PASTOR W.F. KUMUYI
Founder & General Superintendent
Deeper Life Bible Church Worldwide
ABOUT PASTOR W.F. KUMUYI

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

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

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

A humble and outstanding teacher and preacher, Pastor Kumuyi exemplifies servant leadership. He commits himself tirelessly and selflessly to achieve divinely ordained goals. He has a colossal grasp of the scriptures coupled with uncanny ability to dissect
scriptural truths. Preaching between two worlds, bridging the context and the content of the biblical text to meet the realities and the needs of present day led many listeners to conclude that he “teaches the Bible as if he was there when it was written”.

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

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

Memory verse: “Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment?” (Job 20:4,5).

Text: Judges 9:34-57

Abimelech, son of Gideon by a concubine from Shechem, assumed the throne in Israel by slaughtering his father’s seventy sons. He made himself king by eliminating all potential successors to the throne. His inordinate ambition to become king was in sharp contrast to Gideon’s self-effacing and humble response when the men of Israel made an unsolicited request for him to be their king after his conquest of the Midianites (Judges 8:22,23). Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon escaped the massacre and cursed Abimelech and the men of Shechem. At first glance, Abimelech might seem like an ideal candidate for leadership as a gifted communicator and skilled tactician. He set his heart on becoming the ruler of the people. He had an unbridled passion to lead and effectively used his oratory to gain support. “Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, whether it is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal which are three score and ten persons, reign over you or that one reign over you? Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh” (Judges 9:2).

Though Abimelech ascended the throne by subtlety and wickedness, his reign was short-lived as he was killed in battle after three years of turbulent rule. Today’s lesson reveals a fulfilment of the law of sowing and reaping. “For whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). This lesson also shows the destruction of the impenitent because “Everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hands join in hand, he shall not go unpunished” (Proverbs 16:5).
Question 1: How does the law of sowing and reaping apply to man’s actions?


“And Abimelech rose up and all the people that were with him, by night and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies” (Judges 9:34). Godly leaders are motivated by service and not by inordinate quest for power (Acts 13:36). But Abimelech’s inner drive was to dominate and destroy the men of Shechem whom he used as spring board to the throne. He reigned over Israel for only three years. He had no God in his programme. He fought wars by his personal wisdom and physical strength trusting in his sword, bows and arrows. To him, killing his fellow men, even his blood relations was normal. His war was without mercy; he killed or burned all who stood in his path. To the world and himself, he was great and strong, but to God who has the secret of every life, he was repugnant and condemned against “...the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Peter 2:9).

Abimelech had thought like Lucifer, “...I will exalt my throne above...” (Isaiah 14:13). Jesus, our Lord, rightly warns believers against pride, unholy ambition and self-exaltation. He says, “whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:12).

Question 2: Mention four persons in scriptures who exalted themselves and what happened to them?

The scripture records some persons who exhibited ungodly ambition but suffered for it. Absalom and Adonijah both plotted to overthrow their father, David, from the throne; while Absalom died miserably in the forest, Adonijah died by the sword of Solomon. Athaliah who also usurped the throne of Israel was slain beside the king’s house. Such had been the lot of people who destroy others in order to assume power (Revelation 13:10).
Before the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ had the Christian experience of sanctification, they sought for positions above one another. They were interested in who becomes the greatest among them (Matthew 20:21; Luke 9:46). But the Lord said His principle was different: they must opt for ministering and service if they would be great in the kingdom of God.

Unholy ambition and desire to accomplish goals by shortcut, murder, slander, and ungodly means lead to destruction. Believers must trust in the Lord who “lifteth up the meek: [and] casteth the wicked down to the ground” (Psalm 147:6).

Though Abimelech got the throne through treachery and deceit, he soon got paid in his own coins. When Gaal started his rebellion, Zebul apparently did not speak boldly against his actions for fear of being killed. As a faithful officer of Abimelech, he secretly sent information and a war plan for the conquest of Shechem. He remained close to Gaal to ensure he delayed his possible early offensive against Abimelech. Zebul further suggested that the advancing army of Abimelech were shadows of the mountains so as to catch Gaal off guard. When it was clear that Abimelech was near the gate, he mocked him to show the power of his boasting. He suffered defeat and fled back into the city. Abimelech planted his garrison at Arumah. Zebul became bold to expel Gaal and his brethren from the city of Shechem, perhaps to ease the tension and fear in the city over Abimelech’s advancement. Those who conspire in evil soon betray one another.

Question 3: What lessons can we learn from the treachery and deceit of Gaal and Zebul before Abimelech came to conquer Shechem?

THE DEFEAT AND DESTRUCTION OF SHECHEM:
(Judges 9:42-49; Psalm 9:17; Deuteronomy 9:23; 2 Kings 3:25; Jeremiah 17:6; Zephaniahs 2:9)

Abimelech was bent on destroying the Shechemites for slighting him. God used him to punish the Shechemites for their support and conspiracy in the murder of Gideon’s sons. “And Abimelech fought
against the city all that day and he took the city and slew the people that was therein and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt” (Judges 9:45). Sowing a city with salt was an ancient custom signifying perpetual desolation. Abimelech wanted the desolation of Shechem to be a memorial of his achievements against his enemies.

**Question 4:** Those who covenant and trust in idols reap disappointment. True or false?

“And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard, that, they entered into a hold of the house of the god Berith” (Judges 9:46). Abimelech’s second attack drove the remnants of the city to the tower of their god, Berith, who could neither deliver itself nor its worshippers from Abimelech’s fire. Entering into the house of the god Berith (meaning god of the covenant), the Shechemites thought that their god would defend them. How mistaken! Gods of this world are dumb idols that cannot deliver. “They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not... They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them” (Psalm 115:7,8).

Further exploits of Abimelech took him to the city of Thebez where a woman cast a millstone on his head. Evil pursues sinners and backsliders and sometimes overtakes them when they feel secure, even in times of seeming triumph. People around them sometimes get into trouble because evil men do not perish alone in their iniquity; they involve many more that follow their pernicious way. Believers must beware not to take side with rebels and wicked men but should remember that wickedness may prosper for a while, it will not endure for all times.


Thebez near Shechem had no doubt joined in the rebellion against Abimelech. In his furious fight
against Thebez, seeking to set fire on the city tower where the remnants of the people took refuge, he got a deadly millstone on his skull. Such is the abrupt end of godless exploits. Having ruined the Shechemites, it was his turn to pay for the bloody murder of his brethren. He was now face to face with death and hell; yet, he refused to seek God’s mercy because of pride. He told his amour bearer to hasten his death and exit to hell by his sword. “That men say not of me, A woman slew him”. Pride is the reason many sinners and backsliders refuse to repent and accept the Lord Jesus as their Lord even at the point of death. God wishes every sinner to be saved, “For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye” (Ezekiel 18:32).

Question 5: Why do sinners and backsliders die in sin even when they have opportunity to repent?

Sinners count men’s applause. They esteem their earthly gains and positions above their eternal soul. The rise and fall of Abimelech teaches the believer and unbeliever alike that sin is dangerous; self-will is destructive; selfless service to humanity is demanded from leaders; the stiff-necked shall be damned; supporters of evil shall be destroyed; scriptural prophecies must be fulfilled as declared; the season of reckoning shall come; and the God of vengeance would repay every evil work.

Sinners need to urgently repent, confess their sins and accept Jesus into their hearts as Lord and Saviour. The thief on the right hand of the Lord Jesus at the Cross escaped hell at the point of death while the other proudly sunk down to eternal doom.

Self-examination, confession of sins, restitution and returning to God should preoccupy a dying backslider. The hardness of heart of kings Saul and Abimelech should be avoided. Saints should recommit their lives into the hands of God for sustenance until they draw their final breath (Luke 23:46; 2:25-32). There is no fear in death for the saints because it is a transition to a better, glorious life.
LESSON 639
ISRAEL’S SIN AND MISERY

MEMORY VERSE: “Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation” (Judges 10:14).

TEXT: Judges 10:1-18

In the previous chapter, we read of the destruction of Abimelech, a wicked, ambitious and selfish usurper (who disturbed the peace of the people of God) and his Shechemite co-conspirators. After Abimelech, God raised Tola and Jair to judge Israel. The nation was quiet and peaceful for 45 years after which Israel forsook God and went back into their besetting sin of idolatry. Ordinarily, one scarcely thinks that Israel would get into sin again after being delivered from the horrible experiences of torture and servitude they had suffered in the hands of different oppressors due to their backsliding. The question is, why was Israel prone to idol worship? Wilful disobedience to clear instruction from God to wipe out idolatrous nations around them, failure of previous leaders and parents to teach their children the way of the Lord as commanded by Moses and the sedative power of prosperity and worldliness in a time of quietness and peace are the reasons they often fell into idol worship.

Question 1: Why was Israel in recurring backsliding?

Israel, an unconquerable nation and a terror to the heathen, went into sin and reaped oppression, misery and servitude. Had their God travelled, slept, been weakened or overpowered by His enemies? Not at all, for “...he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:4). It was their iniquity that made God to forsake them. The consequence of sin is always the same for everyone the world over.

THE ROLE OF LEADERS IN ISRAEL’S FORTUNES: (Judges 10:1-5; 8:33,34; Joshua 24:14,15,31; 2 Kings 18:1-7; Proverbs 29:2)
In our text, we see an account of two judges in Israel during whose leadership the spiritual condition of the people or their relationship with God was not mentioned. Only their personal achievements were recorded. Nevertheless, the quietness and peace that prevailed during their regimes suggested that these judges were good administrators. Commendable biblical leadership is not measured by physical achievements, but the degree of the people’s relationship with God. Even though no details were given concerning Tola’s regime, one can easily deduce that he was a good mediator and administrator. His ability to calm down and neutralize the bitterness that Abimelech caused in Israel suggested he was a good leader.

**Question 2: Why should leaders make themselves accessible to the people they lead?**

Again Tola’s example of staying close to the people, “a man from Issachar, and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim”, a city almost at the center of the nation, teaches us the need for leaders to make themselves accessible to the people so as to fully identify with them and know how best to minister to their needs. Similarly, Jair’s regime provided peace and rest for the nation of Israel. But nothing remarkable or significant was recorded of him, except that he appointed his thirty sons to rule with him for a period of 22 years. This is a challenge for Christian parents to emulate, in bringing up their children in the way of the Lord.

Israel as a nation had witnessed a number of leaders whose actions either paved way for their fortunes or brought woes and calamities to them. In the leadership of God’s people, it is not personal achievements or the number of years in service that matter, but personal commitment to live and work for God, and at the same time inculcate same in the lives of the people. A mighty man of valour like Gideon who did great exploits and delivered Israel from the terrible torture and servitude of the Midianites left no legacy of good relationship with God for the children of Israel. He
failed to establish the nation of Israel in God’s own way, for after his death, they all went back to idol worship (Judges 8:33,34).

**Question 3: Why is it important for leaders to give priority to teaching their followers the whole counsel of God?**

We learn the importance of leaders teaching the people the word of God so that after their departure, the people may continue to serve the Lord. This is evident in the life of Joshua who faithfully and diligently charged the people to wholly follow the Lord (Joshua 24:14). This resulted in Israel’s long time allegiance and loyalty to God. “And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel” (Joshua 24:31). As a believer, when your life is over, will people remember you for what you acquired for yourself or for the impact you made in other peoples’ lives? What legacy are you leaving for the coming generation? Your decisions and actions today can help determine the destiny of many people tomorrow. A song writer captured it thus:

*Fading away like the stars of the morning Losing their light in the glorious sun,*

*Thus would we pass from the earth and its toiling, Only remembered by what we have done.*

**REASONS FOR ISRAEL’S OPPRESSION AND MISERY** (Judges 10:6-9; Leviticus 26:1,14-21; Proverbs 26:2; Hebrews 12:15-17; Deuteronomy 28:57-62; Job 15:20)

“And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him” (Judges 10:6). After the death of Tola and Jair, Israel returned into their besetting sin of idolatry. They forsook God that brought them out of trouble
and served other dead gods that brought them into trouble. God had earlier warned His people about the danger of compromise and idol worship. On entering Canaan, the Lord commanded them: “... drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell. Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them” (Numbers 33:55,56).

Before taking Israel into the land of promise, God had given definite instructions on their policy towards the nations inhabiting the land of Canaan. “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: That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 20:16-18).

Question 4: What lessons can believers learn from Israel’s compromise?

First, no matter how clever a believer may be, compromise will lead him/her to backsliding. Second, besetting sins not dealt with will overtake its victim; it’s a matter of time. Third, whatever its type, size or shape, sin attracts divine displeasure and judgment. Fourth, the tendency to compromise and backslide is greater in times of peace and pleasure. A church that has been tremendously blessed with spiritual riches for upholding the truth of the word of God on holiness, Christian living, separation from the world and restitution, would be surprised to find the grace of God drying off as soon as her love for ease and material riches increase.

The result of forsaking God was that “… the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel...” (Judges 10:7a).
It is obvious that there is no eternal security. Our deliverance, dominion and victory over our enemies are hinged on our abiding in the Lord and His will. For, “...Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you” (2 Chronicle 15:2). Sin is the chief source of man’s miseries as in the case of Israel. They had no reason to be oppressed or go into bondage were it not because of sin. What powerful nations, kings, soothsayers like Balaam or diviners could not do, sin did to Israel (Numbers 23:19-21). The clear revelation of the scriptures is, “Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted” (Psalm 107:17) and that “....the way of transgressors is hard” (Proverbs 13:15).


God’s judgment against sin as well as His forgiveness and restoration of the penitent to fellowship are unfailing. “And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim” (Judges 10:10).

