Roman 4:17; James 1:5-8). It is the extraordinary faith to do exploits in the life of church members. It was the kind David exercised to prevail over Goliath and Moses also manifested it to convey the Israelites across the Red
sea. With this kind of faith, Paul averted loss of life during a shipwreck (Acts 27:1-40). The gift of **healing** is the supernatural power to heal all manner of sicknesses and diseases without human aid. The **working of miracles** is the supernatural power to intervene in the ordinary course of nature and to counteract natural laws if need be for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 12:10, 27-31; Hebrews 2:3, 4; Exodus 7:10; 14:21). Raising of the dead, astonishing provision and spectacular healing etc. are all manner of miracles. We must however emphasize that these gifts overlap in their operations.

**EXHORTATION TO MAINTAIN UNITY IN DIVERSITY:** (1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:3, 13; Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 10:17; Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 1 Peter 3:8)

Here, Paul made use of the human body to illustrate the unity that should exist in the body of Christ. Each part has a specific function that is necessary to the body as a whole. The parts are different for a purpose and in their differences, they must work together.

**Question 5: What should be the attitude of believers as regards the manifestation of the spiritual gifts?**

There are two common errors that come with the manifestation of spiritual gifts that believers must avoid. The first has to do with pride about personal ability. The second is self-abasement or inferiority complex that makes one think he has nothing to contribute to the growth and spiritual well-being of the church. Instead of comparing ourselves one with another, our different gifts must be used to complement each other in spreading the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. With the different gifts that we possess, we are united by the Spirit into one spiritual body. “**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. For the body is not one member, but many**” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Paul argues that the gifts defer one from another but that we must accept all gifts as given by God. No one should feel superior about his or her gifts; instead, all should use their gifts to willingly serve the body of Christ. We must not disregard or belittle the gifts given to us by
God but put them to active use. There must be no envy concerning another believer’s gift that may seem more recognized than ours. Rather, positive attitude should be exhibited when a fellow believer is honored. Possessing a compassionate heart toward those who are suffering is also key to manifesting the gifts of the Spirit (Romans 12:15; 1 Peter 3:8).

There is need for caution in the pursuit and manifestation of spiritual gifts in the church. Spiritual gifts should not be commercialized, for freely we received and we must freely give. We must avoid the error of Simon who thought the gift of God could be bought with money. “But Peter said unto him, thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money” (Acts 8:20).

Spiritual gifts are obtained and manifested by saved, separated, sanctified and Spirit-filled believers. Unbroken communion with God in His word and prayer, commitment to soul-winning, holy living, compassion for others, sensitivity to the Spirit and prompt obedience to God’s word and Spirit make believers effective and grow in the operation of spiritual gifts.
SPECIAL STUDIES

LESSON 635

MODERATION AND CHRISTIAN DRESSING

MEMORY VERSE: “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5).

TEXTS: Philippians 4:5-7, 10-13; 1 Peter 3:1-5; 1 Timothy 2:9, 10.

A sore spot in Christian living and doctrine is the dress code and moderation among believers. Much bickering, arguments and distortions have accompanied this teaching. The Bible gives us moderation as the governing principle that the Christian can safely follow, especially in areas that the Bible does not categorically give commands. Christian conduct during weddings, christening, funeral service, ceremonies, standard of living, music and dressing fall into this category. The Bible principle that dictates our position in such matters is moderation.

**Question 1:** Mention the Bible principle that dictates our position on moderation.

Moderation, in a general sense, refers to a subdued attitude towards the tendency to indulge oneself. It may also be explained as freedom from excess. This is close to temperance. The word has a deeper meaning in the Bible. It refers to our entire attitude towards life – what we say, do, use, etc. In life, we relate with people and they watch our actions and behavior, even if those actions do not directly concern them. No wonder the Word of God clearly gives commands that touches on our character. “Let not then your good be evil spoken of ... Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded” (Romans 14:16; Titus 2:6).

It is the attitude of patience in life that will establish our souls (Luke 21:19). The impatient, agitated and anxious Christian is not a good example of the forbearance of Jesus Christ. James has a parallel scripture to Philippians 4:5 that reads: “Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5:8).
The lifestyles of Christians are to be examples of moderation, not only in physical matters but also in matters of the spirit; not only in outward appearance, but also in inward disposition. Moderation must be reflected in a believer’s mood, comportment, carriage, emotional responses, desires, ambitions and physical actions.

No wonder Paul the apostle, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, enjoined Philippian saints to exhibit moderation so that people will know of this quality in them. He emphasized this quality, when he gave a testimony of his life: “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Philippians 4:12).

**Question 2: What is moderation and why is it necessary in the life of a believer?**

Moderation cannot be separated from humility. Our Lord Jesus Christ had heaven at his beck and call, yet humble Himself and came down to the earth. Although rich in heaven, He made himself poor on earth. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). Even when He and the disciples needed to pay tax. He could have claimed His right not to pay being a citizen. But being humble, He toed the path of peace. He made Peter to work for the money - to catch a fish and extract money from its belly to pay the tax.

**CHRIST-LIKE MODERATION ENJOINED** (Philippians 4:4,5; 2:5; 1 Peter 4:3,4; Proverbs 23:1-5; Ecclesiastes 7:16)

The exhortation to moderation by Apostle Paul was given to believers. No wonder the injunction to rejoice in the Lord preceded this age-long command. It is therefore obvious that moderation is a spiritual virtue that should be found in any genuine child of God.

“Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5). In our desire for even legitimate things of this life and personal or group rights, there should be moderation. This we could see in the life of
Abraham who, though much older than Lot, and being the heir of the promise of God’s covenant blessings, gave Lot the freedom of first choice over the pasture for their cattle. He refused to be drawn into dispute among their herdsmen over grazing land for their cattle. He said to Lot: “Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left” (Genesis 13:9).

In separating for good, notice also that Abraham did not evict Lot by force, though it was in his power to do so. He even needed to appeal to him, saying, “I pray thee”. How many believers today would confidently comport themselves like Abraham? Would it not be heard in the neighborhood and in the church that they could no longer see eye-to-eye because of money and property? Can a fellow believer safely and freely trust you to show moderation in collecting valuables from his stock of good, and you would not greedily empty the stock? The Word of God teaches godliness and contentment as being of great gain.

Believers must not insist on their rights as that could deny them of heaven. Even the Word of God says, “Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?” (Ecclesiastes 7:16). Therefore, moderation will prolong your life on earth.

**Question 3:** *Mention some areas in which the believer must exercise moderation.*

Men-pleasing tendencies, inordinate ambition, elaborate Christian engagements, lavish house-warming, naming and funeral ceremonies are not in consonance with the principle of moderation. Indulgence in trendy fashion, keeping with the styles in vogue, the designs of dress, the indecent, promiscuous dresses in the world are at variance with moderation. They are often a pointer that the individual is a victim of inferiority complex, and lacks confidence in the God he claims to follow.

Similarly, we must manifest moderation in our words for “in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (Proverbs 10:19; James 1:19). A life of
talkativeness offends God. God commands sound, faultless speech, and moderation is the wedge.

What about moderation in the things we eat? Many people have developed bodily ailments because of lack of self-control in consumption. Over-eating, otherwise called gluttony, is sin. It is a mark of selfishness and unbelief in the power of Almighty God to provide for us. Some unmanageable appetites arising from unwholesome eating habits have been blamed for obesity, heart diseases, hypertension and high blood pressure. Even when invited to a feast with abundance of edibles, God’s word quietly advises on moderation (Proverbs 23:1-3, 6-8).

Conversely, some people engage in unduly long dry fasting lasting for weeks, and thereby have ignorantly impaired their health. “Let your moderation be known unto all men”. As the coming of the Lord draws nearer, believers must reflect on this important injunction and live by it.

CHRISTIAN ADORNMENT EXTOLLED (1 Peter 3:3-5; 1 Timothy 2:9; Romans 12:16; 1 Corinthians 11:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:22)

Adornment embraces all the things we wear on our bodies. Yet, the Lord is concerned also about our inner adornment, which should produce a moderating and sobering influence on outward adornment. In I Peter 3:4, the word of God enjoins women, and of course men, to adorn themselves with “the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price”.

In these last days, when some so-called “Christians” and “pastors” give scant regards to obscene and indecent dressing, it will take an unwavering biblical position to bring about a renewal. Those assemblies where indecent and loud dressing have been raised to the level of an art of fascination and entertainment will have to repent.

Curiously, ministers whose adornment can only be mildly described as abomination now occupy pulpits. When ladies or men who profess being Christians wear dresses that expose their chests, cleavages, navels, armpits, or laps into the house of God, it is evident that such ungodly
habits are served to distract genuine and sincere seekers from getting to God.

Costly adornments like gold watches and straps, golden hand bands, chains, earrings and other deviations only help to inflame pride and vanity and flies in the face of a meek and quiet spirit. Similarly, worldly haircut and curling or blowing up same are clearly indicative of a depraved heart. “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Timothy 2:9 10; 1 Peter 3:3, 4).

Question 4: Mention the things that give sparkle and radiance to the believer’s life.

What sparkles in the believer is not the dress he wears but a humble, godly spirit that transcends the glitter of the most precious jewels. The real beauty of the Christian is the inner man. A Christian needs not have any special ornament about his dress. It is the holiness that shines through the countenance of a meek and humble Christian, causing him/her to dress carefully and modestly in conformity with the inoffensive dictates of the gospel. The Christian woman must avoid like a plague, the hair-do that is masculine or those that are deliberately served to attract attention. “For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered” (1 Corinthians 11:6).

Question 5: What kind of adornment does the Bible recommend to believers?

Moderate and decent dressing must avoid the two extremes of loud dressing or contemptible appearance. The guiding principle in dressing is always in favor of neatness, simplicity and decency. The primary purpose of dressing is to cover nakedness appropriately, modestly, moderately. A real believer must “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22).
CAUTION AGAINST EXTREMISM AND COMPROMISE
(Philippians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:7; Isaiah 3:16-23)

Some people preach that God watches the heart only, and is hardly concerned with the body. They forget that the believer’s body is the temple of God. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians. 3:16). Consequently, God will judge those who misuse their bodies.

“Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling (even in the church) with their feet: Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their caul, and their round tires like the moon, The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels, The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the vails. And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well-set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty” (Isaiah 3:16-24).

“Those who argue and split the hair over what to wear are “the mixed multitude”; those who desire to dress in the attire and style akin to what obtains in the heart of the world. They might appear to have come out of the world at salvation, but the world is substantially, still in them. The soul panting after God, reaching out for true holiness and heaven, is not so much concerned about the style of her outward dress, as she is of her inward dressing and adornment. The spiritually-hungry do not desire the show and style of the world. They are instead thirsty for and desirous of peculiar lifestyle that is wholly pleasing unto God.
There are those who stridently mount opposition to moderation in dressing. First, they say, “my God is not poor”. And did not God give express command by Moses that some among his chosen people should be adorned in the most exquisite manner with gold, precious stones and costly array? True, God indeed did command it so. But for the Jews, especially their priesthood, and we, are under different dispensations. The glory of the whole Mosaic dispensation was chiefly visible and external; whereas the glory of the Christian dispensation is of an invisible and spiritual nature.

Others, in their objection to the Bible position on the use of jewelry and obscene dress designs ask: “What then are gold and precious stones for?” The answer is simple. Not everything in creation is meant for the direct use of man. And there are abundance of things that mortal men have not discovered their correct and appropriate use. Still others say “if all men heed the teachings on Christian dressing and dress the way the Bible commands, how would tradesmen live?” God certainly considered this before He gave these commands. And He knew that man would live much better if the commands are strictly adhered. Besides, those who are engaged directly in gold, silver, precious stones and fashion design and all who would have to make a change in their trade might wonder: “How will we live?” A holiness preacher of the eighteenth century replied thus: “They will live like men, by honest, edifying and Christ-exalting labor; most of whom before lived like swine, wallowing in all gluttony and sensuality.”