The children of Israel were taking God for granted by their frequent backsliding, oppression and cry for deliverance. God recounted the frequency of their spiritual inconsistencies with Him. With pain, He said, “Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand. Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more” (Judges 10:11-13). He directed them to go to their gods to deliver them out of their trouble. Let no believer think that he/she can exit and enter the kingdom of God at will. God will definitely give anyone
who refuse to retain Him in his/her knowledge to a reprobate mind (Romans 1:28). Since this eventually happened to Israel till date and God is a Respecer of no one, believers must take heed lest they fall. It is for this reason that Paul, the apostle was careful not to be cast away, despite the fact that he had preached the gospel more than any other apostle.

Meanwhile, God never fails to rescue His own people whenever they call upon Him with a truly penitent heart. “And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day. And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel” (Judges 10:15,16). God, in His infinite mercy, responds to save people who genuinely repent of sin. However, He will not excuse those who treat His grace and mercy with disdain through wilful disobedience and sin with the notion that He would always forgive (Romans 6:1-4; Hebrews 10:26).

**Question 5: What are the proofs of genuine repentance?**

Note that neither mere confession of sin nor nominal membership of a Christian assembly show evidence of genuine repentance or make one a true believer (Acts 8:9-23). Prompt obedience to God’s instruction on restitution is a clear evidence of genuine repentance which guarantees total pardon and forgiveness of sin (Luke 19:8,9). A changed heart must be accompanied by change of attitude and behaviour. Like the children of Israel who put away the strange gods from among them, anyone today who decides to forsake sin and put away every idol in his life, and calls upon the name of Lord shall be delivered. “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). “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Roman 10:13).
After Israel’s genuine repentance, God raised another judge who defeated the children of Ammon when they gathered against the Israelites. Today, the grace of God is still available to deliver as many as will come to God in genuine and total repentance.
LESSON 640  
JEPHTHAH’S REJECTION AND RISE TO LEADERSHIP

MEMORY VERSE: “And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father’s house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?” (Judges 11:7).

TEXT: Judges 11:1-28

In the concluding section of the previous chapter, we read about the Gileadites who were in search of a military captain to lead them to wage an urgent war against the children of Ammon and subsequently become their political head. The cruel oppression of Israel by the Philistines and the children of Ammon which had its epicenter on the other side Jordan soon became a national devastation as the more zealous Ammonites “... passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed” (Judges 10:9). The searchlight of the elders of Gilead now turned on Jephthah who had been driven away from his father’s house by his half brothers as a result of his unfortunate origin.

Question 1: Mention some examples of people who were rejected of men but later rose to positions of leadership in Israel and state what you learnt from this.

It is awesome to observe how God locates despised and rejected men in the Bible as well as in contemporary times and lifts them to positions of spectacular usefulness. This was true of great leaders in Israel like Joseph, Moses, David and even our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. God does this to magnify the power of His grace and to cut off occasions of boasting from men (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).
UNWORTHY GENEALOGY AND THE REJECTION OF JEPHTHAH (Judges 11:1-3; Deuteronomy 23:2,3; Psalm 51:5; Genesis 37:27-29; Acts 7:9,25-29,35; Romans 3:23; 5:12)

“Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of a harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah” (Judges 11:1).

The description of Jephthah in our text started on a glowing note with a celebrated title – mighty man of valour (Judges 11:1). However, this great testimony became spotted with the careless and carnal life of his parents. Sadly, what was not his fault became his disgrace. His mother was a harlot who gave birth to him out of wedlock. This made his father’s sons to despise and send him away from home. From his genealogy, we learn that one, all men were conceived and born as sinners (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:23; 5:12). Two, there must be a change of our birth history or genealogy for us to become members of the body of Christ. Those who are not born of God will be rejected at the pearly gate of heaven on the last day (John 1:11-13; 3:3,5; Nehemiah 7:64; Revelation 20:15; 21:27). Three, although it was not Jephthah’s fault that his mother was a harlot, it became his shame, disgrace and stigma. How many children today bear the burden of shame, disgrace and stain of their parents’ misadventure? Parents must be careful how they live their lives in order not to jeopardize the future of their children and family. The negative effects of the sinful lives of parents can ruin the physical, social and spiritual lives of their children, the same way the righteous lives of parents can be a blessing to their posterity (Exodus 20:5,6; 1 Samuel 2:31-36; 2 Samuel 21:1-9; 2 Kings 8:19; Matthew 27:24,25). Also, children must not endorse or follow the bad examples of their parents in order to escape God’s wrath (Ezekiel 18:19,20).

UNMERITED GRACE AND THE RISE OF JEPHTHAH: (Judges 11:4-11; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; 15:9,10; Ephesians 1:11-13; 1 Timothy 1:12-15)
“And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel. And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob” (Judges 11:4,5).

The war between the children of Ammon and Israel raged on and became fiercer. The aggressors, the Ammonites were now encamped in Gilead while Israel was encamped in Mizpeh but without a military captain (Judges 10:9,17). In distress, the Gileadites remembered their rejected kinsman. They must have been led of God to make this decision of choosing Jephthah as their captain and political leader (1 Samuel 2:8; Psalm 75:6,7; Romans 13:1). God often permits the humbling of those he designs to exalt. Thus, He used Jephthah’s adversity to work out his advancement. His brethren’s rejection gave him occasion to exercise and improve his martial genius.

It is instructive to observe the power of patience being displayed by Jephthah. Men of great endowments who are slighted or ill-treated by seemingly powerful men should bear it with meekness and cheerfulness. They should not yield to the temptation of discouragement, rebellion, murmuring and backsliding but allow patience have her perfect work (Psalm 27:13; Hebrews 6:12; James 1:2-4).

**Question 2:** *State some positive attitudes displayed by Israel in seeking solution to their predicament. What lessons are there for seekers of divine favours?*

Israel displayed some positive postures as they sought solution to their predicament. One, they were willing to go the way that they had rejected. Two, they did not linger in indecision. Three, they did not prevaricate or evade the real issue but spoke to Jephthah in plain language about their request. Four, their action was guided by humility, earnestness and honesty. They confessed their inability to deliver themselves and made no excuses when Jephthah remonstrated with them over the ill-treatment he suffered in their hands.
Question 3: **Highlight some great challenges the response of Jephthah pose to all Christians today?**

The prudent, prompt and patriotic response of Jephthah to the request of his brethren poses great challenge to all Christians.

One, he sought to provoke them unto repentance and make them aware of their obligations by making a brief reference to their past hatred. Their answer to his charge proved to him the sincerity of their repentance. This was akin to the strategy Joseph employed to try his brethren who sold him as a slave to the Ishmaelites (Genesis 37:26-28; 42:7-20). Believers must not be sentimental in their love for the brethren. They should be bold enough to wisely confront a fellow brother or sister when he/she goes the wrong way with the aim of bringing such a person back to the path of truth and rectitude (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 2:11-14; 6:1; Hebrews 10:24).

Two, Jephthah did not allow his past to hinder the bright prospects of the future. He readily forgave and forgot the rejection by his brethren and was prepared to defend them against the Ammonites. The grace for forgiveness is one true indicator of the strength of one’s spiritual life. This Christian virtue removes rancour amidst brethren and restores ruined relationships by rebuilding the broken bridges of unity in the church (Psalms 133:1-3). On the contrary, the absence or lack of scriptural forgiveness makes the family or church a breeding ground for all evil works (James 3:14-16).

Three, the level of prudence displayed by Jephthah to bargain wisely for the future is a mild rebuke and also an eye-opener to some believers who are too simple in their regular transactions in the business of life. They believe almost anybody without first making a diligent inquiry and putting precautionary measures in place through careful self-examination and seeking scriptural counsel from mature Christian leaders. The result is that they easily fall prey to financial tricksters and other cunning agents of Satan who
seek to destroy their souls.

Jephthah asked questions for clarifications of his doubts which prompted the elders of Gilead to make an oath to support their sincerity (verses 9,10). The oath – “The LORD be witness between us” – was an appeal to God’s omniscience as the Judge of their sincerity and God’s justice as an avenger if afterwards they prove false (Hebrews 6:16-18). However, New Testament believers are not permitted to swear or take an oath to prove their innocence or sincerity in any matter. They should simply but firmly speak or affirm the truth and leave the result in the hands of God (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12; 1 Peter 2:19-23).

Four, Jephthah acknowledged God as the Source of victory (verse 9). Believers should refrain from putting their trust in carnal weapons in the battle against Satan and the world. Like Jephthah, who started his campaign against the Ammonites with prayer, we must commit all our ways unto the Lord and lean not on our own understanding or connections for provision, protection and preservation from every evil work (Proverbs 3:5-7; 2 Timothy 4:18).

Five, the prompt response of Jephthah to the call of God through the elders is highly commendable. He was aware of Israel’s distress and that they stood the danger of being overrun by the desperate aggressors who were now encamped in Gilead. Obviously, being convinced of the finger of God in the matter, he did not request for a day or two to think or pray over the matter; he immediately swung into action (verse 11). Because the great commission is urgent, our response to it should be prompt! Souls are dying daily without the hope of eternal life with God. We must be committed to the task of rescuing their souls from the agonizing torments of hell (Proverbs 24:11,12; John 9:4; Acts 16:9,10; Galatians 1:15,16). Six, we see the wonder of God’s unmerited grace working effectually in the life of Jephthah as he responded appropriately to divine opportunity. He went with the elders of Gilead and the people made him head and captain over them (verse 11). A careless handling
of this opportunity would have made him miss out God’s plan for his life.

UNCOMPROMISING GROUNDS IN THE REQUEST OF JEPHTHAH (Judges 11:12-28; Genesis 39:7-9; 1 Kings 21:1-4; Amos 7:12-17; Acts 5:27-29; Jude 3)

Immediately after the people unanimously appointed Jephthah as their head and captain, he settled down to the urgent business of procuring peace for them. He sent messengers to the king of the children of Ammon. By requesting from the king of Ammon the reason for invading the land, Jephthah proved that he had no pleasure in war although he was a mighty man of valour. Also, it was evident that he delighted in equity and is ready to do justice if the aggressor produced genuine grounds for their invasion. Again, Jephthah was being scriptural by this approach (Deuteronomy 20:10-12). As heaven-minded citizens, we must be determined to seek peace and pursue it (Psalm 34:14; 1 Peter 3:11). It is safe and scripturally sound to go to our offenders for settlement than to complain, murmur, simmer with bitterness or plan subtle ways of revenge (Proverbs 25:19; Matthew 18:15; Romans 12:18; Hebrews 12:14).

The response of the king of the children of Ammon brought to light the insincerity of their demand. Their goal was to attack Israel, spoil and plunder the country and enrich themselves as they had done under Eglon (Judges 3:13,14). To cover the shame of their base intent, they concocted the reason for their invasion thus: “...because Israel took away [our] land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably” (verse 13).

Question 4: What do you personally learn from Jephthah’s uncompromising stand?

With great historical accuracy, Jephthah gave a full and satisfactory answer to the king of the children of Ammon, showing that his demand was unjust and unreasonable (verses 14-27). This answer highlights four grounds upon which Jephthah
stood uncompromisingly against the pressure from the enemy to forfeit or relinquish Israel’s divine inheritance.

One, he made it clear that Israel took neither the land of Moab nor that of the children of Ammon. They were ordered by God not to contend with them in battle for their land (Deuteronomy 2:9,19). Moreover, they did not even force a passage through their land when they were denied the privilege (verses 17,18). Believers must be lovers of peace. All their affairs must be guided by orderliness and discretion. To remain on the side of constant victory, they should only engage in battles that are approved and supported by God (Deuteronomy 1:41-45; 2 Samuel 21:1-6; Psalm 112:5; Matthew 5:9; 1 Corinthians 14:40).

Two, that the children of Ammon were not in possession of the land in question, but had lost them to the Amorites from whom Israel had acquired it by right of conquest (verses 19-22; Numbers 21:26; Joshua 13:25). It is our duty to zealously guard what we have so we do not lose it to the adversary who is tirelessly scheming to steal from us our divine inheritance (John 10:10; 1 Peter 5:8).

Three, that having received a grant of those lands from the Lord, they were entitled to maintain their right on the same principle that guided the Ammonites in purportedly receiving from their god the territory they now occupied (verses 23,24).

Four, that by a lapse of 300 years of undisputed possession, Israel had now established a prescription right to the occupation of the land (verses 25,26).

As believers, we must be urgent and aggressive in reclaiming our lost inheritance from the usurper before he gains full control over them. Like David, once we realize the loss we have sustained, we must mobilize and pursue the enemy until we recover all. The spiritual insensitivity, indifference and indolence of Ephraim must be avoided (1 Samuel 30:7-10,16-19; Hosea 7:8-10).
Question 5: How best can believers prepare for victory in their battle against Satan, sin and the world?

The conclusion of Jephthah after a long dialogue with the king of the children of Ammon was: “Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me…” (verse 27). This, no doubt, helped to consolidate his foundation of truth and righteousness. It is instructive to note that he first made spiritual preparation for the looming battle by putting on the whole armour of God that will enable him to rout the enemy and his cohorts (Psalm 78:9,10; Proverbs 28:1; Ephesians 6:10-18). Little surprise then that Jephthah was bold in calling the Lord to be the Judge in the case between the Israelites and the children of Ammon (verse 27). We are reminded that victory in the battles of life is given by God and it is a decision guided by His impartial justice (1 Samuel 2:6-8; Proverbs 21:31; Luke 1:52). Those who disobey God and engage the powers of darkness in spiritual warfare will suffer shameful defeats (Deuteronomy 1:41-45; 1 Samuel 4:1-11).

“Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him” (Judges 11:28). The king of the children of Ammon proudly rejected the truth that was plainly set forth by Jephthah. His heart, like that of Balaam, was so fixed on the anticipated spoils of war that he became impervious to reason. Even today, the voice of wisdom is loud in the streets, showing the plain path that leads to eternal life. All who humble themselves and fall on the Rock shall be broken into pieces and remoulded into the glorious image of the Son of God while those who refuse the passionate plea of love shall be grounded into powder and salted with unquenchable fire in hell. The wisest decision you can make at this moment is to willingly and unreservedly surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and be obedient unto His word for the rest of your life (Proverbs 1:20-33; Mark 9:48,49; Luke 20:17,18).
LESSON 641
JEPHTHAH’S VOW
AND VICTORY OVER AMMON

MEMORY VERSE: “And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering” (Judges 11:30,31).


Jephthah was rejected by his brethren on ground of the circumstances of his birth in the previous study. Now in grave distress, they invited him to assist in fighting against the children of Ammon who had threatened to destroy their country. They promised him headship if he would help defeat their enemy. Jephthah accepted the offer and invited Ammon for peaceful resolution in accordance with God’s command (Deuteronomy 20:10-12) but they turned down his offer. The Ammonites were descendants of Lot by his younger daughter (Genesis 19:38). They allied with the Amalekites and Egлон the king of Moab to smite Israel in the time of the Judges and to occupy Jericho, the city of palm trees (Judges 3:13). Israel was subjugated by these enemies for 18 years until they were finally delivered by Jephthah (Judges 10:6-11:33).

In this study, Jephthah, desperate for victory, vows to sacrifice whatever came first to welcome him to God if he defeated the children of Ammon. The essence of that vow, the victory over Ammon and his faithfulness in redeeming the vow form the main issues in this study.

JEPHTHAH’S DESPERATE VOW (Judges 11:29-31; Genesis 28:20-22; Numbers 30:1-16; Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Ecclesiastes 5:4-6; Psalm 132:1,2; Jonah 2:9).
“And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering” (Judges 11:30,31).

**Question 1: What is the meaning of the word ‘vow’? State the different types of vow and the possible conditions under which they were made in the Old Testament.**

A vow is a solemn promise or pledge to perform an act or pay something. In a religious sense, it is a binding pledge made to God to render what is promised. There are at least three basic forms of vow in the Old Testament, namely, vow of bargain (Genesis 28:20-22); vow of selfless devotion (Numbers 6:1-8), and vow of abstinence (1 Samuel 14:24).

The object of this study is the first type of vow which is suggestive of a promise made to God on condition that He gives a particular blessing to an individual. According to Deuteronomy 23:21-23, vows are of a voluntary nature; but once made, the individual is under obligation to fulfil the vow. The children of Israel made unique vows to God (Leviticus 27:2,3), more especially in cases of illness, danger or under an emotional impulse either in thanksgiving for blessings received or asking favour from God.

The object of a vow usually reveals how desperate an individual is and what is at stake. In this case, the sovereignty of Israel and the glory of God were at stake. Jephthah knew that Israel needed victory over Ammon by all means. If they lost the battle, they would have to lose over half of their land on the east of Jordan in addition to becoming servants to Ammon. Besides, the enemies of God’s people would blaspheme His name (Numbers 14:13-16). And, only God could avert this ugly possibility. Therefore, Jephthah knew that only favour from God would secure victory for them. He was then ready to
make any personal sacrifice that would attract the needed favour. He valued victory over Ammon above all his possessions. Jephthah’s vow was to sacrifice whatever first came out of his house to welcome him. This vow has two possibilities: if the object be a clean animal, it was to be used for a burnt offering; but if a human being, it would be dedicated to the Lord for perpetual service as God would not accept human sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5).

Sometimes, believers do not show enough desperation for what they desire from God. Not that God is interested in our paying for the favours we receive, but He wants us to demonstrate commitment. When the disciples confronted the Lord over a demonic case, He bluntly told them that, “... this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21). We must empty ourselves of all conflicting desires so as to exercise enough faith for what we need. This desperation is usually expressed through self discipline, fasting, prayers and vows.

The first recorded vow in the Bible was that of Jacob. “And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee” (Genesis 28:20-22). Jacob was fleeing for his life. Weary and tired, he laid down to sleep and God met him. There he promised to serve God, build a house for Him and pay tithes of all he got if the Lord would bring him safe back to his land. Other vows recorded in the Bible include: Hanna’s vow (1 Samuel 1:11,27,28); Elkanah’s yearly vow (1 Samuel 1:21); David’s vow (Psalm 132:2); Jonah’s vow (Jonah 2:9) and Paul’s vow (Acts 18:18), among others.

Opinions and commentaries are divided over the propriety of Jephthah’s vow. While some consider it as impulsive and irrational, others believe he did it as
the Spirit of God led him.

**Question 2: What major lesson do we learn from Jephthah’s vow?**

God forbids frivolous vows. He does not condone careless, thoughtless promises which people make knowing that they would not commit to redeeming them. True believers should be different and be mindful of and committed to redeeming the vows which they have made to God. “*When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay*” (Ecclesiastes 5:4,5). In the Old Testament, a vow uttered by an adult remains binding on him while those of married women and minors will have to be validated by their husbands and parents respectively (Numbers 30:1-16). Some people under the weight of their problems make vows which they soon forget as soon as the burdens are lifted. Some promise to serve God the rest of their lives while others promise money and materials which they never redeem. But they err if they think God has equally forgotten; instead, He counts their words against them. Pledges made for church projects and programmes often go unredeemed as people forget that those are promises made to God and not to man.

**JEPhTHAH’S VICTORY OVER AMMON** (Judges 11:32,33; 1:4; 2:18; 3:10; Exodus 14:13,14,26-31; 23:27; 2 Samuel 5:24,25; 2 Chronicles 20:29; 32:8,21-23)

**Question 3: What was the secret of Jephthah’s victory over the Ammonites and what is the implication for believers today?**

The endowment of the Spirit of God upon Jephthah at his critical moment was the key to their victory over the Ammonites. That the Spirit of God came upon Jephthah demonstrates how God raised deliverers for Israel. The Holy Spirit would come upon His anointed ones, inspire and endue them with power to
fight or accomplish the purpose of God in whatever way He chooses to lead them to bring deliverance for His people. There is little the believer in Christ could do without the help of the Holy Spirit but with Him, all things are possible. There are many examples of patriarchs that were filled with the Spirit of God to do exploits for Him. They include: Moses (Numbers 11:17,25); the 70 elders of Israel (Numbers 11:25-28); Othniel ( Judges 3:10); Gideon ( Judges 6:34); Samson ( Judges 14:6,19; 15:14); David (1 Samuel 16:13); Elisha (2 Kings 2:9-15); Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24:20); Paul, the apostle (Acts 13:1-11); the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ (Isaiah 11:2; 61:1; Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38).

**Question 4: What was the secret of Jephthah’s victory over the enemy?**

Bearing in mind Jephthah’s humble and detestable background, he could only depend on supernatural power for victory. Empowered by the Spirit of God, “Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands” ( Judges 11:32). Victory had always been the portion of God’s people when they obey His word. Abraham, the father of our faith, demonstrated victory over the confederacy of kings that took Lot captive (Genesis 14:12-16); Moses defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan (Numbers 21:24; Deuteronomy 3:2,3); David conquered all the enemies that rose against him (Psalm 18:37). Also, God raised judges to deliver Israel from oppression whenever they repented and turned to Him (Judges 1:4; 2:18; 3:10). Thus it is with God’s children whenever they live in His will. He has promised us victory over our adversaries. Our Lord Jesus Christ declared that He possesses all power; therefore, He commands us to go in the strength of the Spirit “and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19). As we serve the Lord in holiness and righteousness, no power on earth or heaven shall be able to conquer us.
Question 5: *Recite some Scripture passages that assure believers that the Lord will defend them against the onslaught of the enemy.*

**JEPHTHAH REDEEMS HIS VOW** (Judges 11:34-40; Ecclesiastes 5:4,5; 1 Samuel 1:24-28)

It is instructive to note that Jephthah kept his own part of the bargain. He was not like some who renege on their pledge after they have received the blessing. For Jephthah,

it was not a walkover. *“And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter”* (Judges 11:34).

There is considerable controversy as to what Jephthah actually did to his daughter. One view is that he killed her and offered her as a burnt offering to the Lord. Note that the idea of human sacrifice is repulsive and was never approved by God (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). Only animals were sacrificed, human beings were dedicated, and then redeemed with money (Exodus 13:12,13; Leviticus 27:1-8). The other more acceptable view is that Jephthah gave his daughter to be a perpetual virgin in the service of Jehovah. However it is looked at, the needful lesson is that Jephthah was faithful to his vow. *“And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back”* (Judges 11:35). His attitude and action mirror the essence of consecration that is expected of every believer. The psalmist puts it aptly: *“he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not”* (Psalm 15:4). Believers are under divine obligation to keep their vows unto the Lord either in tithes and offering or to assist in the building of God’s house or to offer themselves for God’s service.

Notice should also be taken of the cooperation of Jephthah’s daughter to her father’s vows. She
consented to abide by what he had consecrated himself to do (Judges 11:36). Isaac was another example of great humility and meekness. He did not resist his father’s commitment to obey the Lord who had commanded him to offer him up (Genesis 22:9,10).

**Question 6: What should be the attitude of believers today to the issue of vows?**

In conclusion, some sundry lessons emerge from Jephthah’s vow: One, we should conscientiously endeavour to pay the vows we have made to God either concerning our tithes, offerings and contributions to building God’s house, etc. or our determination to serve the Lord. Our communication must be “yea, yea; nay, nay” (Matthew 5:37). Jephthah said, “I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back”. Two, it is expected of godly children to cheerfully obey their parents in the Lord. They should comply with their parent’s pious resolutions for the honour of God and the upholding of righteous standards in the family even when they appear difficult. Three, we should shun the temptation to renege on our vows after we have received the blessing. Four, we should remain resolute in serving the Lord whatever happens or does not happen. Five, whenever duty calls, we should make ourselves available not minding who appreciates us or not. Jephthah swallowed former reproach and offered to be used of God for the deliverance of Israel. Six, Jephthah drew strength from the Spirit of God to fight the battle of the Lord. No less can believers depend on the Spirit of God to conquer. Seven, we should humble enough to ascribe glory to God whenever He makes us instruments and agents of conquest for His people.

We must, however, note that nowhere in the New Testament are believers commanded to make vows before they can receive divine favour from God. Only absolute faith in God can produce answers to prayer and not unnecessary vows. Believers should stand on the unfailing promises of God’s word for greater exploits (Acts 27:25; Daniel 11:32).
LESSON 642  

STRIFE BETWEEN EPHRAIM AND GILEAD  

MEMORY VERSE: “And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?” (Judges 12:3).

TEXT: Judges 12:1-15  

The preceding chapter showed how Jephthah made a vow to God in the midst of a difficult challenge and how God helped him win a decisive victory over the children of Ammon. In this lesson which concludes his ministry, Jephthah’s victory generated negative reaction from the men of Ephraim. They gathered together and went northward for an unprovoked assault on Jephthah, threatening to “burn down” his house on the spurious allegation that he did not call them to join in the battle against the children of Ammon.

Question 1: Mention another instance when the Ephraimites challenged leadership with allegation of non-inclusion in warfare against the enemy.

This, however, was not the first time the Ephraimites would react after victory was won: they once chided with Gideon for not calling them to fight against the Midianites (Judges 8:1). At the time of war, they seemed to have perfected the art of feigning ignorance or indifference only to realize later that they should have played a part in securing victory over the enemy. Some carnal, worldly-wise Christians also practice this principle of non-committal to the cause of Christ when their service is needed most only to raise spurious allegations of non-inclusion against the leadership. They fail to understand that God cannot be mocked and whatever a person sows is what he would reap. Christ said specifically, “my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work
shall be” (Revelation 22:12). The Ephraimites tried it with the undiscerning Gideon and got away with it probably because he did not also invite them. This time, their action precipitated an avoidable inter-tribal conflict which eventually left about forty-two thousand people dead.

**EPHRAIMITES’ UNPROVOKED AGGRESSION AGAINST JEPHTHAH** (Judges 12:1; 8:1; Luke 14:31,32; Matthew 26:52; Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:16,17)

“And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire” (Judges 12:1). There is ample evidence to suggest that the men of Ephraim, in mustering themselves against Jephthah, were serious in their threat. In violation of their natural territorial boundaries, which serve as signposts for peaceful, mutual co-existence, they crossed over to Gilead’s territory. This signaled the commencement of hostilities or armed conflicts (Genesis 19:9; 32:6,7). Thus, when the Ephraimites embarked upon this unprovoked aggression, Jephthah had to prepare for war. Had he not invited them, he would have apologized for excluding them like Gideon did. But he thought that they harboured a sinister motive for refusing to participate in warding off the external aggression only to now turn around and provoke inter-tribal strife. This should sound a clear warning to Christians never to engage on such ungodly ventures (Matthew 26:52). We should desist from engaging in any action that smacks of violence, whether it is a so-called peaceful protest, mild demonstration, solidarity rally and so on.

God is never pleased with those who engage in carnal strife underpinned by pride, envy, tribal sentiment, vain glory, retaliation, etc., which are “**works of the flesh**” (Philippians 2:3; 2 Timothy 2:24; Galatians 5:19-21). The underlying motivation for the action of
the men of Ephraim against Jephthah stemmed from their envy, pride and an undue desire to share in the glory, triumph and spoils of war from the defeat of the Ammonites.