**Question 6:** *How can the believer debunk non-Christians’ objection to Bible injunctions on moderation and Christian dressing?*

God’s precepts on dressing are clear and unambiguous and should pose no burden to every heaven-bound pilgrim. The simple acid test, which our dressing and indeed our general outlook to life must pass through, is simply this: does it glorify God? If it does not, simply abandon it.
LESSON 636
SANCTIFICATION: A DEFINITE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

MEMORY VERSE: “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deuteronomy 30:6).

TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4, 7, 8; 5:23, 24; 1 Peter 1:14-16

The experience of sanctification is pivotal to the Christian faith. It is clearly taught in Scriptures as God’s gracious work in the heart of the believer. It is necessary for every Christian assembly to give time to study this indispensable experience and ensure that every member becomes a possessor of the blessing.

MEANING AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SANCTIFICATION (Numbers 8:17,18; 2 Chronicles 29:5,15-19; 7:16; Isaiah 43:21; Leviticus 21:1-15; 20:7,8,24-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:3,4; Romans 6:20,22)

Sanctification is a definite work of grace, subsequent to salvation. Sanctification means “to make sacred or holy; to be set apart for a holy or religious use; to make free from sin or to cleanse from moral corruption and pollution”. Being a Christian experience, it is the act of God’s grace by which the affections of men are purified to love God supremely above everything else.

Sanctification also means to be totally cleansed from moral defilement. Man is born with moral pollution, as such, he needs to be cleansed from depraved passions. The believer, though saved and called (1 Peter 1:14, 15), needs to be cleansed from inbred sin. To this end, we can also define sanctification as the “circumcision of the heart”. It also means purity of heart (Matthew 5:8).

Question 1: Mention some misconceptions that people have today about the subject of sanctification and state the proper views.

Though important in man’s relationship with God, it is
one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented Bible teachings. Some common misconceptions are: one, that sanctification or holiness is not possible; they say that man cannot be holy. This is wrong because God cannot require from us that which is unobtainable and impossible. God commanded that believers should be holy because He is holy (1 Peter 1:15, 16). For man to walk with the holy God, he must be holy. God still gives this gift and grace to everyone who desires to be Christ-like like He gave to saints of old. Enoch, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, Job, Zechariah, Paul, etc. are examples of people who received the grace and lived holy and morally upright lives in a corrupt world. If holiness is not possible, Jesus would not have said, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Jesus also prayed for it on behalf of His disciples and all believers. Acting on the truth and possibility of living a sanctified life will surely bring answers to Christ and the believer’s prayer to pass (John 17:17, 19).

Two, others believe that sanctification is a gradual, rather than a spontaneous Christian experience. They believe that we grow into sanctification. This is not true. As salvation and baptism in the Holy Ghost are instantaneous Christian experiences, so is sanctification. We do not grow into sanctification but we grow in the experience after we are sanctified.

Three, there are people who believe that sanctification is by works. But the truth is that we cannot work for our sanctification just as we cannot work for our salvation. Christ has already finished the work for our salvation and sanctification on the cross at Calvary. Now, it is a gift to be received by the willing believer. If it is of works, then it is no more of grace. It is a work of grace done by God in sincere, seeking believers.

Four, others there are who believe that it is only after death that one can be sanctified in purgatory. We need to know that there is no place like purgatory where people go after death to be purged and perfected before being sent to heaven. After death, the Bible says that the next thing is judgment.

Five, some others teach that salvation and sanctification
are the same thing. They believe that both of them take place as an individual gets born again. Though a believer is made morally clean with salvation experience, sanctification is a different work of grace, distinct and different from salvation. It is consequent upon salvation. It is an experience that can only be obtained by those who are already born again.

**THE NECESSITY OF SANCTIFICATION** (Matthew 20:20-24; Jonah 3:4-10; 4:1-11; John 17:17; 1 Peter 1:14-16; Genesis 17:1; Leviticus 11:43-45; 19:2; 20:7,25,26; Deuteronomy 30:6; Hebrews 12:14)

At conversion, righteousness is imputed as the sinner repents of sin and places his faith in the precious blood of Jesus that was shed for the remission of all his sins. But not long after, the new believer, filled with the joy of salvation, begins to notice some inclinations in thought and desire toward the things of the world. He begins to grow cold towards spiritual things. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life begin to overlap his pure spiritual desires. This shows the presence of the adamic nature or the inbred sin. At salvation, the branches and leaves of sin are cut off. But the root or stump still remains. Unless this is uprooted by the supernatural power of God, it has the capability of bringing the believer back to the bondage of sin. This is where sanctification comes in.

**Question 2: Why is sanctification an indispensable Christian experience for every believer?**

Sanctification is necessary because: (1) God commands it (Leviticus 20:7,24-26; 1 Peter 1:14-16); (2) God demands it (Genesis 17:1); (3) it is the nature of God (Leviticus 19:2); (4) it is difficult to maintain a consistent walk with God without it (Amos 3:3; Leviticus 11:43-45); (5) without it, it is impossible to love God supremely (Deuteronomy 30:6); (6) it helps us to obey God and keep His word with a proper motive (Deuteronomy 10:16); (7) in character and conduct, it makes us holy like our heavenly Father (Matthew 5:48); (8) It sets us apart as peculiar children of God; (9) it brings us into perfect bond of unity with other believers (John 17:17,21; Jeremiah 32:39); and (10) it makes us qualified for heaven (Hebrews 12:14).
Question 3: Mention some Bible characters that showed traits of unsanctified life and the challenges their lives pose to the present-day believer.

Abraham’s twenty-four-year walk with God was characterized by inconsistencies. God then called him to perfection. When we discover inconsistencies in our Christian lives, it is a sign that we need the second touch of God. Perfection is not possible without circumcision of heart. Although the children of Israel were already God’s people, they were required to have their foreskins circumcised before they could enter the Promised Land (Joshua 5:1-15). In like manner, if believers are going to enter the Promised Land (heaven), they will need to have their hearts circumcised.

Jonah showed displeasure at God’s decision to spare the lives of the repentant Ninevites. Though he was a prophet of God, it showed the deplorable state of his heart. Jonah needed a new heart of love. If you notice this trait of being angry at God’s acts of mercy on others, the cure is sanctification. Christ’s disciples also manifested carnal tendencies at different times. Obviously, they were born again: Christ declared that their names were written in the book of life (Luke 10:20). These disciples, though saved, had certain blemishes in their lives that made them different from the perfect Son of God they had as their leader. They were selfish, high-minded, self-exalting and ambitious (Matthew 20:20-24; Luke 22:24-27). The needs of others did not arouse a deep concern in their hearts (Matthew 15:22, 23). They showed a critical, judgemental and censorious spirit as they grudged Christ-honoring suppliant (Matthew 26:7-12). They were impatient and vindictive (Luke 9:51-56). Moreover, their love for Christ was limited though they professed high-sounding affection (Mark 14:46-50).

These traits of the old man that were present in the disciples can be found in many believers today who are yet to possess sanctification experience. God allows these manifestations to show us our need of sanctification. Without the experience, we will see things only as they affect us and defend ourselves at the slightest reproof. We will never accept responsibility for wrongs done by us but always blame others for our faults. We will not be happy
when we are not commended on occasions when we felt we have done something well. The unsanctified always wants to be noticed. The manifestation of these traits in His disciples made Christ to pray for the sanctification of believers of all ages.

**THE PROVISION FOR AND POSSESSION OF SANCTIFICATION** (Hebrews 13:12,13; Ezekiel 36:26; Ephesians 5:25-27; Deuteronomy 30:6; 1 Peter 1:2; Matthew 5:6; Romans 12:1; 6:19; Matthew 21:22; James 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).

God has made adequate provision for the sanctification of believers. These include the blood of Jesus - Jesus shed His blood for our sanctification; the word of God (John 15:3) and (3) the Spirit of God (1 Peter 1:2).

**Question 4: What conditions does the believer need to meet before he or she can be sanctified?**

Recognizing that God has made provision for this blessing, we must be ready to possess it. How then does a believer become a possessor? (1) He must be sure of his salvation experience – sanctification is for believers, not sinners. A sinner must first pray for salvation and be sure of his conversion experience before asking for sanctification. (2) He must ensure that he separates himself from the world and its practices (2 Corinthians 6:17). (3) He must consecrate himself and all that he has unto God. His body, soul and spirit must be laid on the altar of sacrifice. He brings all of his past, present and future – personality, possessions, wisdom, talent, intellect, money, ambition, influence, position, etc. – and willingly bind them to the altar. He must be so consecrated that the world and self will hold no attraction for him. (4) He must hunger and thirst for sanctification experience in true humility of heart (Matthew 5:6). (5) He must pray it and (6) believe or receive the experience by faith (1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24). Sanctification is a possibility and it is God’s will for every believer. All those who sincerely consecrate their lives to God, and ask for the experience with unwavering faith will be sanctified.

**PROOFS OF SANCTIFICATION AND POSSIBILITIES OF LOSING IT** (Deuteronomy 30:6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-7; John 17:21-23)
Question 5: Mention some proofs of a sanctified life.

When we are sanctified, the experience will produce changes in our lives. We will know and others will know.
1. There will be the witness of the Spirit in our hearts.
2. The inner peace of God that passes all understanding will permeate our hearts.
3. We will begin to do things out of pure motive; we will be guided by sincere and pure motive in all that we do or say (Philippians 2:13-15); this makes us free from murmuring and self-will.
4. There will be supreme love for God (Deuteronomy 30:6). When we love God supremely, we will serve Him joyfully. We cannot claim to have surrendered all and still complain about God’s demands on us. Sanctification makes us willing and ready to do anything for God.
5. It fills us with pure and sacrificial love for the brethren and sinners (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).
6. We will be entirely yielded unto the Lord – our response to God always will be “yes, Lord, let Thy will be done.”
7. Our affections will be set on things above and not on things on the earth (Psalm 73:25; Colossians 3:1, 2).
8. We will be sensitive to the Spirit’s leading and prodding.
9. We will manifest Christ-like humility (Philippians 2:5-8).
10. We will be totally united with Christ and His church (John 17:21-23). Sanctification, not ecumenism, is the only basis for true unity among believers.

However, seekers and possessors must realize that it is possible to lose this experience. How? If we become careless, we will lose it. The Bible says that “the thief (the devil) cometh not but for to steal…” If we are not vigilant, the precious gift of sanctification will be stolen from us. If we allow little sins to return into our lives – those little foxes will surely spoil the vine (Song of Solomon 2:15). Compromise, excuse-making, censorious and critical tendencies, touchiness, insensitivity, lust, if allowed, will make us to slip into self-management and lose the experience of sanctification.

Question 6: How does the believer keep sanctified?

To keep the sanctification experience, we must: (1) be vigilant and sober always, (2) avoid the company of anybody that can make us frivolous, (3) study the word of God always and be filled with it, (4) maintain a regular devotional life (Joshua 1:8), (6) listen to God’s
leading always (1 Thessalonians 5:19) and (7) maintain fellowship with people of like precious faith and renew our consecration from time to time.

Sanctification is not optional but an indispensable experience for all who want to live abundant, victorious Christian life on earth and spend eternity in heaven. Christ says heaven is for holy believers. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). Pray, possess and preserve the holiness experience to be able to enter heaven.
LESSON 637

LOVING AND SERVING THE BODY OF CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “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).

TEXT: Galatians 5:13-15; Romans 12:3-10

From the text, we discover the scriptural explanation of the relationship of the members of the body of Christ. The Bible is not silent on the duty of each believer in the church. Indeed, it emphasizes the possibility, necessity and the responsibility of serving the body of Christ. The New Testament paints a clear picture of what is meant by the Body of Christ, the Church.

The Church is likened to a bride. Members of the Church to the flock being watched/tend by the Shepherd. The Church is also likened to a kingdom where Jesus Christ is the ruling King. The Church is also called the family of God, where Jesus Christ is the Head. She is described as a building whose foundation is Jesus Christ. Over and above all these, the Church is referred to as the Body of Christ. All these metaphors are used for the Church.

THE UNITY OF BELIEVERS IN CHRIST (Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; 10:17; Galatians 3:26-29; John 17:20, 21; Ephesians 2:10-22; 4:4-6)

“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. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many” (1 Corinthians 12:12-14).

The Word of God emphatically dwells on the unity of the Church, the body of Christ. In the twelfth verse, it says: “the body is one”, and this truth of oneness in the body runs through the three verses. Though there is unity in the body, there is also diversity in the function of the members. This is similar to the human body. While we speak of only one body, there are several parts of the body – head, eyes,
ears, nose, mouth, hands, legs, toes. Though these parts of the body are several, they all in unity, constitute the body.

**Question 1:** How can one become a member of the body of Christ?

The church ought to be one just as the members of the physical body. All the members of the church (blood washed and saved) ought to know that Christ placed them in His body for a purpose. At salvation, the Holy Spirit baptizes (puts) the new believer into the body of Christ: “for by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (verse 13). That one body consists of all “Jews or Gentiles ... bond or free”. As soon as we get born again, all tribal, national, social, professional or academic discriminations are removed and we are fused into one identity - the body of Christ.

“**Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4: 3-6).

Here we see very clearly how the Holy Spirit emphasizes the unity of the body. This is the prayer of the Lord in John’s gospel:

“**Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 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 that thou hast sent me**” (John 17:20,21).

**Question 2:** Mention some attitudes that can affect church unity today.

It is a sin against God when brethren in the church divide along tribal or other lines. Our marriages must not be colored by tribal or other ungodly considerations. It is a sin to discriminate and denounce a member of the church along gender lines. Competition, hatred or resentment in the church contradicts the prayer of Christ and it is a sin. It is resisting the Holy Ghost. The goal and ideal of Christ is that “all may be one”.

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Question 3: What does it take to keep unity in the church?

It takes humility to keep the unity of the brethren in the church. Cooperation of all the members of the church is required for unity to be achieved. “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. 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 member’s one of another” (Romans 12:3-5). None should be self-centered or self-conceited. We should humble ourselves before other believers and let the body be one. The key to the unity of the Church is humility.


Problems are tests of unity in the church. When there are no problems, almost all members profess love, unity and brotherhood. But when problems arise, real unity is proven. This happened in the Corinthian church.

“I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren” (1 Corinthians 6:5-8).

We may accidentally step on one another’s toes; our interests may clash at one time or another and we may be bandied about by some so-called brethren in the local church. We may even be overtly cheated. Such offences, when there is unity, are settled in the church by the leaders where there is unity. Such problems in the family are settled within the family or best by the leaders of the church; never by the extended families or in-laws. The
Bible says, offences must come (Matthew 18:7). Whatever the offence, and wherever the source, we must endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the home and the church in the bond of peace. All segregations must stop.

“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34).

Question 4: Mention some reasons why some brethren despise others in the church.

Some people despise because they feel that other brethren are uncultured or uncivilized. But if Christ were to look for reasons why He cannot love us, He would not need to look too far before He spots a thousand and one faults in our lives. Christ loves us just as we are, and He expects us to love the brethren in the same manner. Do not look for reasons why you should not love your brethren. Rather, search for the things in their lives that would compel you to love them.

Question 5: Why must we love the brethren?

God commanded us to love our brethren; that is the reason we must love them. Second, the soul of our brother or sister is precious before God so we must love that which God deems precious. Third, a brother or sister may seem not physically attractive in your estimation, but he/she has a sweet, beautiful spirit and for that, we must love him/her. Fourth, some brethren may not intelligent in your evaluation but spiritually, their hearts are perfect and for that, we must love them. Fifth, a brother or sister may not be a possessor of a university degree, but he/she possesses the rich grace of the eternal God to live right and victoriously. For that, we must love him/her. The duty and great service we have one towards another is love.

We should love under all circumstances. Brethren may make obvious mistakes, we should still love one another. Your wife behaves unwisely, still love her. A house fellowship member may deliberately go into mischief, still love him/her. Your children may playfully damage some household utensils, still love them. People may not grant you the recognition you expect in the church, still love them. A brother may appear to be weeping today, you are to still
love him because his face may be lit with joy tomorrow. A sister may be lacking the basic things of life today, you are to still love her; she might be mightily blessed of God with all comforts of life tomorrow. We should love one another unconditionally as Christ has loved us. Our love must also be sacrificial and sincere.

“And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:6).

We have different members of the body carrying out diverse functions. These functions, if not specified and carried out, may cripple the body. We should seek how to best serve the body of Christ. Several services are available in the church.

UNDERSTANDING AREAS OF SERVICE AND MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH (1 Corinthians 12:27-31; Romans 12:4-8; Acts 6:1-6; 8:6-8, 26-40; Galatians 5:13; Acts 9:36-39; Titus 2:3-5)

“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).

Question 6: Mention some ministries and areas of service available in the church.

The areas of service and ministry in the church ranges from the sensitive assignment/responsibility to the daily regular duty of caring, giving and showing of mercy. There is a duty for you to carry out. In the house fellowship, all the members cannot lead. But all can give something to comfort, assist and cheer up the needy. In the local church, all the members cannot teach, but all can show mercy one to another, bearing one another’s burden. In every church, all the members can be involved in serving one another. Such duty of serving the brethren is described as a “ministry” in the seventh verse. Some serve the body by helping the brethren in various ways: assisting young
mothers, comforting the distressed and bereaved, cleaning up the church, visiting the sick, weak and lonely.

“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” (1 Corinthians 12: 29, 30).

The thrust here is that we should not compete with one another. We should do whatever the Lord has for us with all our might. Philip, in the church, accepted what he was given to do and did it cheerfully. The work looked mean, but he concentrated on it. He later became an evangelist and the city of Samaria received the gospel through his ministry. Some Christians can hardly appreciate or adjust to serve in the days of small things. But they err. We should start like Philip and leave the future to God.

“For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 3:13). If you start on a seemingly low rung of the ministry, the Lord can, in future, lead you into a higher position; there is always the next level.

“The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Titus 2: 3-5).

The old women who are supposedly matured in the Lord should be teachers, instructing the younger sisters on Christian living, domestic manners and responsibilities.

**Question 7: What is wrong in seeing some services in the church as unimportant?**

Some people classify some works in the church as carnal and unimportant, but they miss it. God places high premium on every ministry in the church because He set up all the ministries. Second, the Bible says whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might (Ecclesiastes 9:10). So, do not idolize any ministry. Giving, visitation,
feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and giving water to the thirsty are as rewarding as any other ministry or position in the body (Matthew 25:31-46).
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A WORD FROM THE PASTOR

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common ... And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:42-47).

The above-mentioned verses becomes clearer when we consider the italicized words. The number of Christians who can confidently say that their lives are in conformity with the above-mentioned scripture, is low. The church, especially in Africa, should provide the opportunity of a forum at which the entire church membership will fulfil these New Testament distinctive role of caring, loving, helping, exhorting, edifying and building up one another. In Africa, almost every church is noted for her largeness, particularly in the area of organizing events, such as big crusades, programs, and big Bible study classes. The leadership should be concerned about the position of new members and visitors to the church. In most cases, first timers integrate into the “big church” without notice of the leaders. This is not the will of God for the Church.

This booklet - Building the Body - provides the long sought solution to this problem in the Church. Building the Body is a bi-annual publication, prepared for use in the Home Caring Fellowship or in churches all over Africa and globally. The Home “Church” aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. CARING FELLOWSHIP

“And all that believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need” (Acts 2:44, 45).

A Home Caring Fellowship comprises believers who hold Christian meetings for the benefit of all its members. Once
you become a member, you will get needed support, even when people of the world fail to give you necessary help. Personal matters discussed are held in strict confidence. The Home “Church” will provide advice or practical help to members, irrespective of the time of day or night. In cases of emergency, for example, where members are desperate for help, the Home Church will surely provide necessary help.

2. GROWTH INTO MATURITY

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:41, 42).

3. FELLOWSHIP, FRIENDSHIP, FREEDOM

“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:46, 47).

The Home Church stays together in the Lord, enjoys freedom of fellowship and like a real New Testament Christian community, prays together. The Home Caring Fellowship helps you and other believers to live a holy, lovely and wholesome life.

4. TOTAL EMANCIPATION FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

In the Home Caring Fellowship, every believing member is free from falsehood of fake teachers. The apostles’ doctrines, Christian fellowship and apostolic prayer will gradually eliminate false doctrines and practices. Thus, you are emancipated (set free) to worship in spirit and in truth.
5. EVANGELIZATION

“Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

The Home Caring Fellowship comprises ‘active’ Christians. When you invite a neighbor to the fellowship, it should lead to the salvation of a soul. The salvation of a new com er should be focus of every saved member of the Home Caring Fellowship.

6. PRESERVATION OF FRUITS

“And they, continuing daily with one accord ...” (Acts 2:46).

As many as are brought into the Home Caring Fellowship are preserved and taught to continue daily with one accord.

7. INTERDEPENDENCE AMONGST BRETHREN

“... and they continued stedfastly ...” (Acts 2:42).

Decades ago, John Doane said, “No man can be an island, complete to itself”. And the sage of old, Solomon said: “Two are better than one, for there is a better reward for their labor”. The Home Caring Fellowship provides opportunity to share knowledge, experience, victories, joys, as well as learn from each other’s challenges. This process contributes to developing every member.
BELIEVERS’ FELLOWSHIP COVENANT

Before you begin this series, realize and agree on some common goals and disciplines with other members of the fellowship. The strength of your Home Caring Fellowship is dependent on how you adhere to the common disciplines. They include the following:

1. ATTENDANCE:
To ensure prompt attendance to the Home Caring Fellowship meeting, do not put other engagements at the time that the Church has set for the fellowship, except in cases of emergency.

2. CONFIDENTIALITY:
To keep personal matters discussed at the fellowship strictly confidential.

3. EVANGELIZATION:
To tell your neighbors about God’s love, mercy, and show them how they can enjoy it and willingly accept new members to the Home Caring Fellowship.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY:
To set goals for your life and ask other members in the fellowship to “support” you in them. Give permission to the fellowship members to hold you accountable.

5. VISITATION:
To go out on a weekly basis; to see other members of the Fellowship in their homes and share the love of Christ with them.
COVENANT STATEMENT

I, ............................................................................................................ will meet
(Full Name)
on ........................................................... , at ............................
(day of the week) (time of day)
with other brethren in my Home Caring Fellowship. With the help of God, I will be a regular, faithful, caring member of this group.

Signed: ..........................................................
**FORMAT OF THE HOME CARING FELLOWSHIP**

1. Opening Prayer 3 minutes
2. Choruses 5 minutes
3. Testimonies 10 minutes
4. Follow-up/Visitation Report and submission of Prayer Requests 12 minutes
5. Praises and Intercession 15 minutes
6. Bible Discussion 30 minutes
7. Prayer 5 minutes
8. Follow-up Schedule 7 minutes
9. Closing Prayer 3 minutes

_________

**Total** 1 hr. 30 minutes

==========
Lesson 01

**BIBLICAL MINISTRY OF VISITATION**


One important aspect of the great commission that has been neglected by many churches and believers is the ministry of visitation and follow-up of the fruits of evangelism. Visitation to new believers is a biblical ministry taught and practiced by the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, and exemplified by the believers of the early Church. Our texts also reveal the importance the Apostle Paul attached to visitation to new believers. It was an inseparable part of his missionary work. No wonder most of his converts were strong believers who later became fellow laborers with him.

Like new born babies, new believers are in their formative, tender years. They need much attention to be able to survive the temptations, oppositions and persecution coming from the enemy because of their new-found faith. Neglect or delay in caring for them immediately after their decision for Christ may have grave consequences, including backsliding and premature spiritual death.

Our care towards them should not be limited to only when they come to church. We should meet them in their homes; at work, in hospital wards or in the prison. The purpose of such meeting is to show genuine love and concern for their spiritual growth and development, as spiritual parents (Matthew 25:34-40; 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 8, 11).