**Question 2: Point out some noticeable flaws in the action of the Ephraimites as revealed in the text?**

There are some lessons from the action of the men of Ephraim. There appears to be some elements of divine retribution behind Jephthah’s seemingly harsh response to the Ephraimites’ attack as they were in the habit of chiding their leaders. The scriptural warning that, “**Pride goeth before a fall and a haughty spirit before destruction**” (Proverbs 16:18), could not be more apt than in the case of the men of Ephraim. They had arrogated to themselves the position of chief tribe either because their late leader, Joshua, was from that tribe or because they had gained prominence among other tribes (Joshua 17:14-18). Thus, their pride reared its ugly head on a number of occasions. The same spirit of overarching self-estimation was the problem of the Pharisees when our Lord’s fame began to outshine theirs with multitudes thronging His meetings. For envy, they looked down on His public ministry, blasphemed Him and made several attempts to kill Him (Matthew 12:14; Mark 3:6; 11:18; 14:1). The men of Ephraim were more poised to ignite tribal sentiments and inter-tribal conflict with their fellow countrymen than unite with other tribes to repel external aggression. Their threat, “**...we will burn thine house upon thee with fire**” is akin to that of their heathen neighbours and the ancient Sodomites (Judges 14:15; 15:6; Genesis 19:4). Thus, it could be said that they were guilty of copying heathen savage lifestyles instead of studying to obey the commandments of God contained in their laws (Leviticus 18:2-5; Deuteronomy 12:29,30; 2 Timothy 3:15). God commands His children not to “**learn**” the way of the heathen (Jeremiah 10:2). The Ephramites were hypocritical in their claims because they had earlier declined to assist in the war.
UNMITITATED RETRIBUTION FOR THE EPHRAIMITES’ EXCESS (Judges 12:4; Romans 13:1-8; 1 Peter 2:13,14; 1 Thessalonians 5:12,13)

“Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites” (Judges 12:4). Jephthah gathered the men of Gilead for battle against the Ephraimites. He must have acted in self-defence since he was at the risk of losing his life and property. He had thought that having conquered enemies of the nation, there would be internal peace. But alas, there were dissidents within. Perhaps, if Jephthah had tried to pacify the Ephraimites considering the threat to his life, family and leadership, their anger might have assuaged (Proverbs 15:1; Judges 8:1-3).

Jephthah’s reaction to the threat of the Ephraimites is not an excuse for present-day Christians to fight in similar circumstances. One, battles in the Old Testament dispensation were literal against humans but in the New Testament, we engage in spiritual warfare against the devil and his cohorts. Two, New Testament believers stand on a higher moral platform of grace through Christ’s death and resurrection. Three, Christ is our perfect Example in Christian conduct and practice. “...Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:20,21,23). Four, internal strife and rancour always open up avenues for the enemy’s attack as “...the house divided against itself shall not stand” (Matthew 12:25). We should be “slow to anger” and know when to give “a soft answer” in readiness to “seek peace and ensue it” because “anger resides in the bosom of fools” (Proverbs 16:32; 15:1; 1 Peter 3:11; Ecclesiastes 7:9). The New Testament clearly warns that, “...the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach,
patient...” even in the face of undue provocation (2 Timothy 2:24-26; Luke 9:51-56; 1 Peter 3:11).

Christian leaders and workers should note that no one had ever been able to please all classes of men while serving the Lord. Even our Lord, “…who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil...” ended up having more foes than friends and was often called names, accused of blasphemy and using the power of Beelzebub to effect healings (Acts 10:38; John 9:16; Luke 11:15; Matthew 10:25).

**Question 3: What is the responsibility of believers today in relation to their leaders?**

The Scripture instructs us to “…know them which labour among you and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thessalonians 5:12,13). But the men of Ephraim not only despised their leader, they mustered forces and went on assault against him. And as if these were not enough, they consummated it by taunting Jephthah and his tribesmen as fugitives, which was contrary to the word of God (Romans 13:1,2).

The outcome of the war was defeat and killing of forty-two thousand Ephraimites (verse 5-7). The once boastful Ephraimites, now defeated in battle and their once arrogant tribal identity decimated, they resorted to lying and denying their identity in order to preserve their lives. But that lie, instead of salvaging them, tended to expose and imperil their souls at the “passage of Jordan” where they failed pronunciation test of the word “Shibboleth”. The Ephraimites would say: “Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it.”

**Question 4: What does the encounter between the Ephraimites and the Gileadites at the passage of Jordan teach believers?**

Christians of all times and climes are enjoined to consistently speak the truth at all seasons no matter the odds, as only the truth can save (Matthew 5:37).
Also, we should note that, as the Gileadites knew a little secret about the Ephraimites’ weak point, which thing the Ephraimites themselves did not know, and subsequently used to test and ensnare them, the same way the devil may know a thing or two about our weak point and often use same to ensnare us (2 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:10). Therefore, we need to “lay aside every weight and sin that doth so easily beset us” and “put on the whole armour of God”, part of which is the belt of “truth”, so that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Hebrews 12:1; Ephesians 6:11,14).

There are some instances in the Bible where latent character traits imperceptibly resurfaced to betray verbal denials. One, Peter’s denial of his Galilean origin was later exposed by his native ascent (Matthew 26:69-73). Two, Jacob’s denial of his identity before his father was later betrayed by his voice (Genesis 27:18-23). Three, king Saul’s initial disguise before the witch of Endor later became uncovered by his unguarded emotions (1 Samuel 28:8-12).

JEPhTHAH’S DEATH AND HIS SUCCESSORS
(Judges 12:7-15; Luke 8:14; Hebrews 11:1,2,32)

“And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died... And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem... judged Israel seven years. Then died Ibzan and was buried... after him Elon judged Israel... ten years. And Elon the Zebulonite died...” (Judges 12:7-15).

Question 5: Point out some lessons believers should learn from the life and death of Jephthah’s successors?

After the strife with Ephraim, Jephthah lived and judged Israel six years. Though his life was characterized by strife, a period of tranquility ensued and continued after his demise. A marked period of peace and prosperity followed in Israel. There is a time of war and peace, tears and joy, storm and calm. Christians should not lose faith in God, no matter life’s situation. Soon, days of tears and sorrow will give way to joy and laughter; famine and poverty to
fullness and prosperity; darkness and difficulty to light and abundance (Psalm 126:5,6). We should endeavour to live as those who would one day die (Hebrews 9:27). Knowing that we all would stand before God after death to give account of our life on earth, we should not live our days carelessly but wisely (2 Corinthians 5:10). The consciousness of what good works we would be remembered for after we are gone should gear us up in active spiritual service for the Lord.

Available records of Jephthah’s successors reveal some things. One, Ibzan the Bethlehemite who judged Israel for seven years immediately after was busy with the issue of marriage of his sixty children. He had given birth to many children with the heavy responsibility of catering for them before he became judge. All he achieved, worthy of mention in Scripture, apart from maintaining peace in Israel, was sending thirty daughters out in exchange for thirty wives for his thirty sons. What a life of outright compromise of “unequal yoke” in marriage for his children contrary to God’s word (Judges 12:9; Joshua 23:11-23). Believers and Christian leaders need to be discrete in limiting child-bearing to the number they can cater for very well and still be able to discharge their God-given responsibility towards lost sinners. The cares of this life immobilizes the believer from effective service.

Two, Elon the Zebulonite who judged Israel for ten years had zero record of achievement. Three, Abdon, the Pirathonite stepped in to judge Israel for eight years. His was a life of extravagance, amusement and amassing of wealth and filthy lucre, of “forty sons and thirty nephews that rode on threescore and ten ass colts” (verse 14), and these to the detriment of military and civilian exploits.

Thus, Jephthah’s successors merely existed without vision or passion for great service for God’s glory (Isaiah 64:7; Daniel 11:32). This should not be our lot as Christians. We need to respond to Christ’s prompting to lift up our eyes “and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest”; being fully assured that “…they that know their God shall be strong and shall do exploits” and “...he that
reapeth, receiveth wages and gathereth (souls) unto life eternal” (Daniel 11:32; John 4:35-38). And when the Lord of the harvest shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory to receive everlasting crowns and rewards.
LESSON 643
THE PRE-EMINENCE OF LOVE

MEMORY VERSE: “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

The text focuses on Paul’s famous discourse on love. It is the continuation of his teaching on the gifts of the Spirit which had been dealt with in the previous chapter. In the present chapter, he enlightens the Corinthians on how best to manifest the gifts in an environment of love for the edification of the body of Christ. In the Corinthian church, the emphasis was on spiritual gifts, which though good, was at the expense of the “more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31). And Paul sensing the urgency and need for love among God’s people, wrote to correct their misplaced priority. Spiritual gifts will only be profitable in an atmosphere of love, for they are given in love, received in love and must be exercised in love.

Question 1: What central truth did Paul emphasize in this chapter?

Paul’s emphasis here was to show the pre-eminence of love. Love is greater than all spiritual gifts because without love, gifts are empty. While Paul did not condemn the Corinthians’ earnest desire and quest for spiritual gifts, he made it very clear that the use of God-given gifts would amount to nothing if they did not make love their priority. We all must acknowledge this truth that in whatever we do, selfless love is the priority for every Christian. This love is a clear proof of regeneration and a touchstone of our professed faith in Christ. It is clear from this point that God exalts Christian morals above ministry, Christ-like character above charisma and Christian grace above possession of spiritual gifts. The life of an individual must be transformed and influenced by the love of Christ which, “is shed abroad in our heart” before receiving a ministry and spiritual gifts for service. The
lesson is very apt as it applies to every aspect of our Christian life, family, church or social relationship.

**THE PRIORITY OF LOVE TO SPIRITUAL GIFTS**
(1 Corinthians 13:1-3; John 13:35; 15:12,13,17; Ephesians 5:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:9,10; Romans 13:8-10; James 2:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 2:7-10; 3:11-19; 4:7-21; Romans 12:9,10)

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass,... and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Question 2: **What kind of love is Paul talking about here and how did Christ exemplify it?**

Different words are used for love in Greek (the language used in writing the New Testament). The word translated ‘love’ or ‘charity’ here is not the Greek word *eros* which refers to erotic or sensual love, commonly used when people talk of “falling in love”. It is also different from *philia*, which means affection, friendship, a feeling of warmth towards someone else. Rather, it is *agape*, which is a commitment of the will to cherish and uphold another person. This is the word that is always used for the love of God. “...God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). It is a caring, self-sacrificing and unconditional love which shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved. It involves a decision and commitment to treat another person with concern, care, and thoughtfulness and to work for his or her best interest.

In His sacrificial death on the cross, our Lord Jesus Christ is the epitome and embodiment of this kind of love. He is the One who imparts this love in the heart of people who are saved from sin. Saved, believers are enabled to obey Scripture command to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength”, and “… shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37-39; Mark 12:30,31; Luke
10:27). As we abide in Christ, this love which is “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost” (Romans 5:5) abounds more and more. It is impossible to love God and our neighbours without the new birth experience.

**Question 3: Identify the gifts the Corinthian believers manifest without love in our text.**

Paul tells us that love is of more value than our most valuable gifts and laudable deeds in the sight of God. He further exposes the pre-eminence of love by contrasting it with certain gifts that were highly regarded by the Corinthian church and are still highly regarded in many Christian assemblies today. The first is the gift of tongues. The Corinthian brethren valued, admired and enjoyed communication, eloquence and oratory without practical love. Paul reveals to them the emptiness of tongues without thoughtfulness for others’ edification (1 Corinthians 13:1).

Secondly, he compares love to two other related gifts – the gifts of prophecy and knowledge – that were admired in the Corinthian church. Convincing prophetic powers and a deep understanding of mysteries without a benevolent and charitable heart are of no value. Love is superior to comprehension of spiritual realities. Obviously, Apostle Paul himself, a man of great prophetic gift and deep understanding of the mysteries of the Kingdom, emphasized that possession of all these without practical love is of little value. People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Thirdly, love is also compared with the gift of faith. This has to do with the power to move mountains or do great exploits in the Kingdom (1 Corinthians 13:2). To possess great faith and the ability to accomplish things termed impossible by others is good and commendable; but without love, it profits nothing. Love, therefore, is indispensable.

Finally, the Apostle compares love with almsgiving or philanthropy and sacrificial zeal which may lead a person to give away all he has (1 Corinthians 13:3).
In essence, he declares that if our acts of kindness are devoid of love, they will do little good. There are many reasons why people give. Some, like the human rights activists, give up their possessions and sometimes, their lives for the cause of social justice. Some philanthropists give for very selfish reasons, although their deeds may appear generous. Others give to the poor just to impress people that they are willing to help, but still do not love them. If one gives away all he has but withholds his heart from God, it cannot profit him. The underpinning truth revealed here is that love is the paramount thing that makes life worth living.

THE PROPERTIES OF TRUE LOVE (1 Corinthians 8:1;13:4-7; Galatians 5:22,23; Romans 13:10; Ephesians 4:15,29-32; Colossians 3:12-15; 1 Peter 4:8,9; 2 Peter 1:5- 9; Matthew 5:43-48)

Paul enumerates fifteen characteristics of love to show how love acts or looks like in everyday life.

1. It “suffereth long” (verse 4). This refers to endurance under provocation. This type of love does not seek revenge, but is slow to anger, endure personal wrongs without retaliation, and bear with others’ imperfections, faults and differences. It “is kind” (verse 4). This refers to the quality of goodness and the disposition to be helpful or useful to others. Kindness has been described as patience in action. A kind person is known by his/her eagerness to seek out the needs of others and look for opportunities to meet those needs with no mind of receiving back. He is tender, considerate, forgiving, respectful of others and responds to harsh treatments without grudge (Luke 6:33,35). Kindness motivates others toward positive change, just as God’s goodness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

2. It “envieth not” (verse 4); it is not jealous of the talents or blessings of others, but rejoices in their prosperity. An envious and jealous person would not want to recognize others, their abilities, contributions, successes,
etc. Envy generates unhealthy competition, cravings and conflicts among men (James 4:2).