Our visitation therefore must be purposeful and goal-oriented. We need to instruct, nurture and mature them in the faith. First, refer to the word of God to assure them that their sins are forgiven and that they are now children of God (1 John 1:9; Romans 8:16). Second, teach them how to live the new life and the principle of spiritual growth (Matthew 4:4; 1 Peter 2:1-3). Third, guide them on how to maintain a personal, private devotion (Quiet Time) every day (Mark 1:35; Joshua 1:8). Fourth, encourage them to share their testimony with other people regularly (Mark 5:19; John 1:40-46; 4:28-30). Fifth, encourage them to attend all weekly meetings of the church (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 2:42-47). Six, teach them the importance of maintaining
regular prayer life in order to gain strength and victory (Luke 18:1-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18).

If practiced consistently, visitation will lead to spiritual and numerical growth of the church; more laborers will be available for the service of the Lord.

1. (a) What is the biblical basis for visitation in a New Testament Church?
   i. _______________________________________________________
   ii. _______________________________________________________

2. From the following passages, explain the manner of caring for new believers:
   (a) Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 20:20 ________________________
   (b) Acts 14:21-23 ________________________________
   (c) 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3; 3:10________________________
   (d) Psalm 122:1; Hebrews 10:25 _________________________
   (e) Acts 11:29, 30 ________________________________

3. (a) What are the dangers of neglecting or delaying to visit the new converts? _____________________________
    _______________________________________________________
   (b) What are the consequences of refusing to visit the new converts according to Matthew 25:41-46?
    _________________________________________________________
Lesson 02

IRRESISTIBLE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

TEXT: Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12; Matthew 16:18

Looking at the public ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, one can see the manifestation of the power of the gospel as he declared in Luke 4:18,19: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” This is the power of the gospel.

Christ himself testified to the power of the gospel in the same way that John the Baptist did while in prison - he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if it was He that was to come. Jesus’ reply tells it all: “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Matthew 11:4, 5). This is the irresistible power of the gospel.

A few examples of some of the manifestations of the power of the gospel can be cited: the power of the gospel makes for salvation. In Romans 1:16, Apostle Paul declared: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jews first, and also to the Greek.” It is the reason Christ won multitude to Himself, including people who became His apostles, such as Peter, who preached on the day of Pentecost and about three thousand souls were converted.

In Matthew 10:1, Jesus Christ gave power of the gospel to His disciples against unclean spirits: to cast them out and heal all manner of diseases. In the ministry of Paul, the lame was healed (Acts 14:10); a damsel with the spirit of divination was set free (Acts 16:18). None of these people could dispute the conquering power of the gospel; indeed demons and evil spirits obeyed.

Jesus demonstrated what the power of the gospel can do through a believer - that miracles can happen. He left us a
promise before His ascension to heaven - that what He did we too could do them, even greater and mightier things we would do. Like Jesus did, today’s believers are supposed to manifest the power of the gospel in preaching to bring conviction and conversion to sinners, healing the sick, raising the dead, opening blind eyes, and delivering the afflicted. As the power of the gospel was irresistible in the ministry of Jesus Christ, so it can be in the ministry of believers today.

1. (a) From our study today, through what agent or medium did God manifest His power?

_______________________________________________________

(b) Mention five problem areas in people’s lives where the gospel has shown its power.

(i) ________________________ (ii) ________________________

(iii) ________________________ (iv) ________________________

(v) ________________________

2. What do the following Scriptures say concerning believers and the gospel?

(i) Mark 3:14, 15 _______________________________________

(ii) Romans 1:16 _______________________________________

(iii) 1 Corinthians 1:18 _________________________________

(iv) Acts 2:37, 38 _______________________________________

3. (a) In what practical ways can we demonstrate the power of the gospel? _________________________________

(b) What must a believer do to be able to exercise the power of the gospel as given by our Lord Jesus Christ?

_______________________________________________________
Lesson 03

THE CRY OF THE LOST

TEXT: Luke 16:19-31

The word of God is clear on the consequences of all unrepentant sinners and backsliders who die in sin. Certainly, all the people who are lost in trespasses and sin will face fiery judgment and wrath of God which shall be poured upon them unabated because of their rebellion.

The awful condition of the ungodly rich man in our text is a vivid example of the eternal end of the wicked and the fate of lost souls (verse 23, 24). The Bible says, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all nations that forget God” (Psalm 9:7). Hell is the eternal abode of people who die in sin without Christ.

Hell is a place of excruciating pain and torment. It is a place of torture, weeping, wailing and everlasting punishment in the unquenchable fire (Mark 9:48). THE RICH MAN NOW IN HELL, “lift up his eyes, being in torments,... and he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:23,24).

Lost souls will end in hell; groan continually in pains; and shall cry but will not be heard. They will be separated from God. The consequence of not accepting the gospel message and continuing in sin is grievous. You can escape the judgment of God today by sincerely turning away completely from all your sins and believe that Jesus Christ died to save you from penalty of sin.

People who reject the gift of God will cry eternally in the lake of fire. Cry to God today in repentance and receive Jesus Christ into your heart, in order to avoid eternal weeping and wailing after your death. Jesus said, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). Open the door of your heart now and let the Savior in.
1. (a) Who are the people the Bible refers to as “the lost”? ________________________________
(b) Where will lost souls spend eternity according to verse 23 of our text? __________________

2. What lessons can we learn from the following references?
(i) Revelation 20:11-15 ________________________________
(ii) Revelation 14:10; Mark 9:48 _______________________
(iii) Luke 16:26 ____________________________________
(iv) Ezekiel 3:17-20 _________________________________
(v) 2 Corinthians 5:10 ______________________________

3. Enumerate the dangers of remaining in sin and halting between two opinions. ________________________________
Lesson 04

PRESSING ON TO PERFECTION

TEXT: Hebrews 6:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 7:1

The Christian life is a life of grace. It begins, and is sustained and perfected by grace. God does not expect believers to live a spiritual life that is stagnant. We are expected to grow in grace into perfect men and women (2 Peter 3:18).

As mature fruits become desirable when ripe, so is the life of a Christian: it becomes most radiant and desired by other people when ‘double cure’ had been administered to the sin problem in his life. At salvation, only the visible aspects of sin are dealt with. The root, (not visible) is uprooted when the person experiences sanctification, also called holiness, circumcision or purity of heart.

The moment a man is born again, he is cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh, including fornication, adultery, drunkenness, wrath, pride, backbiting, stealing, murder, and sorcery. If he/she does not proceed to experience inner cleansing, he would be ‘staggering’ spiritually because of the filthiness of the spirit or the pollution of the heart. Though saved, he still manifests unforgiving spirit, retaliative spirit, judgmental and critical attitude to others, self-centeredness, self-exaltation, discriminatory attitude and bigotry (Luke 9:46-56).

Sanctification eliminates all inner pollutions and depravity. This different, definite and distinct experience from salvation ushers into the believer’s life unspeakable joy, peace that passes understanding, victory over tempters, worries and anxieties. Above all, a perfect love for God reigns in the heart of the sanctified believer.

It is only a believer who is not satisfied with his state of ‘inner pollution’ that will thirst to possess this Christlike nature. Such a believer is inspired to consecrate his entire life unto the Lord, having separated it from the world totally. He prays earnestly, to ensure he/she lays hold on God’s promises in prayer until God-ordained purity floods into his soul, spirit and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23).
“Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his blood, suffered without the gate” (Hebrews 13:12).

1. What is meant by the double cure of sin?

2. Mention 5 characteristics of an unsanctified believer.
   (i) _______________________ (ii) __________________________
   (iii)____________________ (iv) _____________________________
   (v) _____________________________

3. From the following passages how can a believer experience a perfect heart?
   (i) Matthew 5:6 _________________________________________
   (ii) Romans 12:1, 2 _______________________________________
   (iii) Mark 11:24 _________________________________________

4. What assurance do we have in these passages that we can be sanctified?
   (i) 1 Peter 1:16 _________________________________________
   (ii) John 17:17 __________________________________________
   (iii) 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24 ____________________________
Lesson 05

BELIEVERS’ TESTIMONY

TEXT: John 1:29-51:4:27-30

The stories in our text reveal the attitude of a person who has seen or witnessed a spectacular event. Whosoever sees the extraordinary will want to invite other people to “come and see”.

In John 1:35-51, John the Baptist with two of his disciples saw Jesus Christ and could not resist saying, “Behold the Lamb of God!” In other words, see, appreciate, accept, respect, and honor Him who is the sacrificial Lamb of God.

One of the two disciples of John who heard him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. Andrew first found his brother and took him to Jesus, verse 41. It is clear therefore that when a person sees the spectacular, he invites other people to see it.

From verse 43, Jesus went into Galilee and found Philip and said unto him, “Follow me”. Remember, if Jesus hadn’t travelled to Galilee, He would not have met Philip; He called him, then he became Jesus’ disciple. In verse 45, Philip now a believer with a testimony, preached to Nathaniel. The greatest testimony of a believer is to testify on how he met the Lord Jesus and became converted. Philip said, “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

When a believer bears the testimony of his conversion, many people become converted. It is why in John 1:49, Nathaniel could say “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel”.

If a believer obeys the Lord’s commandment (Matthew 28:19a; Mark 16:15), to bear the testimony of his conversion, people will experience the promise of the Lord, which says. “Hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:51).

In John 4:27-30, we see that when a person meets the
extraordinary, it sets up a relay action - action that leads to other actions. When a person becomes genuinely converted, he becomes like “a city set upon a hill”, he cannot be hid.

In our text, when the Samaritan woman met the Lord, her life was touched; she could not hide her testimony. “She left her water pot and went her way into the city and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did” (John 4:28, 29). This is what happens when a person has a personal contact with Christ. He bears the testimony and people respond (John 4:30). A song writer puts the believers’ testimony like this:

**Go and tell them (2ce) Jesus died for a sinful world**

**Go and tell them (2ce) He is coming back again**

1. (a) What is a believer’s greatest testimony?

(b) What is the focus or central theme of a believer’s testimony?

2. What do we learn from the following references?

i) Matthew 5:14, 15; Psalm 66:16

ii) Matthew 10:27

iii) Acts 1:8

iv) Acts 18; 9, 10

v) Mark 5:18, 19

3. (a) What should be the state of mind of one bearing the testimony of his conversion to the Lord? (2 Timothy 1:8).

(b) How constantly should a believer be ready to give his testimony to his hearers? (1 Peter 3:15)
Lesson 06

SCRIPTURAL WATER BAPTISM

TEXT: Matthew 3:1-17

Water baptism is one of the cardinal doctrines of Jesus Christ. Like other doctrines of the Scripture, the church must faithfully uphold it. It is not a substitute or a precondition for salvation. Experience of salvation comes when a sinner confesses his sins, repents from them and by faith accepts Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to administer water baptism on people who believe the gospel and are saved. Salvation comes by grace through faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who gave His life to redeem man from the pollutions of sin. Water baptism does not guarantee salvation. There are examples in the Scriptures of people who were baptized in water after they had manifested clear evidence of a saved life. The multitude “that gladly received (the) word” on the day of Pentecost were baptized at the instant (Acts 2:41). The believers at Samaria, the Ethiopian eunuch and Saul of Tarsus were baptized when they got saved.

The conception that one cannot be saved without water baptism is wrong. The thief on the cross was saved but did not have the opportunity to be baptized in water. However, believers ought to surrender themselves for scriptural water baptism immediately they become saved.

Water baptism done before a person is saved is not scripturally acceptable. Infant baptism is equally wrong because an infant cannot express saving faith in Jesus. The acceptable mode of water baptism is by immersion in water only once and not thrice as some believe. This is done in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Those who carry it out in the name of the Son only are not following the Scripture. Through the immersion, we are identified with Christ’s burial and resurrection. It is also a way of making a public declaration of an inner faith in Christ.