3. It “vaunteth not itself” (verse 4). This means that true love does not brag, boast, parade or advertise itself. It does not seek to be the centre of attention. Love allows others to enjoy their moments of success.

4. It “is not puffed up” (verse 4). Love is not arrogant or proud; it is humble, realizing that all our possessions come from God undeservedly (1 Corinthians 4:7).

5. Love “doth not behave itself unseemly” (verse 5). This refers to love never being rude or not acting unbecomingly and disorderly. Love does not offend unnecessarily. It is good mannered, courteous, polite, sensitive to the feelings of others and always uses tact. It always seeks to treat others with compassion and humility.

6. It “seeketh not her own” (verse 5). It is never self-centred or self-seeking, but is genuinely concerned with and places others’ needs and desires above its own (Mark 10:45).

7. Love “is not easily provoked” (verse 5). It is not touchy, not easily offended and not hot-tempered or angry. It does not intimidate, threaten or punish in anger.

8. It “thinketh no evil” (verse 5). Love keeps no inventory or record of past wrongs. Rather, it responds in a godly way by overlooking and forgiving others.

9. It “rejoiceth not in iniquity” (verse 6). It refuses to rejoice in the sin or failures of others. Rather, it intercedes on behalf of the erring ones.

10. It “rejoiceth in the truth” (verse 6). True love and truth go together (Ephesians 4:15).

**Question 4: How can love cover multitude of sins without condoning sin?**

Although love is kind and overlooks the faults of
others, it does not compromise the truth or take a soft view of sin. To condone or cover up the sin of others is not love. True love boldly confronts and corrects sin, knowing the destructive consequences of sin.

11. Love “beareth all things” (verse 7). This is the quality of love to tolerate, patiently suffer or get along with unfavourable circumstances without complaining, recoiling or getting irritated. The second meaning implies that love does not broadcast the problems, weaknesses, failures and offences of others; rather, it defends the character of the other person as much as possible within the limits of truth. Although love would not lie about others’ weaknesses, it will not sarcastically expose and castigate them. Love protects.

12. It “believeth all things” (verse 7). This does not mean that love is gullible, but that it is not suspicious and doubtful of others’ character and motives.

13. It “hopeth all things” (verse 7). Love never loses hope or gives up on any person, however hopeless the situation. It refuses to resign to failure as final, but expects the best possible outcome in all situations. This does not mean a fanatical ignoring of reality, but a strong assurance that, “what God had promised, he was well able to do”, because “...all things worketh together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 4:21; 8:28).

14. Love “endureth all things” (verse 7). The word “endureth” is a military term meaning to sustain the assault of an enemy, to hold the fort, to stand its ground without giving up or abandoning its post. It has the idea of holding up under trials and in spite of difficulties. It is resilient, not transient. It hangs on even when all hope is gone. One major weakness of most believers is the tendency to defect or decamp when faced with tough or adverse situations. Where there is love, people will not leave the church or run out of their
marriage relationships or families because of problems, disagreements or misunderstandings. All these characteristics reveal that love is not just idle talk but actionable and practical.

THE PERMANENCE AND SUPREMACY OF LOVE OVER OTHER GIFTS (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; 14:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; Colossians 3:1-3; John 13:34,35; Matthew 5:44,45; 1 John 4:7-13,16-21)

After enumerating the properties of love, the Apostle to the Gentiles makes a declaration of the permanence of love: “Charity never faileth” (1 Corinthians 13:8a). The enduring quality of love indicates its ability to abide over time. This refers to the tenacity, perseverance, and relentless nature of love that endures whatever situation it comes across in this present life. But the unfailing or unending character of love stresses the eternity of love. This refers ultimately to the love of God as reflected in creation, redemption and in the future restoration. For “…whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). These spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues, knowledge, etc. are only given for the ministry of leading people to true love in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7). The whole essence of Christianity is love; gifts are designed to lead us to love. Love will make us show concern for the soul of sinners by reaching them with the gospel message. Love will make us see men from eternity’s point of view.

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). The glorious expectation of all heaven-bound saints is the dawning of the new and eternal day when all the imperfections of life will come to an end. All the gifts we receive here are, at their best, imperfect and
give only a faint revelation of God’s mind and might. But the time is coming when the imperfect will give way for the perfect. Then, we shall understand clearly and fully that love transcends time.

Finally, Paul compares love with two other virtues that equally abide in order to show the supremacy of love over them. These are faith and hope. “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Corinthians 13:8).

**Question 5: Why did Paul regard love as the greatest of the three abiding virtues?**

Faith, love and hope are often mentioned together in the Scriptures (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8). They are referred to as the cardinal virtues which summarize the whole Christian faith. These virtues will abide until they have brought us to heaven. But in heaven, only love will continue to exist through eternity as the saints behold the Father of love who gave His only begotten Son to die for mankind. Thus, while we desire spiritual gifts for effective service, we must ensure that we “… follow after charity” (1 Corinthians 14:1).
LESSON 644
PRECEPTS FOR USE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

MEMORY VERSE: “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Corinthians 14:26).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 14:1-40

The Corinthian church was as controversial as it was spiritually gifted. The immaturity exhibited by members in the use of spiritual gifts generated confusion and made their worship disorderly and unedifying. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, had to call them to order in this epistle; “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33). The Apostle zealously guarded that which he received from the Lord and passed it unadulterated to the churches. Earlier, he had informed them, “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you...” (1 Corinthians 11:23). It is the responsibility of church leaders to take necessary steps to correct any perceived deviation which is not in conformity with the Scripture. They should not fail to take corrective measures when their congregations drift away from the original standard of the word of God for fear of losing membership.

The focus of Apostle Paul in the text is to set out precepts for the proper use of spiritual gifts, especially of prophecy and speaking in unknown tongues. He points out that speaking in an unknown tongue, though scriptural, only profits the speaker: “For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries...” (1 Corinthians 14:2). He admonishes believers to rather seek the gift of prophecy which is far superior and better, because: “he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3).
A clear understanding of the use of spiritual gifts is of paramount importance to every believer and all Bible-believing organization. However, spiritual gifts are not sought in a vacuum: those who desire to be partakers of these gifts must be saved, sanctified, separated, Spirit-filled and consecrated to the Lord to utilize them faithfully.

**Question 1: What lessons do we learn from Apostle Paul’s admonition to the Corinthian church as revealed in our text?**

The Apostle Paul started by emphasizing the fact that spiritual gifts should be exercised in love. “Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy” (1 Corinthians 14:1). In the previous chapter, he had proved that love is rated much higher than any other gift. “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest is charity” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love is the most essential ingredient in Christian life and service. Spiritual gifts are necessary for the Church to achieve her full potentials but at the same time, they can be misused if they are exercised without divine love. Believers who possess spiritual gifts need genuine (agape) love in order to impart Christ’s life, love, healing, and power to others. Any exercise of spiritual gifts must be done in love in order to be acceptable to God. “Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). In other words, love must be the governing principle of all spiritual manifestations.

The Corinthian believers seemed to have overestimated the importance of the gift of tongues in relation to other spiritual gifts and this led to confusion in their public worship. He explained that speaking in unknown tongues without interpretation is out of place in corporate worship. He encouraged believers to desire the gift of prophecy above other gifts because that is beneficial to others. In the spirit of love, what is beneficial to others is preferred to what is of benefit to oneself. The believer that speaks in an unknown tongue speaks mysteries which edify only him. On the other hand, the believer who prophesies edifies
both he and others. He proceeded to contrast the gift of speaking in an unknown tongue and the gift of prophecy.

**PROPHECY AND UNKNOWN TONGUES CONTRASTED** (1 Corinthians 14:1-17; 12:1-10; Joel 2:28,29; Acts 2:1-8; 21:8,9; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6)

Prophecy, in a general sense, is a supernatural prediction that something will happen. In this context, it is an inspired, anointed utterance given to the believer by the Holy Spirit to edify, exhort, comfort, counsel, or warn the Church in accordance with the Scriptures. The gift of diverse kinds of tongues manifests by way of utterances in different kinds of languages previously unknown to the speaker. Again, it should be noted that prophecy is not necessarily to foretell future events. Apostle Paul proved that the gift of prophecy is more beneficial than speaking in an unknown tongue (1 Corinthians 14:2-17).

The gift of unknown tongues is contrasted with the gift of prophets as follows. First, he that speaks in unknown tongues speaks to God; he that prophesies speaks to men. Second, unknown tongues are mysteries unknown to men; prophecy carries a clear message to men. Third, tongues elicit no purposeful action since no comprehensible instruction is passed; prophecy gives understandable instructions that could be acted upon. Fourth, speakers in tongues will appear barbaric to the uninformed but prophecy gives credibility to the speaker. Fifth, while tongues need interpretation in order to be understood, prophecy requires no interpreter.

**Question 2: Contrast prophecy with speaking in an unknown tongue.**

“And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?” (1 Corinthians 14:7). There are several lessons from this passage. Ministers of the gospel should use clear and simple words in presenting
their messages so that their audience will understand them. Also choristers should be careful so that the melodies of their songs do not overshadow the important message they intend to convey. Parents should give simple understandable instructions to their children if they expect them to act on them. In large gatherings, the technical crew is expected to ensure that the message is clearly transmitted to the entire audience. One could imagine what would have been the lot of mankind if the way of obtaining salvation is not stated in the Bible in simple language for every sincere seeker to understand.

**Question 3: How should ministers present their messages?**

**THE PLACE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE CHURCH**
(1 Corinthians 14:18-25; 2 Corinthians 10:8; John 16:7-14; Acts 8:5-8; Romans 12:6-10; 15:2; Ephesians 4:11-13)

Having spelt out the supremacy and pre-eminence of love in 1 Corinthians 13, the Apostle exhorted the believers to earnestly desire spiritual gifts because of its place and importance in the Church. Earlier in chapter twelve, he had explained the manifestations of the Holy Spirit given to and through the believers, stressing that they all are from God and for the benefit of the Church. Gifts generally attest to the authenticity of the gospel as coming from God (1 Corinthians 13:3-5; Acts 13:6-12). Also, the exhortation to believers to desire spiritual gifts points to the fact that they are indispensable in the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts when used properly will not only edify the Church but would lead to the conversion of sinners. As a matter of fact, when Paul came to preach to the Corinthians, he ministered to them under the unction of the Holy Ghost (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). This led to their conversion and subsequent establishment of the Church. It is obvious that he did not speak to them publicly in an unknown tongue.

The tongues’ extravagance was dismissed by the Apostle’s statement that five words in an understandable language are better than ten
thousand words in an unknown tongue (1 Corinthians 14:19). The Scripture abounds with five-word statements that are capable of edifying the hearers. For instance, “Ye must be born again” (John 3:3); “Behold the Lamb of God” (John 1:29); “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners” (James 4:8); “Touch not the unclean thing” (2 Corinthians 6:17); “Sanctify them through thy truth” (John 17:17); “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11); “Lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:12); “Hold fast till I come” (Revelation 2:25); “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20); “Rejoice in the Lord alway” (Philippians 4:4); “Evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Corinthians 15:33); “Speak evil of no man” (Titus 3:2); “Wisdom is the principal thing” (Proverbs 4:7); “Bear ye one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2); “Add to your faith virtue” (2 Peter 1:5); “The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5); “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20); and many more are powerful words which can transform, get us closer to God, keep us steadfast in the faith, help us live lives of continual holiness and eventually take us to heaven instead of speaking 10,000 words in an unknown tongue that do not profit others. The rebuke of the Apostle was a way of curtailing the excesses of speaking in an unknown tongue in the church without interpretation.

The purpose of the Holy Spirit in the Church is to convict and convert sinners, instruct, guide, teach and mature believers, among others. These roles could not be fulfilled just by speaking in unknown tongues. An unbeliever who comes into an assembly where members are speaking in unknown tongues will certainly become confused. This will defeat the purpose of the Holy Spirit for such a person to hear the gospel message and be convicted and saved. The opposite effect is produced if the unbeliever hears the convicting message of the Holy Spirit in a language he or she understands.

Immature, childish use of spirituals gifts in the church creates strife, misunderstanding, disunity, disharmony and disorderliness. Needless to say that
such an atmosphere does not serve the purpose of God for giving the gifts to the church.

**Question 4: What problem does improper use of spiritual gifts pose in the church?**

It is most unfortunate that what Paul the Apostle by the Spirit’s leading corrected in the Corinthian church is practised in many so-called Pentecostal and charismatic assemblies in contemporary times. But care should be taken in every Bible-believing church so that members coming in from various backgrounds would not introduce abusive uses of spiritual gifts into the church. This can be achieved through proper teaching of God’s word, training of believers before enlisting them into the workforce, effective supervision of newly recruited leaders, and avoiding putting untested and unproved people into leadership positions.

**PROCEDURE FOR PROFITABLE USE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE CHURCH** (1 Corinthians 14:26-40; 12:7; Titus 1:5; Exodus 25:9; Hebrews 8:5)

Following his teaching on the use of spiritual gifts, Paul the Apostle gave practical instructions to enforce compliance. He laid down the procedure for exercising spiritual gifts in public worship. This is a commendable approach when handling matters in the church. It behoves true disciples of Christ that we follow standards enshrined in the Holy Scriptures “…as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount” (Hebrews 8:5).