Water baptism must be a continual exercise carried out by the church, as long as new converts are coming to the
Lord. Jesus said, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned”. Obedience to this command is a mark of true discipleship.

1. (a) What is water baptism? _____________________________
___________________________

(b) What must a sinner do to be baptized in water?
_______________________________________________________

2. Mention some wrong modes of water baptism.
(i) ____________________ (ii) __________________________
(iii) ____________________ (iv) _________________________

3. What can we deduce from the following passages of the Scripture?
(i) Luke 3:21 __________________________________________
(ii) Matthew 28:19 _____________________________________
(iii) Acts 2:41 __________________________________________
(iv) Acts 8:34-38 _______________________________________
Lesson 07

BURNT WORKS OR REWARDING LABOUR?

TEXT: Matthew 25:14-30; 7:21-23

The Word of God emphatically states that “Except ye be converted... ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). There are many church-goers today who are not yet converted. They are regular at all meetings; in fact, zealous in church activities, such as teaching, preaching, singing, serving in one committee or another, yet they have not had an encounter with Christ. They give liberally or actively promote fund-raising efforts towards the programs and projects of their churches. They are generous to people inside and outside the church, such as meeting the needs of the poor and giving themselves to social service in their communities. Regrettably, they are still deep in sinful acts, such as adultery, idolatry, witchcraft, stealing, wickedness, and the like. The Bible asks, “Thou therefore which teachest another teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, does thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, does thou commit adultery? thou that abhorest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?” (Romans 2:21, 22).

Some of these people are so engrossed in church activities to the point that when they hear messages from the Word of God, they become presumptuous. They do not pray until they are sure that the Word has been firmly planted in them. Consequently, they become careless in their way of talking and living. No wonder they soon allow things they had previously abandoned, such as anger, bitterness, unforgiving spirit, and unbelief, to return into their lives. The Bible warns that such people “after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Peter 2:20).

There are other people who profess to have spiritual gifts of teaching, prophecy, and of working of miracles, but they teach errors, such as the false doctrine of eternal
security; they pronounce false prophecies to satisfy their covetousness. Jesus Christ says of them: “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21-23).

In order to get reward for our good works in eternity, we must have been genuinely saved through faith in Christ Jesus and be free from sin. Our worship, prayer, preaching, teaching, counselling, giving, evangelism, working of miracles and other good works must be carried out in obedience to God’s Word. The purpose of our work must be to promote God’s glory alone, not our glory. They must not be done for the purpose of attracting men’s commendation, recognition or for obtaining men’s favors. Good works that will attract God’s reward are those carried out in holiness of life, with self-denial, Christlike compassion, love and humility such that, “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10).

1. Mention some ‘works’ that Christians do?
   (i) ______________________ (ii) __________________________
   (iii) ______________________ (iv) _________________________
   (v) ____________________________________________________

2. Why will some so-called Christian ‘works’ be ‘burnt’?
   (i) ____________________________________________________
   (ii) ___________________________________________________
   (iii) ___________________________________________________
   (iv) ___________________________________________________
   (v) ____________________________________________________

3. What attitudes must Christians manifest so that their ‘works’ can be rewarded?
   (i) Matthew 6:2-4 ______________________________
(ii) Matthew 10:6-8
(iii) Luke 17:10
(iv) Matthew 9:36
(v) John 15:5
(vi) 1 Corinthians 15:58
(vii) 1 Corinthians 13:1-3
Lesson 08

OBEDIENCE TOWARD GOD

TEXT: 1 Samuel 15:1-9

There is no point attempting to please God through giving, keeping of the Ten Commandments, observing religious ordinances, and the like. Obedience to the word of God is key; there is no substitute for it.

The reason why Saul, the first King of Israel fell was the same reason why Adam fell in the Garden of Eden. It was disobedience to God’s clear command. God’s demand for obedience to His word from all men remains unchanged for all ages. God demands complete obedience in every area of our life. This is the only means of sustaining our relationship with Him.

In our daily Christian living, obedience to God is required in major things as well as those that seem minor or insignificant. We should take cognizance of all our actions and decisions, because they can affect our progress in the Christian journey. We must regulate and weigh them with God’s word. Whenever our personal interests conflict with God’s commandment, we must give priority to God irrespective of the discomfort that such a decision may bring to our flesh. Without a doubt, the devil will attempt to trick us by suggesting that there is no logic behind absolute obedience. He will often suggest alternatives as well as boost our confidence in them. He will present the benefits of his suggestions. Remember there is no substitute for obedience to God. We must resist the devil and reject his suggestions.

It was Saul’s desire for greater wealth that made him to spare “the best of the sheep and the best of the oxen and of the fatlings, and the lambs and all that was good”. He disobeyed God’s command to destroy all. How many present day believers still regulate their business and career pursuit with the word of God? Prosperity preaching is leading many people into covetousness, bribery and deceit. To get God’s blessings and prosperity, we must obey His commandments on holiness, purity, and righteous living.
Every family need to uphold God’s word and live by it. Relationships among family members must be guided by the word of God. Parents have to show by example their submission to God through their continual obedience to His word. This will encourage the children to respect God’s word; have faith in Him; and obey the scriptures even when conflicts arise in their lives. God demands obedience in our Christian service. God’s work cannot be done independent of His word. The Scripture prescribes how we ought to render our service to God. Worldly principles and carnal methods cannot be adopted in preference to scriptural principles and methods, however attractive. When we obey God’s word then we are able to go where He sends us; do what He commissions; and say what He tells us.

1. What was the cause of Saul’s rejection?
_______________________________________________________

2. (a) What excuse did Saul give for not obeying God’s word? ____________________________
(b) Mention some excuses people give today for not obeying God’s word in the area of:
   (i) Repentance ____________________________
   (ii) Restitution ____________________________
   (iii) Water Baptism ____________________________
   (iv) Unequal yoke in marriage ____________________________

3. From the following references, how important is obedience to God’s word?
   (i) Exodus 19:5 ____________________________
   (ii) 1 Kings 3:14 ____________________________
   (iii) Matthew 12:50 ____________________________
   (iv) John 14:23 ____________________________
   (v) Revelation 22:14 ____________________________
Lesson 09

TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSEL


From the beginning, God has always used man to fulfil His divine purpose on earth. In most cases, He uses weak vessels to achieve great exploits. “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:27).

However, before God can use anybody, there must be a relationship with Him. The person must possess a divine treasure to energize him for God’s service. This treasure is the power of the Holy Ghost which God promise to pour upon all flesh (Joel 2:28-31).

The Lord Jesus Christ accomplished His ministry to the lost sheep in the fullness of the Holy Spirit power. (Matthew 4:1; Acts 10:38). He commanded His disciples to continue in the preaching of the gospel, but charged them to receive the promised power for effective evangelization of the world (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).

The baptism in the Holy Ghost in a believer makes a real difference. Remember Peter, prior to Pentecost, was fearful and trembling; same Peter after Pentecost, became a bold preacher of the truth. This treasure in a believer makes him/her bold and dynamic. The Holy Ghost gives wisdom, power and anointing to preach and teach the word of God that brings conviction and conversion. He boost the prayer life of the believer and gives inspiration and revelation in the word of God. He guides in all truth and illuminates the heart (John 16:12, 13). Through the power of the Holy Ghost, sicknesses are healed and captives of Satan set free (Acts 3:1-9; 5:12-16).

If we are to live the overcomers’ life over sin and Satan in this world, we need the Holy Spirit. If we are to fulfil the great commission, we need the Holy Ghost power to break the yoke of sin and Satan that is in sinners. The promise is unto you; indeed, you can possess this gift of God, even today.
To qualify for this gift of God and obtain God’s blessing, you must be born again and cleansed from all inward sin.

1. (a) Mention some Bible characters who experienced a mighty outpouring of the Holy Ghost in their lives and ministries __________________________________________

   (b) Describe the effects of the baptism in their lives _______________________________________________________

2. What difference does the baptism of the Holy Ghost make in a believer’s life and ministry?
   (i) ____________________________________________________
   (ii) ____________________________________________________
   (iii) ____________________________________________________
   (iv) ____________________________________________________
   (v) ____________________________________________________

3. (a) What are the steps a seeker must take in order to receive the mighty outpouring according to the following references?
   (i) Ezekiel 36:25 _______________________________________
   (ii) Deuteronomy 30:6 __________________________________
   (iii) Acts 5:32 __________________________________________
   (iv) John 7:37 __________________________________________
   (v) Mark 11:22-24 _______________________________________
Lesson 10

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

TEXT: Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 1:8

The word ‘church’ is translated from the Greek word, ‘ecclesia’, which means, “called out”. Church in the New Testament therefore refers to “a company of people called out” of sin and the world into a new relationship with Jesus Christ, to perform the mission of Christ. It is a wonderful privilege to be a member of the Church. But such a privilege carries with it the responsibility of bringing others to Christ through the gospel message.

Christ came into this world to seek and save the lost. He came to call sinners to repentance (Luke 19:10). He came to fulfil the desires of the Father who wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Christ’s focus was on seeking and saving perishing souls. He never allowed the opposition of the Pharisees and Saduccees to distract His attention from His set goal. His purpose was to do His Father’s will and finish it (John 9:4). He went to individuals, villages and cities to preach the gospel (John 4:4, 10; Luke 4:42-44).

Jesus, the Head of the Church, sent His disciples to proclaim the good news to those who were lost in sin and darkness (Luke 10:1, 2). This mission to the lost must continue until He returns to the earth.

The mission of the Church can be summarized into the two aspects of the great commission as expressed in our texts (Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16). First, the Church is to make disciples of all nations through the preaching of the gospel and second, to teach them all things (the whole counsel of God). Both aspects of the great commission must go together. As souls are won into the Church, they must be integrated into the body of Christ in order to become mature members of the Church.

The mission cannot be accomplished by some few individuals in the Church, but the whole body of Christ. Every member of the Church (saved souls) must get involved in the evangelization of sinners in our community. Soul-winning is the ministry of every believer. To refuse to
preach the gospel is to reject the leadership of Christ in the Church. Although the Church has the responsibility of building up the body of Christ through worship, fellowship, teaching, prayer (Acts 2:42-47) through the regular weekly meetings, yet the ministry to the lost within and outside the country is necessary to rescue perishing souls (Romans 9:1-3; 10:1, 14, 15). All members must therefore co-operate with the leadership of the local church to reach sinners for Christ.

1. (a) Explain the meaning of the word ‘Church’.
_________________________________________________________________________

(b) How can a person become a member of the Church of Christ? ________________________

2. Who is the head of the Church and what was His mission on earth? ________________________

3. From the following references, identify the responsibilities of the Church?
   (i) Luke 19:13; John 20:21 ____________________________
   (ii) Mark 5:18-20; Acts 8:4 ____________________________
   (iii) Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 2:42 ______________________
   (iv) Acts 26:19 ______________________________________
   (v) Matthew 9:36 ____________________________________
Lesson 11

STANDING ON GOD’S PROMISES

TEXT: 2 Peter 1:1-4

A promise is as good as the credibility of the person making it. Many times, men make promises but fail to fulfil them, perhaps because of insincerity or inability to fulfil them. But with God it is not so. He is faithful to His promises. The Scripture says, “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Corinthians 1:20), and that “God is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19). The strength of the believer therefore are the promises of God: they strengthen the believer to handle life’s challenges and shield him from the wicked devices of the enemy.

The promises of God cover every area of our lives. Sometimes, we meet circumstances, problems, difficulties, and trials which tend to perplex and paralyze our entire life and seem to defy solution. The Lord encourages His children that at such times, they should not react in fear and worry like other people; instead, they should reflect on God’s promises. When our marriages are troubled because of satanic activities, or the future of the entire home seems bleak and uncertain, the only solution is to stand on the promises of God.

When the problem is in our place of work where we face threat of losing our jobs or it is in the market where we trade where other sellers gang up against us, we must remember that the promises of God are the guarantee for our safety and victory over the enemy. When we face situation of famine or austerity, the promises of God should remind us that He is the great unfailing provider.