**Question 5: What lesson do we learn from Paul’s approach in handling the controversy in the Corinthian church?**

According to the Apostle, the following procedures were to be observed: First, two or at most three are to be allowed to speak in unknown tongue if there is an interpreter. Second, if there were no interpreters, no one should speak in unknown tongue in the church. Third, two or three were to prophesy while others
scrutinize to ensure adherence to the Scriptures. Fourth, while one is prophesying and another receives a revelation, one should hold his peace and allow the other to speak. Fifth, prophecy should be one at a time. Sixth, spiritual gifts do not make someone uncontrollable. Seven, women should not usurp authority over men in the church. Above all, he asserts that “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.”

In conclusion, the Apostle made it clear that the instructions he had given to the Corinthians and by extension to all believers in Christ were by divine authority. Whoever therefore objects could not be said to be acting by the Spirit of God, whatever gifts he professes. The Spirit of God cannot contradict Himself. He restated what he posited earlier that the brethren should rather covet the gift of prophecy which is more beneficial to the Church. The great lesson for all is that in the Church of God, all things must be done decently and orderly.
LESSON 645
THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

MEMORY VERSE: “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:1-58

In the previous chapter, Apostle Paul acknowledged the spiritual gifts which God bestowed upon the Corinthian Church. However, he exhorted the church to covet the best gifts which should be exercised in the spirit of love for the edification of the body of Christ.

In this lesson, Paul the apostle deals with the subject of the resurrection of the dead. He establishes the truth of Christ’s resurrection as the first fruit which was confirmed by infallible proofs and authentic witnesses. Refuting the claim of those who deny Christ’s resurrection, he affirms that it is the basis of true believers’ hope of a future resurrection in glory. He expresses the transformation that true believers will experience at resurrection and their final victory over death, sin and Satan. In order to partake of this glorious event, the Apostle exhorts believers to be steadfast, obedient and diligent in God’s service.

Question 1: Why is the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead so important to the Christian faith?

The suffering, sacrifice, agony and death of Christ on the Cross for the remission of the sins of the whole world would be of no value without His resurrection. The truth of His prediction to rise the third day after death (John 2:19) and His claim to deity as well as victory over sin, Satan and death and a blissful eternity with God after death would be vain and false without the resurrection of the dead. But Christ resurrected and we shall also rise from the dead.

Question 2: What are the proofs of Christ’s resurrection and the lessons believers can learn from it?

Christ’s death, and particularly His resurrection are indispensable truths of Scripture. The four gospel writers gave clear account of these because of their significance to the Christian faith. While it took Christ’s vicarious death on the Cross to pay our sin-debt, it took His bodily resurrection to make apparent the seal of God’s approval of the redemptive work. The transforming power of the gospel is hinged on the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Paul affirms this truth: “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).

The earliest convincing evidence of His resurrection was the empty tomb (John 20:1-8). After His resurrection, Christ remained on earth for 40 days, appearing and speaking to the apostles and many of His followers of things pertaining to the kingdom of God (John 20:11-18; Luke 24:13-32,34,36-43; John 20:26-31; John 21:1-25; Matthew 28:9,10,16-20; 1 Corinthians 15:6-8; Acts 1:3-11).

There is no salvation from sin outside Christ’s death and resurrection. For “...if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished” (1 Corinthians 15:17,18). The resurrection of Christ from the dead sets Christianity apart from other religions with its eternal hope and miraculous power of transformation. Christ is “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). Today, the living Lord reveals Himself to men and women who believe in Him, an evidence
that He is alive. He declares, “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).

**IMPLICATIONS OF DENYING THE RESURRECTION**

(1 Corinthians 15:12-19; Acts 17:30-32; 2 Timothy 2:16-18; Acts 23:8; Matthew 16:6; 22:23,34)

Having confirmed the truth of Christ’s resurrection, Paul refutes the claim of those in the church at Corinth who denied the resurrection of the dead. “Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead” (verse 12). There were some among the Corinthians who thought the resurrection to be an impossibility. Some heretics like Hymenaeus and Philetus also spoke against the resurrection (2 Timothy 2:16-18). Clearly, those who deny the reality of the resurrection of Christ and of the dead deny the Christian faith altogether.

**Question 3: From our text, enumerate the logical consequences of denying the resurrection of the dead.**

Denial of the resurrection of the dead has grave implications. It would appear that Christ, the God-man is defeated, dead and is still in the grave (verse 13); that the apostles were false witnesses of God (verses 15,16); that the faith of Christians and the labours of ministers of the gospel are all vain (verse 17); that believers who died in Christ like Stephen, James and others are forever lost since the only hope believers have in Christ expires at death (verse 19).

Both the Old and the New Testaments testify of people who were raised to life as proof that the dead shall live again by the power of God. The son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:22), the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:32-35), the dead man that touched the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:20,21), Jarius’ daughter (Matthew 9:18,25; Mark 5:42), dead saints that were seen at the time of Christ’s crucifixion (Matthew 27:52,53), the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-15), Lazarus of Bethany (John 11:44) and
Dorcas (Acts 9:40) were all raised to life.

The first man, Adam, brought death to all humanity through his wilful disobedience, but the last Adam, Christ, brought life and immortality to all through His obedience. For Christians, the life to come would be comprehensively and incomparably superior to the present one. The resurrection from the dead refers to redemption to fullness of life. We trust that we shall live again, even if we put off “this tabernacle” at the revelation of Jesus Christ, for “if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”. We are “to awake to righteousness”, because of this lively hope of resurrection from the dead.

To deny the resurrection is to negate the gospel and open the door to sin and unbridled sensuality. “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Corinthians 15:32). Those who deny the resurrection of Christ are in danger of losing so great a salvation and ultimately incurring the wrath and judgment of God. By their attitude of doubt and unbelief, they regard themselves as unworthy of the ‘Good News’, which is the product of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. To be saved, we must believe the gospel. This requires that we both trust in His death, burial and resurrection and receive the person of Christ as Saviour to be saved from sin (Revelation 3:20). “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9,10).


Christ is the “first fruits” of the dead who rose from the grave. Since death came through man, Christ incarnated as a man to make resurrection possible.
His resurrection will be followed by that of all believers who received salvation through His sacrifice. This will be a resurrection to life. But all sinners that ever lived shall be resurrected to eternal damnation. Meanwhile, Christ will continue to reign over and conquer all His enemies, the last of which is death.

**Question 4: With what body form shall believers inherit the kingdom of God?**

Having overcome Satan and death through Christ’s resurrection, believers now affirm faith in that victory through observance of water baptism. They are baptized into His death by immersion in water and raised to newness of life. Apart from being the basis of the doctrine of water baptism, Christ’s resurrection is the anchor of hope of eternal salvation for believers who suffer persecutions. It is the reason for consecration, sacrificial service and cleaving to the Lord in spite of the storms that we face. “And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die” (1 Corinthians 15:30-32).

Christ’s resurrection proves that He is the Son of God (John 10:17,18; Romans 1:4), guarantees the efficacy of His redemptive work (Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 15:17), validates the truth of the scriptures (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:31; Luke 24:44-47), proves the reality of future judgment on the wicked (Acts 17:30,31), engenders the spiritual life of believers (Acts 2:32,33; Romans 5:10; 1 Corinthians 15:45), makes available the presence of Christ and His power over sin to every true believer from day to day (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:18-20) and assures believers of their resurrection or translation and future heavenly inheritance when the Lord returns (John 14: 3 ; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; 1 Peter 1:3,4).

Believers who doubted Christ’s resurrection in the Corinthian church were those who indulged in
ungodly association with unbelievers or heretics and had their spiritual senses dulled. No matter how wise a Christian is, unequal yoke with unbelievers will definitely influence his conviction. “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not...; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.” Unbelief in the resurrection of Christ and of all men is sin, aside erasing borders of holy living. Ignorant believers in Corinth, asked: “How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?” The Apostle answered this question clearly by alluding to their agrarian life (verses 35-50). The body of the grain sown is not the same as that which will be harvested. “But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body” (verse 38). Just like animals and galaxies exist with different body forms, so will the resurrected body be different from the human body. The dead will be “raised in incorruption”, “glory”, “power” with a “spiritual body”, “the image of the heavenly” which is “immortality”. The conclusion is that the natural body cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

To inherit the kingdom of God, we shall be changed! “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51,52). This supernatural transformation and change of the natural bodies of believers into celestial, glorious, heavenly bodies will happen at rapture. This is a great mystery the Lord has revealed to His church. With this new body, death is swallowed up in victory because sin which is the messenger, instrument and sting of death is removed (verses 54-56). “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (verse 57). Note however that this victory comes and can only be obtained through Christ. Victory over sin is so interwoven with the resurrection that to deny one is to deny the other. Prayer of faith in His sacrificial
death and resurrection makes the experience of salvation real in the penitent.

**Question 5: What encouragement and challenge can believers receive from the truth about the resurrection of the dead?**

The dead shall be raised to wear exactly the same celestial body our Lord Christ had when He rose from the dead. There shall be no barrier or obstacle before us “but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” All men, without exception, shall rise again; some will rise to glory and honour, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who have received the grace and salvation of God through Christ, and continued faithfully unto death, shall have a resurrection to everlasting glory.

From the foregoing, the hope of resurrection was the reason Paul, the Apostle was unrelenting in preaching the gospel, fighting the good fight of faith even with beasts at Ephesus, enduring afflictions, writing this epistle to nullify falsehood and establishing the truth, answering questions about the resurrection and challenging believers to uncompromising and faithful spiritual service that would be rewarded by the Lord in the end. If anything, erroneous teaching weakens and discourages people to abandon spiritual service since they might be serving in vain. That is why the Apostle rounds off this exposition on the resurrection of the dead with exhortation to steadfast and enduring service for the Lord. This exhortation is for believers then and now. “**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord**” (verse 58).
LESSON 646
PAUL’S CARE FOR THE SAINTS

MEMORY VERSE: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye” (1 Corinthians 16:1).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 16:1-24

In the previous chapter, Paul, the apostle explained the full gospel that revolves around Christ’s death and resurrection. He used this, especially the resurrection of Christ, to counter false belief of some so-called believers among them who denied the doctrine of resurrection.

In this last chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul sets out to deal with the issue of collection for the saints and prescribed the best way to do it. He promises to pay the brethren a visit at winter and gives directives about the treatment of his co-workers in transit. He exhorts to watchfulness and strength in the faith and commends the visit of some brethren and their supply to his needs. After the salutation of some co-workers, Paul laments the awful state of the enemies of Christ and concludes the epistle with an apostolic benediction.

MANNER AND RULES OF COLLECTION FOR NEEDY SAINTS (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 9:1,2; 8:1-4,7; Romans 15:25,26)

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come” (verses 1,2).

At the time of Paul’s writing, Christians in Jerusalem and Judea were experiencing hardship because of the famine earlier predicted by Prophet Agabus (Acts 11:27-30). The order to make contributions for the saints in Jerusalem was earlier given by the apostle
to the churches of Galatia. Paul at this point also told the Corinthian church to do likewise. We can learn from the wisdom of the apostle to “...consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Hebrews 10:24). The duties and responsibilities believers have towards one another are here underscored. They are to diligently and attentively consider each other’s trials, difficulties, weaknesses, and to abound in love one to another.

**Question 1: What are the practical steps we need to take to alleviate suffering of believers in need?**

The welfare of needy believers should be of utmost concern to us. We are not to be selfish. Rather, we are expected to demonstrate Christ-like love and sympathy to suffering and needy brethren. We should strengthen and encourage each other in their trials and in their godly responsibilities. To realize this reciprocal care, we “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Philippians 2:4). Therefore, the heaven-bound believer should not be selfishly engrossed with the care and attention of his concerns or that of his own family, but should show some care and have the welfare of other believers dearest to his heart.

The Apostle gave directives as regards the manner of collection from which we deduce the following:

(i) the collection is universal – everyone is to make it a duty and responsibility to give for the care of the saints (Exodus 30:15).

(ii) It is to be systematic and regular. The contributions are expected to come in every first day of the week.

(iii) It is to be planned: the brethren are to set aside or save something for that purpose. “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity...” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

(iv) It is according to one’s ability. “Then the disciples, every man according to his ability,
determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea” (Acts 11:29).

(v) It should be voluntary; “not grudgingly, or of necessity”.

(vi) It should be done willingly, “for if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath…” (2 Corinthians 8:12). Every believer is to apportion his or her resources to the collection, not by pathetic appeals and compulsion but of their volition. The brethren have to designate in their own minds the sum of money which they can give.

(vii) It should be done cheerfully “… for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7.)

Question 2: Point out from the Scriptures clear proofs of worship on the first day of the week.

We see the apostle directing the collection to be taken on the first day of the week (Sunday), the day Christians observe as their day of rest and worship. The Apostle’s instruction to receive the contributions on the first day of the week gives a foundation for our worship on Sunday contrary to the belief by some sects to keep the Jewish Sabbath as a day of worship. Christians started observing the first day of the week as the day of worship after the resurrection of the Lord. Further proofs of the first day of the week as the day of Christian worship abound in the Scriptures. First, the same order for the collection on the first day of the week was given to all the churches proving that they worshipped on the first day of the week. Second, it was the custom of the early church to gather together on this day to break bread (Acts 20:7). Third, the seal of the Pentecost day on which the church began was on the first day of the week. Fourth, John the beloved through the Spirit of God identified it as the Lord’s Day (Revelation 1:10).

“And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem” (verse 3). Paul requested that the contribution be reckoned properly and
delivered through trusted hands with covering letters. We note from this directive that reckoning and documentation of offerings as well as letters of introduction of brethren in transit are necessary to forestall the risk of bearing losses through false brethren. Church leaders and members will do well to follow this scriptural precept given by the apostle.