Jesus Christ bade us “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Nevertheless, our courage seems to fail as we see the magnitude of the task. But Christ has promised: “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Psalm 2:8).
Sometimes, our actions do not reflect faith in the promises of God, especially on occasions when we try to adopt human methods to find solutions to our problems. We often assume that God has forgotten us during time of trouble. But He always knows the right time to act. His promises will be fulfilled according to His own time table, not ours. His word is sure, because, the Scripture tells us that God honors His Word above His name. Sin, however, is the one thing that can hinder us from enjoying the promises of God. Sinners and backsliders must therefore acknowledge and confess their sins to God, repent and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

1. What is the reason for our confidence in the promises of God? ____________________________________________

2. Mention some situations in our lives that are covered by the promises of God.
   (i) ______________________  (ii) ___________________________
   (iii) ______________________ (iv) ___________________________
   (v) ___________________________

3. What do we learn from these references?
   (i) Genesis 12:1, 2: Genesis 21:5 ______________________
   (ii) Mark 16:18; Acts 28:3, 5 ____________________________
   (iii) Joshua 1:3-5; Joshua 7:10-13 ______________________
Lesson 12

TRUE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

TEXT: Matthew 16:24-26

To follow someone is to accept that person as lord or master. It means to learn only from him and do all things as taught by him irrespective of how unpopular such teachings may be or whether obedience to them may bring difficulties. There are people who follow men because such men have influence, popularity, authority, or experience. Other people follow the multitude in their sins. But true followers of Christ are a special group of people. They have repented of their sins, yielded their lives to Christ and have received pardon and forgiveness for their sins. Now they have peace and grace of God. They are not like the self-righteous hypocrites who continue in sins and trespasses, even though they may be coming to the church and profess to be Christians.

Like an ambassador who clearly knows what his mission is, the life of a true follower of Christ is not characterized by sinful pleasure, selfish desires, fleshly indulgences and carnal conversations. He desires holiness and life of victory above all sins. He lives daily in obedience to God’s commandments. He does so without complaining or murmuring even though he encounters shame and inconvenience.

True followers of Christ seek to serve others as Christ had served them, for Christ “came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Their service to others is without ulterior, selfish motives. They are people who have pledge total obedience to God’s unchanging Word, and will not change, whatever may be the worldly enticements or temptations. They love God and fellow brethren without reservation or secret resentment. As Christ forgave, they whole-heartedly forgive and forget all offences and all persecutions against them. As Christ was humble, they take His humility as the law of their lives in obedience to the word of God that says, “In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). They live daily life of holiness and total devotion to prayer. Finally, they
are committed to and zealous in carrying out the work that brought Christ to the world, namely, the salvation of sinners.

1. What is meant by following Christ?

_______________________________________________________

2. What do we learn in these passages about Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior?

(i) John 13:14 ____________________________

(ii) 1 John 3:16 __________________________

(iii) John 6:38 __________________________

(iv) Matthew 11:29 ______________________

(v) Philippians 2:5-8 _________________________

3. Write down 10 marks of a true follower of Jesus Christ.

(i) __________________________    (ii) ________________________

(iii) __________________________    (iv) ________________________

(v) __________________________    (vi) ________________________

(vii) __________________________   (viii) ________________________

(ix) __________________________   (x) _________________________
Lesson 13

LOVE IN THE FAMILY

TEXT: Ephesians 5:20-33

The kind of love that should exist in the family is beautifully described in two ways in our text. First, Husbands should love their wives even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it. It is unfortunate that this type of love rarely exist in many Christian homes. As Christ’s love for the Church has no limitation, so the love of Christian couples for each other should be without limitation. The true joy of marriage cannot be enjoyed without this kind of love. Like Christ who sacrificed His life for the Church, so must we be prepared to sacrifice whatever may be necessary for the happiness and unity of the family.

Why did Christ love and sacrifice Himself for the church? - to “present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”. True love has a goal, not selfish kind of goal, but a Christ-honoring goal. We should aim to develop and contribute to each other’s progress spiritually, mentally, and career-wise. When we love each other as Christ loves the Church, whenever we offend each other, there will be true forgiveness.

The second is that husbands should “love their wives as their own bodies... For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church”. In order to protect our body from harm, we give it enough care and protection. In the same way, Christian couples are expected to care and protect each other.

To sustain love in the family, certain things are essential. First, the Scripture must have a prominent place in the home. There must be respect for the word and willingness to submit to its rebuke and correction. The more a family takes time to study the word of God together, the deeper the love grows for each other. Second, there is the need for respect for each other and consideration of each other’s views and feelings. Love thrives when there is openness and freedom to express one’s views. Third, there must be co-operation: it promotes a sense of belonging. There will
be no meaningful achievement in a family where there is no co-operation. The fourth, is the willingness to bear one another’s burden. No member of the family should be made to bear his/her burden alone. Whatever help or assistance by way of prayers, counsel, or finance that may be required must be given without any bickering. Fifth is communication. Time must be created to discuss plans and fears. Such discussions go a long way to provide necessary encouragement and support.

1. How should Christian couples love each other?
   (i) Verse 25 ________________________________
   (ii) Verse 28, 29 ________________________________

2. From the following passages, how can we preserve love in the family?
   (i) Colossians 4:6 ________________________________
   (ii) 1 Peter 3:8 ________________________________
   (iii) Ephesians 5:22 ________________________________
   (iv) Colossians 3:20 ________________________________
   (v) 1 Peter 3:7 ________________________________

3. In what practical ways can each member of the family contribute to the success of the family?
   (a) The father ________________________________
   (b) The mother ________________________________
   (c) The children ________________________________
Lesson 14

THE GREAT INVITATION

TEXT: Matthew 22:1-14

We often receive invitation from many people for different occasions. The greatest invitation however is the invitation from the Almighty God to sinners. From the time Adam and Eve fell into sin, God has always sent invitation to men to bring them back to the original position of friendly relationship with Him.

Sin separates man from God (Isaiah 59:1, 2). Man has become the servant of the devil because of sin. Man who was supposed to be the temple of God has been defiled by sin.

Today, God is inviting sinners to repent, knowing that without repentance, the destiny of sinners is eternal sorrow and doom in hell. The sinner has no part in the kingdom of God. He is not under the protection of the Almighty God. The judgment of God against the sinner is severe. To avert this judgment, God has given up His own Son as propitiation for our sins.

Jesus Christ is the only way to God. He has suffered and died for the sins of men. The blood He shed is the atonement for our sins. He did not commit any sin, but gave Himself for our sins. While He was on earth, Jesus gave invitation to all men to come unto Him even in their sinful state and transgressions. He is still making the call today. He is the one approved of God to reconcile us to Himself. It is rather sad that many are rejecting God’s offer of peace and pardon given through Jesus Christ. They attempt to get to God through a lot of self-contrived methods, such as good works of almsgiving, observance of the Ten Commandments, and regular church attendance. All these efforts have proved fruitless.

As they did in the days of Noah, many people are still handling God’s invitation with levity. They are giving themselves over to surfeiting, drunkenness, lasciviousness, greed, violence and murder. Believers need to urgently go into the streets to bring sinners into the kingdom. God is still waiting with open arms to receive them. Repentance
from sin and faith in Christ will break down the wall of partition between God and man.

1. What is the state of the sinner? ____________________
   __________________________________________________________

2. (a) What provision has God made for the sinner’s salvation through the great invitation? _________________
   __________________________________________________________
   (b) What should be the attitude of the sinner towards the great invitation from God?

3. How can a sinner become a saint?
   (i) Psalm 34:18 _________________________________________
   (ii) Luke 18:13 _________________________________________
   (iii) Proverbs 28:13 _____________________________________
   (iv) John 1:12 __________________________________________
   (vi) Romans 3:24 ________________________________________
Lesson 15

HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE?

TEXT: Hebrews 2:1-3

It is at the cross that the curse inherited by man was cancelled. In His infinite mercy and love, God gave His only begotten Son to reconcile the fallen man back to Himself. It was God’s initiative to send Christ as the propitiation for the sin of the fallen man. The devil had dominion over man, but Christ gave His life to ransom man from him who had the power of death (Hebrews 2:14). Salvation from the power of Satan and sin is now possible for whoever will accept God’s plan of salvation for his life (Romans 10:13).

Unfortunately, many people still neglect this ‘so great salvation.’ Instead, people are desirous of sin, which will ruin them. Those who reject the glad tidings will settle for the sad tidings. How shall they escape God’s Judgment if they neglect God’s mercy? How shall they escape God’s wrath if they adamantly embrace fleshly pleasures?

The ways of transgressors are hard because God is angry with them every day (Psalm 7:11). The sinner is cut off from the life and love, power and protection, provision and prosperity of God. He shall receive a just recompense of eternal sorrow and suffering if he continues to neglect Him who says: “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

In order to escape the wrath of God, the sinner must quickly run into the bosom of Christ. He must humbly realize his sinfulness, repent of his rebellion and receive Christ into his heart by faith. And as many as received Him to them He gives power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name (John 1:12).

1. (a) What is man’s greatest problem?

(b) Whose life was given to ransom man from this great problem?
2. What is the lot of sinners now and at eternity from these passages?

(i) Psalm 7:11 ________________________________

(ii) Proverbs 15:8 ______________________________

(iii) Luke 15:14-16 ______________________________

(iv) Luke 16:23 ________________________________

(v) Revelation 20:15 ____________________________

3. How can the sinner escape the judgment of God?

_____________________________________________
Lesson 16

THE GOOD OLD WAY

TEXT: Jeremiah 6:16

Consider a person who is going on a journey to a particular city. When he gets to a place where the road divides into several ways; obviously because he is not willing to go astray, he should stop to find out the right way. If he is still unable to determine the right way, he will seek proper direction from another traveler. Armed with the right information, he will then proceed on his journey and eventually arrives at his desired destination.

There are many people who profess to be on their way to heaven, but have missed the right path. Such people have not stopped to check the proper direction. The Bible declares that “in the last days, perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves” (2 Timothy 3:1, 2). The love of self will lead to pride, vainglory, and covetousness. People will abandon sound doctrines and essentials of Christian living. Jesus Christ had forewarned: “take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And many false prophets shall arise and deceive many” (Matthew 24:4, 5). Such deceivers often exalt their own selves and personality. Their major focus and desire are signs, wonders, miracles, and prosperity. They tailor their messages to suit and please those who listen to them.

Modern Christian practices are rampant in many church assemblies. The people engage in worldly practices; as such neglect or trivialize messages on repentance, sanctification, and Holy Ghost baptism. Such assemblies encourage unscriptural manifestation of the gift of speaking in tongues; idolization of materialism; permissive and lustful interaction between men and women; and unnecessary display of talents, status, and achievement. In such assemblies, the people are rarely taught or concerned about heaven.

The Christ-honoring way is the good old way which emphasizes salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, holiness without which no one shall see the Lord,
enduement of power by the Holy Ghost for service, an unquenchable thirst and hunger for the word of God, uncompromising obedience to the word of God, faithful commitment to evangelism, a passionate devotion to prayer of intercession and a life of faith in God and His promises. The good old way is characterized by self-denial, need to endure persecution and to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints.

It is that good old way that guarantees eternal life with Christ in heaven. It is the same way that God-approved men and women in Bible times followed. Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Daniel, Peter, Paul, Esther, Mary etc. trod this path. God has promised: “let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7). This is God’s invitation to all who have missed the way to heaven.

1. (a) What is the good old way?

(b) Why must we strive to continue in the good old way?

2. What signs do we see today in some Christian assemblies that reflect departure from the good old way?

3. What do we learn from these Scripture passages?
   (i) Isaiah 1:12-15 
   (ii) Matthew 7:13,14 
   (iii) Isaiah 35:8 
   (iv) Proverbs 14:12 
   (v) Ezekiel 33:14-16
Lesson 17

“YE SHALL RECEIVE POWER”

TEXT: Acts 1:1-11

Power to do exploits comes upon a believer after receiving the Holy Ghost baptism. The Holy Spirit is the third person in the Trinity whom we must worship, have fellowship with and listen to. He is the Spirit of Truth who helps to accomplish Christ’s work of man’s redemption.

The desire of Christ for His Church is that the Church should be virile, militant and stable to withstand every onslaught from the devil.

Power in the Church is the power in individual believers. If the believers in the congregation are void of power, the church is powerless. Jesus gave to His disciples the promise of the power needed to be true and effective witnesses unto Him (Acts 1:8). Without the power of the Holy Ghost on the disciples, the gospel which started in Jerusalem will not reach the uttermost parts of the earth.

The early Church witnessed amazing influx of new converts as they patiently sought and received the Pentecostal power. The lack of this power in the lives of many believers today is reason for lack of appreciable physical and spiritual growth in the Church. It makes some people resort to physical, carnal means in carrying out spiritual tasks.

The baptism in the Holy Ghost comes upon a sanctified believer as a gift that enhances his witnessing for Christ. The initial evidence of this experience is speaking in an unknown tongue (Acts 2:4). This is not a language which a minister or another person teaches the seeker of the experience.

There are numerous effects of the Holy Ghost baptism on a believer. The believer gets boldness to preach the gospel in the face of difficulties and opposition; fervent, prevailing and vibrant prayer life; wisdom and very deep love for God. The Holy Spirit instills authority in a believer over the devil and his agents. There will be deeper understanding of the Word of God and comfort in times of discouragement and trouble.
The seeker of the baptism in the Holy Ghost must be saved and sanctified. Likewise, intense desire and thirst for the experience, faith and prayer to receive are necessary preconditions for the enduement of power on a sanctified believer.

Once received, the power of the Holy Ghost must be kept and profitably used for the spread of the gospel.

1. Who is the Holy Spirit? _______________________________

2. List six effects of the Holy Ghost baptism upon a believer.
   (i) ____________________________ (ii) ____________________________
   (iii) __________________________ (iv) ____________________________
   (v) ____________________________ (vi) ____________________________

3. From the following texts, what must we do to be baptized in the Holy Ghost?
   (i) John 3:3 ___________________________________________
   (ii) John 17:17 _________________________________________
   (iii) Isaiah 44:3; John 7:37-39 ___________________________
   (iv) Luke 24:49 _________________________________________
   (v) Matthew 21:21,22 ________________________________
Lesson 18

THE FRUIT OF A CHRISTIAN LIFE

TEXT: Matthew 7:15-20

Nothing else distinguishes the believer from other people aside the fruits he bears. These will confirm the genuineness or otherwise of his professed salvation experience. As a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, so it is impossible for the unregenerate to manifest Christian virtues. The indwelling Spirit of God in every true believer produces a lifestyle that is in complete contrast to the former life. Corrupt desires and practices are replaced with the fruits of righteousness that are the hallmarks of a true Christian life.

Like Christ, a true Christian is holy and righteous in thoughts, words, action and affection. His conduct in public and private life are without spot and blemish. He is a burning and shining light in his community, resisting the moral decay and corruption in the society. His life brings conviction upon the hearts of men concerning the abundant riches of God’s grace to make us free from all outward or secret sins and all appearances of evil.

Meekness and humility are also some of the fruits of the Christian life. We are living in an age when there is self-consciousness and passion to be great and recognized even among so-called believers. Those who want to live the Christlike life cannot be different from our Master. To drive home the need for humility and meekness among the disciples and indeed among His followers, Christ stooped to wash the feet of His disciples and told them, “If I then your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14). The desire to be first recognized or placed above our fellow Christians is contrary to the Spirit of Christ.

One other fruit of the Christian life is the grace to forgive. A true believer does not bear grudge or harbor hatred, animosity, malice or unforgiving spirit in his bosom. Having been forgiven by the Lord, we reciprocate by forgiving others, including our husbands, wives, children, relations, friends, colleagues and Christian brethren. No
matter what people do against us, like Christ, we forgive them always.

Compassion for souls and burning zeal for the Lord are natural to the Christian life. If these are missing, then such person’s acclaimed salvation is doubtful. “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:8). The Christian life is fruitless if we lack earnestness in preaching the Gospel and intercession for the lost. The eternal consequence of a life without Christ always moves the believer to sacrifice all he can to win the lost for the Savior.

1. (a) Who is a Christian? _______________________________

(b) How does one become a Christian?

_______________________________________________________

2. (a) From our text, how is an unbeliever identified?

_______________________________________________________

(b) Mention some characteristics of an unregenerate soul.

(i) _______________________ (ii) __________________________

(iii) _____________________ (iv) __________________________

3. Identify and list some of the fruits of a Christian life from the following passages. Philippians 2:14,15; Colossians 3:12-14; Romans 9:1-3.

(i) _______________________ (ii) __________________________

(iii) ______________________ (iv) __________________________

(v) ________________________ (vi) __________________________

(vii) _______________________ (viii) ________________________
Lesson 19

“WHY STAND YE IDLE?”

TEXT: Matthew 20:1-7

During Christ’s ministry on earth, He was busy with the task of saving sinners. On different occasions, the disciples were engaged in this important duty of seeking the lost. Moreover, at the close of Christ’s mission on earth, He commissioned every believer to preach the gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:19). It is therefore absurd today to hear some Christians say like the men in our text “… no man hath hired us”.

Whenever a sinner turns to God in repentance, he is immediately enlisted in the workforce of soul-winners. There is a major work for every saint to do in the kingdom of God every hour, every day and every time. That major work is to preach the gospel to sinners. Prompt obedience to this charge is the proof of our loyalty to Christ while all forms of excuse-giving, reluctance and idleness are sure signs of lack of love for the Master who has unreservedly given His life to save us.

For many believers, idleness may be in the form of unwillingness to be workers in the household of God, while some who are supposedly workers are busy with useless and irrelevant activities aside preaching the gospel. So many reasons are constantly adduced for idleness. These range from a busy schedule of secular work, domestic duties, lack of special abilities or formal education, poverty, weakness, and the like. Unfortunately, while saints are slothful and idle, sinners are denied access to the bread of life. Consequently, they die and eventually end up in hell.

In the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, there was no idle moment. From His youth, He had identified and worked to accomplish the one single purpose for His life. His resolute determination, fervency, self-forgetfulness and commitment to the work in the face of danger, persecution, opposition, weariness and hunger are lessons for us today (John 4:32-35). Despite lack of transportation, He went into all the villages and cities to preach the gospel. There are rewards for the consecrated, committed and consistent laborer who follows Christ’s example today.
In conclusion, there is much work to do in the Kingdom. The shortness of time and the misery of sinners should be reasons for our urgent involvement in the work. God will not spare idle believers.

1. (a) From our text, what is idleness?

(b) Mention two ways in which people exhibit idleness.
(i) ______________________ (ii) ________________________

2. Mention six excuses people give for not participating effectively in preaching the gospel.
(i) ______________________ (ii) ______________________
(iii) ____________________ (iv) ______________________
(v) ______________________ (vi) ______________________

3. What do we learn from the following Bible references?
(i) Proverbs 19:15 _________________________________
(ii) Ecclesiastes 10:18 ______________________________
(iii) John 5:17 _________________________________
(iv) Luke 19:13 _________________________________
(v) Luke 19:21-26 _________________________________
Lesson 20

GOD’S ANSWER TO THE GREATEST QUESTION

TEXT: Psalm 15:1-5

King David had served God through prayers, wars, songs, and worship. He had also learnt God’s ways, in areas such as holiness, righteousness, judgment, mercy, expectations and the characteristics of heaven - the abode of God. He wondered if by what he knew of God and heaven, he will get there at last.

In Psalm 15:2-5, by the inspiration of God, David provides the conditions for getting to heaven.

In verse 2, the heaven-bound believer must be morally upright; speaking and ensuring righteousness at all times.

In verse 3, he must not misuse his tongue; he must not do evil to anybody or take a reproach against his neighbor.

Verse 4 teaches that the heaven-bound pilgrim must think first of others and honor all men. He willingly prefers to take offence, and suffer injuries rather than offend other people. He abides by any decision he takes even when it is to his disadvantage. He does not change like a chameleon just because of a temporal advantage. To be able to satisfy God’s standard for heavenly abode, Revelation 15:5 teaches that we must not be covetous, greedy of gain, oppressive and exploitative.

Except the Lord purges the heart (Psalm 51:7), touches the tongue with a live coal from His altar in heaven (Isaiah 6:6,7), anoints the eyes of men (Revelation 3:18), and rids man of his covetous tendencies (Psalm 119:36) through prayers, the hope of abiding in God’s holy place is not attainable. All of these are attainable through sound salvation experience and sanctification.

Has your heart been purged of its sinful tendencies? Is your heart circumcised yet? Jesus Christ declares: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

1. (a) What is the greatest question as revealed in our study today? ____________________________
(b) From the study, mention five conditions that can promote or make living with God in heaven possible.

(i) ____________________________________________________________
(ii) ____________________________________________________________
(iii) ____________________________________________________________
(iv) ____________________________________________________________
(v) ____________________________________________________________

2. From the following references what lessons do we learn?

i) John 3:35,36 ____________________________________________
ii) John 14:1-3 ____________________________________________
iii) 1 John 17:14-17 ________________________________________
iv) Mark 5:8 _________________________________________________
v) Hebrews 12:14 ____________________________________________

3. (a) Mention three activities or features in the life of a man (even a believer) that can hinder him from getting to heaven.

(i) ________________________ (ii) _____________________________
(iii) ________________________________________________________

(b) What is the singular Christian experience that can remove all traits that tend to prevent man from getting to heaven? ____________________________________________
Lesson 21  

**THE SECRET OF SUCCESSFUL SERVICE**

**TEXT: Acts 20:17-35**

Success in Christian service has erroneously been associated with our natural abilities and educational attainments. This has hindered many believers from getting involved in the work of God. God is not confined to the greatly talented and exceptionally-gifted. The scripture confirms that God has often “chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise” (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Our success in Christian service hinges on some conditions. First, our total and complete dependence on God so much that His power can be displayed in us and through us. We can only be successful when we do not depend on our own abilities and resources and look away from our limitations and human weaknesses. God knows where best to deploy us so that what we have can be most strategically employed.

Second, we must follow Christ’s pattern of service. He did the work as the Father commanded Him and pleased the Father always. “I can of mine own self do nothing ... I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me ... for I do always those things that please Him” (John 5:30; 8:29). To God, He was submissive and obedient. To man, He was compassionate, loving and meek in service. Jesus is the perfect example we must follow.

The third condition is rendering our service for the honor and glory of God. This must be our focus in service. Whatever exalts self or promotes our interest detracts from the glory of God and will eventually lead to pride. At the height of our Christian service and success, we must learn to say, “We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10). There is nothing we do in His service that is not by His power, therefore the glory and honor must always be ascribed to God.

All the people who attained success in God’s service have undoubtedly given the word of God a priority. Joshua, for example, was told by God that to prosper and have
good success in his commissioned task, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night” (Joshua 1:8). When the word of God abides in us and we evaluate all things in the light of God’s word, we are sure to succeed.

Prayer is also of equal importance to our success. He who fails to pray, plans to fail. Whatever area of service we are called by God to serve, cannot be done successfully by mere human knowledge and strength. For fruitful and successful service, we need God’s grace and power. Success is not attained by wishful thinking but by prayer and supplication.

Lastly is faithfulness in service. This will demand rendering service unto the Lord without expecting any reward or commendation. Diligence in duty and perseverance in the face of all odds and opposition are marks of faithfulness. Our services must be carried out in the fear of God who “is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love...” (Hebrews 6:10).