**MISSION PLANS AND RECEPTION OF FAITHFUL MINISTERS** (1 Corinthians 16:5-12; Acts 20:1-5; 28:11-15)

“Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia. And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go” (verses 5,6). The Apostle here outlines his plans to visit the churches in his journey to Macedonia as part of his itinerary. Paul was still at Ephesus and he purposed to visit the brethren at Macedonia and perhaps spend the winter in Corinth. This he did by spending three months (Acts 20:3). We recall that he had a vision to leave Troas for Macedonia where the gospel was greatly needed (Acts 16:9,10). Geographically, Macedonia was not in the direct way from Ephesus to Corinth, yet he purposed to go there first and after visiting the churches, then he would go to Corinth. He had long laboured in these churches and had his heart set to see and stay with them. Like Paul, the heart of the Christian minister must be much towards the people he leads.

**Question 3: What do we learn from Paul’s articulation of his itinerary and guidance of the Spirit in his evangelistic missions?**

The itinerary of Paul also teaches us that it is important to have a diary of evangelistic programmes according to the will of God. This will spur the believer or Christian worker to be on course and move towards greater success in ministry and life. We should also endeavour to have a contrivance for our own personal business to enhance greater success. As much as other duties of his office allowed him, he was willing to
see, stay and check up on the progress of his flock so as to impart a greater benefit on them (2 Corinthians 1:15). His excuse for not seeing them at the present was to assure them that he would not pay a passing or transient visit that would not satisfy them. Therefore, he would not see them now, but another time when he could tarry longer with them. This teaches us that our evangelistic visitation should be planned ahead in prayer and greater intake of the word of God so that our hosts would have great spiritual benefits.

We also see the dependence of the apostle on the will of God. He did not make his plan to the exclusion of God’s permission knowing that he was His servant and could be led by the Spirit to change plans. We observe this in the Macedonian call when he and his company were still in Troas when the Spirit of God forbade him twice from his intended destinations. We learn here that our plans and purposes must be made with absolute submission to the will of God and His divine providence. We do not have the liberty to carry out our own designs without divine approval; we must do everything under God’s power, permission and directive.

**Question 4: What should be our attitude in the face of oppositions to the propagation of the gospel?**

“But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries” (verses 8,9).

While in Ephesus, the Lord gave Paul the apostle a grand opportunity to preach and extend the gospel with great success. It was an opportunity for him to bestow more labour as many Ephesians were prepared to receive the gospel from him. There was a great prospect that many more would come into the Kingdom with more labour. For this reason, the apostle determined to stay on and labour for a while in Ephesus.

However, there were adversaries of the gospel which made his stay longer in Ephesus. It is instructive to
note that great success in ministry is attended with many adversaries and great opposition. The devil stirs up all rage and fury against the preachers of the gospel where he has been greatly affected, and that should encourage us to stay in our duty posts, though our difficulties may be many and our discouragement great. The adversaries in this case were not secret but open as was Demetrius and his protest group who felt threatened about the loss of their trade through gospel-preaching. Adversaries will always arise when the kingdom of Satan is shaken and ready to scatter. Such opposition is often an indication of the presence of the Spirit of God and a proof that the enemy is stunned and losing out in the battle. Paul did not see the opposition as a reason to leave; it made him to see the need to stay on, help the converts and win more souls. The contemporary soul-winner should never give up the work or leave the place for the enemy to regain control over his former subjects because of opposition.

MINISTERIAL EXHORTATIONS, SALUTATION AND BENEDICTION (1 Corinthians 16:13-24; Romans 16:1-24; Corinthians 13:11-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:25-28)

“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity” (verses 13,14). The apostle exhorts the Corinthian brethren to four main duties of their faith namely, watchfulness, steadfastness in the faith, courage and love. First, watchfulness is a necessary and daily duty of every Christian. The believer cannot afford to be careless. Therefore, we must watch against all sin, all appearance of sin and all temptations. The Corinthian brethren were in great danger by reason of their many feuds; so, they were to watch against divisions, false doctrines and false teachers. Second, steadfastness in the faith is a great and an indispensable duty of every believer that understands the value of his soul’s salvation. A true believer must not work disorderly. Third, a believer is also exhorted to be strong and courageous. He is to stand his ground and adhere to the revelation of the
truth. Fourth, they are also advised to be careful to practice charity in all things as “charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

The apostle gives particular directives concerning some saints among them. These men and women had always shown care for Paul or supported him through personal accompaniment and physical provision. Stephanas was said to have addicted himself to the ministry of the saints. That means, he so sold himself to it that it became part and parcel of his life and was commended by the apostle. Therefore, such persons deserved to be treated with proper deference and regard in their assemblies. This is a commendable gesture and virtue which should be emulated by contemporary Christians.

Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned among the eminent group of persons deserving honour as well as their house fellowship. The self-devoting love of this couple leaves a mark for Christian couples of today to follow.

Furthermore, the apostle tells them to salute one another with an holy kiss. In the custom of the day, it was an expression of mutual affection and friendship. Many so-called modern Christians have tried to apply this Scripture to satisfy their fleshly lust. The heaven-bound Christian must be wary of this and not swim with the tide of sensuality.

**Question 5: Explain the practice of ‘holy kiss’ as a form of greeting in the church today.**

What did Paul mean by an holy kiss then? First, it should be clear that he cannot in any way encourage any practice that could arouse sensuality among believers as that would mean pulling down the foundation of what he had already built. It was their custom in the Middle East and other climes to give a peck or a mild touch of an ‘insensitive’ part of the body of a cherished one such as the neck or cheek with the mouth, the shoulder-to-shoulder embrace or a pat given to someone at the back were forms of intimate greetings. In asking the brethren to greet each other with a kiss, Paul was only recommending a mutually
deep and warm greetings among the brethren. For avoidance of doubt, he qualified it as an “holy kiss” to eliminate any shade of uncleanness to be associated with the practice.

The Apostle closes up the chapter with the salutation of love and the pronouncement of curse on any one who will not love the Lord while pouring benedictions of love and grace upon believers in general. This teaches the need for preachers of God’s love to balance their teaching by highlighting consequences of spurning the love of God. “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Romans 11:22).
LESSON 647
COMFORT FOR SUFFERING BELIEVERS

MEMORY VERSE: “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:3,4).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 1:1-24

The second epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Church at Corinth opens with a strong emphasis on the ministry of comfort and support for suffering believers. The epistle appears intensely personal and the words flow apparently from the heart of a caring and enduring shepherd.

Specifically, this chapter addresses some questions regarding Paul’s calling and ministry. It also reveals what our conduct should be in times of severe or extreme afflictions arising from our faith in Christ and ministry. Moreover, our text highlights our responsibilities to hurting and suffering saints whether near or far from us. It is edifying when ministers and other members of the church serve as agents of comfort to suffering believers who are in dire need of encouragement.

THE MANDATE AND SALUTATION OF A PERSECUTED APOSTLE (2 Corinthians 1:1-2; Acts 9:15,16; 26:15,16; Romans 1:1; 11:13; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 15:9,10; 2 Corinthians 11:5; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1)

As his manner in most of his epistles, Paul introduces himself at the outset of this epistle as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. He mentioned this because there were some skeptics in Corinth who had raised question about his apostleship. He clarified that he neither assumed the apostolic
ministry by his own will nor was he ordained by men but by God (Acts 9:15,16; 26:15-18). Circumstances surrounding Paul’s conversion and commission were such an unforgettable experience. It was the consciousness and assurance of this divine call that sustained his apostolic ministry during periods of intense persecution and affliction.

**Question 1: What lesson can we learn from Paul’s salvation experience in our text?**

Believers and ministers of the gospel today have two major lessons here. One, they should be able to recount their individual encounter with the Lord and the accompanying experience of salvation underpinning their spiritual service. Two, they must know that their call to ministry can only come from God. “**And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron**” (Hebrews 5:4). A self-appointed ministry or leadership is a self-serving, self-destroying and soul-damning ministry. The examples of Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, Korah, Dathan and Abiram, Absalom, and the consequences that followed would suffice us here (Leviticus 10:1,2; Numbers 16:1-33; 2 Samuel 18:9-15; 18:19-32). Other instances of self-appointed ministry or leadership could also be seen in the following passages (Jeremiah 23:21; Acts 15:24; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 3 John 9,10). We must all ensure that ours is not a carnal, self-appointed ministry or leadership but that which is by Jesus Christ through the will of God. Whenever we are pressed beyond measure in ministry, it is this assurance of divine call that will keep us going in the face of difficulties (Romans 8:35-39).

The apostle Paul, in humility, makes mention of Timothy in his salutation, thus signifying that the latter was with him at the time the epistle was written. Earlier, Timothy had been sent by Paul to Macedonia with instructions to go on to Corinth if possible (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10). As an associate of Paul, he was a well-known minister to the Corinthian church. This underscores the importance of proving ourselves
This epistle is specifically addressed to “the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia”. The recipients of the epistle who are addressed as “the church of God” refers to an assembly of the redeemed believers who belong to God through Christ’s vicarious sacrifice on the Cross. It was not a heathen assembly, a social club or a religious cult, but a body of believers in Christ, saved and called out from the world to be God’s peculiar people (Galatians 1:4; 1 Peter 2:9,10). The epistle, however, is not addressed only to the church of God in Corinth but to all the saints in Achaia as well. The Roman province of Achaia included all the Southern part of Greece where other churches had been planted. The apostle desires this letter to be circulated among them all.

Today, the Church must realize her position as God’s peculiar treasure and, therefore, should not be conformed to the world (Romans 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Another point to note is that those who are yet to be saved or born again are not members of the Church no matter how long they have been attending fellowship. Moreover, the universality of the gospel message and the sustainability of our doctrinal standard should make us circulate the sound message and teachings we have received to every local church in our regions (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 1:38; Luke 4:43). The literature ministry is particularly underscored here.

**Question 2: From the text, what is “Church” and how can one become a member of it?**

The salutation of Paul the Apostle in this letter is also quite instructive. “Grace be to you and peace…” has become the customary and refreshing salutation that Paul has come to be associated with in most of his epistles. Through this salutation, he wishes to express his greatest affectionate desires for the people of God. It is important to note that these wishes are purely spiritual and not materialistic in nature. Unlike
Paul, many modern day preachers seldom labour for the spiritual blessings of their congregation. Their ministration and prayer for their members centre mostly on material things. While there is nothing wrong with these kinds of blessing, we must note that they are transient and ephemeral.

In our text, Paul boldly placed the Lord Jesus Christ side by side with God the Father (verse 2). This means that Christ is equal with the Father in the Godhead. The passage, thus, corroborates the doctrine of Trinity of the Godhead which the church teaches.

THE MINISTRY OF COMFORT AND SUCCOUR TO SUFFERING BELIEVERS (2 Corinthians 1:3-11; Acts 14: 21, 22; Jeremiah 38: 4-13; 1 Corinthians 12: 26; Philippians 1:28,29; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-7; Hebrews 13:3; Romans 15:25,26)

Paul, the apostle thanked God for the comfort he received in the midst of severe persecution, distress and afflictions (verses 3-11). Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit was the principal Source of this comfort he enjoyed (Acts 9:31; John 14:26; 15:26). Paul’s comfort also came partly through the physical presence and companionship of Titus and partly through the good news about the spiritual progress of the Corinthians which Titus had brought to him in Macedonia (2 Corinthians 7:6,7). The apostle then goes on to show that whether he is afflicted or comforted, all turns out for their eventual good, consolation and salvation. The thanksgiving of Paul is addressed to “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. Moreover, God is described as “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort”. It is from Him that all mercies and comforts flow (Isaiah 61:2; Zechariah 1:17; Acts 9:31; John 14:16,26). It is this God “who comforteth us in all our tribulation...” In all his afflictions, Paul was conscious of God’s comforting presence. One of the many reasons God comforted Paul was that he might, in turn, be able to comfort other suffering believers with the same comfort with which he was comforted by God. We should remember that when we are comforted that we should practically seek to
pass on this comfort to others in their time of need.

“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounded in Christ”. It should be noted that “the suffering of Christ” here means that believers can and do suffer because of their identification with Christ (2 Timothy 2:11,12; 1 Peter 2:12-23; 4:12-16; Matthew 10:17,18,22-28).

Question 3: Mention some of the reasons for suffering and the benefits that come from it.

Believers suffer reproach, persecution, rejection, hostility, hatred, imprisonment, denial, betrayal, false accusation, martyrdom, etc. on account of their faith in Christ. They are common experiences believers go through at one time or the other on their pilgrim journey to heaven. The Bible gives account of godly men and women who went through great afflictions and sufferings for righteousness’ sake such as Joseph, Job, David, Christ, Paul etc. While the devil aims at using suffering to discourage us from following and serving the Lord, God allows it to toughen our spiritual muscles and make us stronger in faith.

All sufferings, irrespective of how painful or distressing, always come with some benefits. (i) It makes us to seek after God and His divine intervention (Psalm 94:12; 126:1; Daniel 9:2,3; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10); (ii) It refines and purifies us (Isaiah 48:10); (iii) It teaches us obedience (Psalm 119:67); (iv) It makes us compassionate and merciful to others (2 Corinthians 1:4; Hebrews 2:18); (v) It also makes us to rest in the Lord knowing that He loves and cares for us and will deliver us.

Paul’s emphasis in our text is that there is a rich compensation for all the trials believers go through. We enjoy a corresponding share in the consolation of Christ. “And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer” (verse 6). Here the apostle could see good outcome from both his afflictions and his comfort.
They would be encouraged and challenged by Paul’s endurance and would reason that if God could give him grace to bear sufferings, He could likewise give them grace.