1. Mention five different areas where we can render our service to the Lord in the Church.
   (i) __________________________________________ (ii) ____________________________
   (iii) ________________________ (iv) _________________________
   (v) ____________________________________________________

2. From the following verses in our text, what accounts for Paul’s success in his service for the Lord?
   (i) Verse 19 __________________________________________
   (ii) Verses 20, 27 _______________________________________
   (iii) Verse 24 __________________________________________
   (iv) Verse 32 __________________________________________
   (v) Verse 33 __________________________________________

3. What are the conditions for success in service stated in the following passages?
   (i) Joshua 1:8 __________________________________________
   (ii) 1 Corinthians 2:1-4 _________________________________
(iii) John 8:29 ________________________________
(iv) 1 Thessalonians 5:11 ______________________
Lesson 22

THE HARVEST IS TRULY PLENTEOUS

TEXT: Matthew 9:36-38

When our Lord saw the multitude, His compassionate heart reached out to them immediately, because they fainted and scattered “as sheep having no shepherd”.

There are millions of people who wander aimlessly after religion that cannot save them. Many seek refuge in the illusions of knowledge. Some people crave for wealth which does not offer lasting satisfaction. Other people seek protection in occultic powers which in the end leave them totally disappointed. Some other people abandon themselves in pleasure, which drowns and eventually destroys them. Most of the things that take attention of men in the world are vain. But are there eyes and heart like those of Christ’s that sees and reaches out to harvest these ‘unfortunate’ souls? The god of this world has blinded the minds of the lost. A lot of people pay much attention to seeking things that perish. They faint because their energies are expended on that which is not ‘bread’. They scatter about because there are confusing, Satan-inspired noises calling for their attention and hunting for their souls.

It is time for concerned laborers to look at the plenteous harvest in the field of the world. Delay is dangerous. There is an adversary who will waste the fruits if the laborers’ hands are not on the sickles.

Death can come suddenly and the souls of many people may be wasted. The Lord can come any moment and the anti-Christ will have a field day on the earth after the believers had been taken away. Much weeping and wailing await sinners if their souls are not harvested into the barn of the Almighty before it is too late.

If the world’s harvest will not be ruined, true laborers must brace-up to reap the harvest now. They are to get on their knees in prayer of consecration to win souls while they are able. Jesus Christ says, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).
1. What kind of harvest should the true Church be engaged in today? __________________________________________

2. Mention some things men in the world seek after which would not satisfy them.
   (i) ________________________ (ii) ________________________
   (iii) _______________________ (iv) _________________________
   (v) ____________________________________________________

3. Why must the laborers be earnest in harvesting souls into God’s kingdom?
   (i) 1 Peter 5:8 ________________________________________
   (ii) Hebrews 9:27 ______________________________________
   (iii) 1 Thessalonians 5:2 ________________________________
   (iv) Revelation 20:15 ________________________________
Lesson 23

THE DANGER OF SILENT SAINTS

TEXT: Ezekiel 3:17-19

God’s plan and purpose is that saved men would be vessels to spread the gospel to the unsaved people of the world. The believer has the divine mandate to preach the word “in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2).

The saint is like a coin; except it is put in circulation, it has no value to anyone. As the light of the world, if he hides his light under a bushel, the whole world around him will be thrown into utter darkness. The business of soul-winning is compellingly mandatory. Paul says: “Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16). We are obligated to preach the gospel to sinners, and owe God a duty to obey His great Commission.

If a watchman sees danger ahead and refuses to sound the alarm, he is guilty of a criminal offence. Saints are watchmen. They stand between man and God. They ought to hear from God and carry the message to men. But if saints maintain their silence, they are not only guilty of unfaithfulness in the sight of God, they are conspirators with the devil to deny sinners around them eternal life.

Saints are stationed at a vantage point because of their spiritual insight: they are therefore able to see spiritual robbers far before any other person. But silent saints refuse to sound the alarm to warn the careless and to ward-off enemies. Their silence makes them robbers too. They rob the people of the information that could help them to brace up against their foes.

Silent saints are laborers who would not throw in their sickles until the harvest is wasted. Their silence denies sinners of God’s provision of salvation in this present time and of eternal life hereafter.

These saints deprive themselves too, of the soul-winners’ joy and crown. They rid themselves of God’s mercy in their own hour of need and will eventually answer for the blood of those who could have repented if they had not been silent.
“When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning ... the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand” (Ezekiel 3:18).

1. Who are silent saints? ______________________________

2. What excuses do silent saints give for not preaching the gospel?
   (i) ________________________ (ii) ________________________
   (iii) _______________________ (iv) _______________________
   (v) ____________________________________________

3. What dangers face sinners and silent saints because of the latter’s silence?
   (i) Proverbs 13:15 ______________________________
   (ii) Psalm 9:17 ________________________________
   (iii) Proverbs 21:13 ___________________________
Lesson 24

SUBMISSION IN THE FAMILY

TEXT: Ephesians 5:21-22, 24

In modern society, especially in the area of marriage, submission has become a foreign concept. Wives are generally regarded as inferior to their husbands. In contrast, Christians should submit to one another as a mark of mutual respect and reflect their fear for the Lord. The word of God enjoins husbands and wives to submit to each other. This kind of mutual submission preserves harmony in the family and enhances love and respect between husband and wife.

Yielding ourselves in submission to one another in the family poses no problem in homes where both partners have strong relationship with Christ, and where each member is concerned about the happiness of the other. Consequently, the wife will cheerfully follow her husband’s leadership in Christ, while the husband will joyfully set aside his own interests in order to care for the wife.

The role of the husband as a spiritual leader imposes on him the responsibility to serve his wife just as Christ served His disciples, even to the point of washing their feet. A genuinely born again husband will therefore not take advantage of his position as a leader to oppress his wife, neither will a Christ-honoring wife attempt to undermine her husband’s leadership role. Submission in the family will therefore lead the husband and wife to have fellowship; give care and love to each other. They should avoid negative, cold or wrong attitude toward each other. They should refrain from making hurtful remarks towards each other. In fact, both parties should identify positive aspects in each other and cultivate the attitude of appreciating each other at all times, as such, enable them practice the golden rule: “all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them” (Matthew 7:12). When the husband and wife are yielded to each other, it enables them to “leave and cleave”, and to have a life-long unconditional commitment to each other. The life of unity and co-operation will help them to bring up their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”.
1. In what way does God’s standard for the family differ from the practice in today’s society?

2. What do we learn from the following scriptural references?
   (i) Ephesians 5:21 ______________________
   (ii) Ephesians 5:22 ______________________
   (iii) 1 Peter 3:4-6 ______________________

3. What will characterize the relationship between husband and wife when both are yielded to each other?
   (i) ____________________________________
   (ii) ____________________________________
   (iii) ____________________________________
   (iv) ____________________________________
   (v)  ____________________________________
   (vi)  ____________________________________
   (vii) ____________________________________
Lesson 25

THE RANSOM FOR SOULS

TEXT: Matthew 16:24-26; 1 Timothy 2:5, 6

Since man fell through Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he has been separated from God. In fact, he died spiritually (Genesis 2:16, 17) through disobedience to God’s command. Man therefore lost the glory and beauty of God.

For man to regain his dignity and glory, there is need for a sinless being to be a sacrifice that will act as reconciliation between man and God.

John the Baptist acted as a witness to the mind and purpose of God, when he declares: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus therefore was the one appointed from heaven to redeem man from the bondage of sin. He paid the price with His own blood. He died a vicarious or substitutionary death. His death on the cross to atone for man’s sin, the blood He shed to buy back man from the slave market of sin is referred to as the ransom for our soul. The blood of Christ cannot be compared to the cost of gold or silver. It was pure and divine. No other thing can atone for the sin of the world (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Since our sins could not be atoned for by the “blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of a heifer”, “Christ through the eternal Spirit” had to offer “himself without spot to God” (Hebrew 9:13, 14) for this purpose. God knew that the soul of man is priceless. In fact, all the riches of this world cannot be equated to it (Matthew 16:26). The Bible says that all souls belong to God and that the soul that sins shall die. If the same Bible declares that “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), then all men should repent and be converted.

Salvation from sin comes by taking a number of steps. Firstly, upon hearing the gospel, the sinner should acknowledge his sinfulness. Secondly, he should repent of all sins committed and confess to God. Thirdly, he must ask for forgiveness. Fourthly, he should decide to turn away from such bad and evil ways, promising God not
to sin again. Fifthly, he should invite Jesus to come into his heart and dwell there. Through this, he accepts Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Lastly, he believes that through Christ, God has forgiven his sins as he now prays and claims his freedom from sin through faith in Jesus.

Have you yielded your life to Jesus Christ through repentance and faith in Him? If you have not done so, now is the time to receive His pardon and the joy of salvation.

1. (a) From this study, what do you understand by the term, “ransom for soul”?

________________________________________________________________________

(b) Who paid the price for the redemption of the souls of all men?

________________________________________________________________________

(c) Briefly describe how Jesus Christ paid the price for the redemption of the souls of all men.

________________________________________________________________________

2. From the following passages, what can we learn about the price of our redemption?

(i) Isaiah 53:10 __________________________________________________________

(ii) 1 Timothy 2:5, 6 ______________________________________________________

(iii) Matthew 26; 36-39 ______________________________________________________

3. a) Describe the necessary steps to salvation experience.

________________________________________________________________________

b) What will be the end of anyone who refuses to accept the ransom paid by Christ for his soul?

________________________________________________________________________
Lesson 26

THE UNFAILING PROMISES OF GOD

TEXT: Joshua 23:1-16

The great heritage of believers are the promises of God explicitly stated in the Scripture. These promises are applicable to every generation and covers every area of need. Looking back at the faithfulness of God to His promises, Joshua declared, “...not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof” (Joshua 23:14). This is the uniform testimony of all saints. God will always keep His words. He never promises what He cannot do and nothing is impossible unto Him.

To enjoy God’s promises, the first thing is to establish a right relationship with God. The only promise God has for the sinner or backslider is that of pardon and forgiveness when he turns from his sinful ways. The beneficiaries of God’s unfailing promises are members of God’s family. These are those who have appropriated the atoning blood of Jesus Christ for their salvation. These are people who love and trust God in every circumstance of life and have renounced the hidden works of darkness.

For every need of a child of God, there is a promise of God. Whatever may happen to us in life had been known by God and provided for in His promises. If God’s promises are not realized in a believer’s life, the failure is not on God’s but on our own part. “Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.”

Ignorance of God’s specific promises on the areas of our need will deprive us of God’s blessings. Until we give ourselves to the diligent study of the word of God, we may remain ignorant of all that God has provided for our success and victory. Casual readers of the word of God never discover the hidden treasure. All through life they live on the crumbs and never enjoy what rightly belongs to them as children of the Kingdom.

Faith in the ability of God to do exactly as He has promised is what is required to have God’s promises fulfilled in our lives. It takes faith to believe that God is able to do what
seems impossible. On the other hand, many who concede the ability of God to do all things are not so confident of His willingness to intervene in their particular situations. Doubts and unbelief will send their victims into the dungeon of despondency and penury. To know God is to be assured of His absolute willingness to intervene in our situations to the best of our interest.

As a result of impatience, many people have missed the fulfilment of God’s promises. God’s promises may sometimes tarry, but it will surely be fulfilled. “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:35, 36). Patience and perseverance have made many believers heroes of faith.

God’s promises have conditions attached to them. We cannot desire the promises and not willing to fulfil the conditions. As long as the conditions attached are fulfilled, the Lord will bring the promises to pass. The conditions are always within our capability. God will not demand from us what we do not have the ability to do.

1. (a) What are some of the things God had done in the past for Israel (verse 3)?

(b) Mention some promises of God that have been fulfilled in your life in the past:

(i) _____________________________________________________

(ii) _____________________________________________________

(iii) _____________________________________________________

2. From the following texts, what are the conditions for having the promises of God fulfilled in our lives?

(i) Joshua 23:8, 11 _________________________________________

(ii) Hebrews 10:23 _________________________________________

(iii) James 1:5-8 ____________________________________________

(iv) Hebrews 10:36 _________________________________________
3. Find out a promise of God on the following, and state the conditions attached.

(i) Salvation ________________________________
(ii) Healing ________________________________
(iii) Provision ________________________________