Moreover, the apostle expresses his confidence that just as the Corinthian believers had known what it was to suffer on behalf of Christ so they would experience the comforting experience from Christ. Sufferings never come alone for Christians. They are always followed by the consolation of Christ.

**Question 4: What should be our consolation in times of suffering?**

“For we would not brethren have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia...” Having spoken in general terms of afflictions and comfort, Paul now tells more specifically of a terrible affliction he suffered by God’s grace in Asia Minor. He was “pressed out of measure” beyond the ordinary human natural power of endurance “that we despaired even of life”. Paul’s condition was so gloomy and extremely depressing that he had the feelings of a man that was sentenced to death. It is instructive that God allowed his commissioned servants to go through such a harrowing experience so that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. The omnipotent God is the hope of any man who is doomed to die like Paul the apostle. It is cheering to know that God who delivered Paul from such a “great death” will continue to deliver his servants until that final moment when we shall be ultimately released from all the tribulations and persecutions of the present evil world. We must however continue to intercede for missionaries and other brethren going through sufferings and tribulations in different parts of the world (verse 11).

**MAINTAINING A GODLY CHARACTER IN LIFE AND MINISTRY DURING SUFFERING** (2 Corinthians 1:12-24; 1 Thessalonians 2:2-10,14; 1 Corinthians 4:12-13; 2 Corinthians 4:1-2; 8-11; 6:3-8; 1 Timothy 4:10-12; Hebrews 11:24; 1 Peter 2:19-23; 3:14-17)
Paul could boast of his integrity towards the sheep which God has made him overseer. His conscience bears witness to the fact that his conduct was characterized by “simplicity” and “godly sincerity”. He did not stoop down to the methods of carnal and unregenerate men, but rather demonstrated a holy conduct before them by the grace of God (1 Thessalonians 2:10). We learn from Paul that suffering does not excuse believers from manifesting godly character in life and ministry.

**Question 5: How should we conduct ourselves in times of suffering?**

With the confidence that they rejoiced in him as a true apostle of Jesus Christ and as one whose sincerity is above question, Paul wanted to visit them with the assurance of their trust, esteem and affection for him (verse 13-16). He intended to come first to Corinth before going to Macedonia and then back to Corinth on his return from Macedonia so that they might have a second benefit. Paul’s original plan could not work out as he thought because of some developments beyond his control (2 Corinthians 1:16,17; 2:12,13). Against this backdrop, Paul maintains that he does not plan according to fleshly nature of speaking with both sides of the mouth. He asserts his trustworthiness because there was no vacillation or changeableness in Christ that he preached. In other words, Paul could not preach about a faithful God and himself be unfaithful to his own word. God does not send fickle-minded persons to effect such a marvelous transformation in their lives.

God is true and unchanging; and so are all His promises. “**For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us**” (verse 20). Suffering believers should draw comfort from the fact that all the promises of God are unchanging and unfailing. God has also given all true believers the anointing and seal of the Holy Spirit as a mark of divine ownership and security irrespective of the suffering we are going through (2 Corinthians 2:21,22). “**Now he which stablishes us with you in**
Christ and hath anointed us is God who hath also sealed us and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

The Lord has promised divine support for all suffering believers. However, at such times of adversity, believers need to pray and ask for God’s help (Psalm 34:17,19); read and meditate on God’s word (Romans 15:4); encourage themselves in the Lord (1 Samuel 30:6); continue trusting in God and exercising patience (Hebrews 10:35-39); remember God’s past faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22-26; Psalm 77:1-12; 2 Corinthians 1:10); and look on the brighter side of life (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).
LESSON 648
THE BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY GHOST

MEMORY VERSE: “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (John 7:37).

TEXT: Acts 2:1-40

The Holy Ghost power Jesus calls all believers to experience in our memory verse is as sure and real as heaven and earth. In the New Testament, it is a requisite experience for every believer. Surprised at the weakness and fruitlessness of some ignorant Ephesian believers, Apostle Paul asked, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost” (Acts 19:2). The question, by extension, comes to the individual believer today. The baptism with the Holy Ghost is a definite Christian experience, subsequent to sanctification, whereby the believer is anointed with the power of God and energized for service. It is one of the cardinal doctrines of the word of God.

Question 1: Why is the baptism with the Holy Ghost important?

The Baptism with the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in the spiritual life and service of every believer. This third work of grace is vital and central to victorious Christian living and effective Christian service. Filled with power from on high, the feeble believer becomes dynamic, the lukewarm becomes aggressive in evangelism while the ordinary believer becomes a mighty instrument in the hand of God. Without this experience a good number of people try to serve God in the energy of the flesh. Some who started in the Spirit are now relapsing into formalism. Even believers who started out with enthusiasm, great expectations and zeal are now fagged out. They need spiritual (re) activation through the Holy Ghost baptism.
REVELATION CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT
(Acts 2:1-4,17,18,38; Romans 8:14,9; Jude 19; Ephesians 4:30-32; John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; Romans 8:2; 1:4; 1 Corinthians 12:8; 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 10:29; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Peter 4:14; 2 Corinthians 3:18)

Question 2: Who is the Holy Ghost? And what work does He do in believers?

The Holy Ghost is the third Person in the Trinity. He has a distinct personality as God. He thinks, teaches, talks, leads and can be grieved. As such, He, the Spirit of God leads and guides the sons of God the way they should go. This same Spirit that worked supernaturally in the life and ministry of Christ is also with us. He can also work in believers who receive Him. He is called (i) the Spirit of God (ii) the Spirit of Christ (iii) the Spirit of truth (iv) the Spirit of life (v) the Spirit of holiness (vi) the Spirit of faith (vii) the Spirit of power (viii) the Spirit of love (ix) the Spirit of grace (x) the Spirit of promise (xi) the Spirit of glory (xii) the Spirit of the Lord. These titles of the Holy Spirit reveal more of His impact, work and ministry in believers’ lives and service.

As indispensable as He is, sinners and backsliders do not have, and cannot receive, the Spirit of God except through repentance. And He does not continue to abide in the believer who grieves Him. Likened to a dove in gentleness, His character conflicts with sinful attitudes like bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking and malice; and He does not dwell in any heart which harbours them. He is the Spirit of truth who is opposed to error. He does not energize those who perpetrate error. “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth”. He quickens as well as dwells in the believer with the principles of life because He is the Spirit of life. He leads and inspires children of God to live a holy lifestyle. He is holy. Immorality does not originate from Him. But as believers, we do have the Spirit of faith who produces faith in our hearts to be healed, receive miracles and hold on to the promises of God.
We receive Him as the Spirit of power when we pray to receive His baptismal measure of power.

He is the Spirit of love who helps us to demonstrate Christ-like love. Those who claim they are Spirit-baptised but who devise how to hurt others lie and need God’s forgiveness. As the Spirit of grace, He does not only help us to know more about the grace of God but also gives us the grace we need as believers for every challenge that we face and in every situation. He is the same Spirit that Christ promised believers and by which they are sealed. The Spirit of God is also called the Spirit of glory. He reproduces the character of the Lord in us so we can be conformed to the image of the Lord. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian is of great value. This is because it is through Him that we have a lively and enriching relationship with God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we live as victors as our prayer life is also enriched by the Lord. The life of the believer who has the Spirit of God dwelling in him is positive, practical, purposeful and powerful.


Our text centres on Pentecost, one of the most important events in the history of the early Church and in the Book of Acts. It was that momentous event that precipitated all the acts which we read about in the Acts of the Apostles. The disciples were all prepared for the enduement with power from on high “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4).

This same power that they received was what Jesus received before the commencement of His public ministry. The anointing of the Holy Ghost He received made Him to do mighty works of healing and deliverance by the power of the Spirit. He affirmed that, “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 broken- hearted, 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” (Luke 4:18,19). “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). It is an idle dream for the believer in this dispensation to do similar works without experiencing baptism with the Holy Ghost. That was why the Lord told His disciples: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you”. The word translated “power” in the original is “dunamis”. It is from this word we got the English word for powerful engine – Dynamo. The statement means that you will receive the dynamite of God that will make you an effective and powerful witness of the Lord’s saving grace. When they were baptized and endued with power on the day of Pentecost, the disciples knew that it was in fulfilment of the promise of the Lord. The initial evidence was speaking in a previously unlearned tongue. Wherever the Holy Ghost is, He reveals Himself through supernatural utterances and manifestations. His utterances are not taught in the schools of men. He is God. To speak in tongues without any visible manifestation of His power in life and ministry is questionable as the experience is for fruitful service in God’s vineyard (Acts 1:8).

**Question 3: What difference did the Holy Ghost baptism make in the life of the early disciples?**

The point is that baptism with the Holy Ghost comes with accompanying supernatural manifestation of power. For instance, Peter, one of the disciples who had just received the Holy Ghost spoke with power, fresh anointing and unusual Spirit-imbued boldness. He made all the people - “Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians” - who were present in Jerusalem to worship God to
understand that it was in fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy that the Spirit of God descended on the disciples. The Baptism with the Holy Ghost made a great difference in the life of the disciples of the Lord in that they were transformed into different men and women after the Spirit came upon them at Pentecost. Before Pentecost, they were seen huddled together behind closed doors “for fear of the Jews”. But they could not even be kept behind prison doors after they received the Pentecostal power as they became as bold as lions and stood before their persecutors in the power of the Holy Ghost (John 20:19; Acts 5:17-20; 4:19, 20).

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE SPIRIT’S BAPTISM
(Acts 2:12-21; Ezekiel 37:25-27)

Question 4: Mention pitfalls to be avoided when seeking to be baptized in the Holy Ghost?

Peter’s defence was in response to the misconceptions of worshippers about the Holy Spirit’s baptism due to their spiritual ignorance. “And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.” As it were, there are unscriptural extremes and fanaticism in some circles regarding the Holy Ghost baptism necessitating a balanced teaching on the subject. Our experiences and practice must conform to the principles and teachings of Scripture. There are Pentecostals who profess to be baptised with the Holy Ghost without its accompanying power. The “tongues” of some people are too monotonous, repetitive and shallow to be classified as the powerful evidence of the Spirit’s baptism. Some even go as far as copying the pattern of other people while others “speak in tongues” in such a way that is completely unintelligible. Although those who are baptized in the Holy Spirit are supposed to speak in an unknown tongue, this does not mean that every “speaking in tongues” is genuine, powerful and refreshing. Many people profess to be baptized in the Holy Ghost but are as cold as ice in their spiritual lives perhaps because they do not continue in and build up themselves in the Holy Ghost. Others only
have testimonies of once-in-a-life-time experience when their hearts were warmed by the Holy Ghost. They have not discovered the marvels of the refreshing power of the Spirit of God. Baptized believers should strive to dig deeper and enjoy the inexhaustible treasures of the Spirit baptism.

**Question 5: Explain the difference between Holy Spirit baptism, salvation and sanctification.**

It must be stated that baptism with the Holy Spirit is not the same as salvation or sanctification experience. There are those who deceive themselves by claiming that baptism with the Spirit happen automatically at the instant one receives salvation experience. It is also wrong for anyone to feel that because he has not received the baptism in the Holy Spirit that he has not been saved. The new birth experience is different and distinct from baptism with the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that their names were written in heaven which means that they were saved. Yet, He told them to tarry in Jerusalem so that they could receive the Holy Ghost.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is different from sanctification. Sanctification removes the Adamic nature. It brings about purity of heart, intention and purpose whereas the Holy Spirit baptism brings power from on high for service. And truly we see that this mark of unity was manifested in the lives of the apostles after they were sanctified. In Acts 2:1: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place”. One accord means unity of mind, judgment, intention, consideration for sacred things and for the service of the Lord.

**PRE-REQUISITES FOR THE SPIRIT’S BAPTISM**

**Question 6: What important Christian experiences must you possess before seeking Holy Ghost Baptism?**
The Spirit baptism is a gift of God’s grace for His children. To receive this experience then, the sinner and backslider must repent of their sins and be saved. It is also indispensable to seek the experience of sanctification as the Holy Spirit does not descend into an ‘unholy’ life and heart. God has promised to grant these gracious experiences of salvation and sanctification/circumcision of heart to everyone who wholeheartedly seeks (Ezekiel 36:24-26). When you are sanctified, you will have the unity of the Spirit with believers. There will be no envy or jealousy; there will be nothing within you that defiles. Your heart will be pure and your life will conform to what the Bible teaches. The believer must of necessity live a practical life of obedience to His words and be passionate to win souls with a pure motive of bringing glory to God.

Finally, you must also thirst for this experience, for Jesus says: “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (John 7:37). Are you thirsty? Do you want the Lord to fill you? Then, call upon the Lord and you will receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Have faith in God. Jesus said: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Luke 11:13; Matthew 7:8).
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 (1 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-emphasised. 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 everyday. 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 TIME OF QUIET TIME (Exodus 16:21; Psalm 55:17; 88:13; Mark 1:35; Matthew 6:6).

Question 2: Why is the morning time best for personal/family devotion?

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 characterised 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 on prayer and study of God’s Word.


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 centred on the Saviour (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:

*Break thou the bread of life Dear Lord to me,*  
*As Thou didst break the loaves Beside the sea*  
*Beyond the sacred page I need Thee Lord;*  
*My spirit pants for Thee, O Living Word.*

**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 memorise 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 moulded 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 everyday.

FAMILY DEVOTION (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 11:18-21)

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). Rhoda, Timothy and the daughters of Philip also had good parental tutelage.

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

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 650
PRAYER AND FASTING

MEMORY VERSE: “Howbeit this kind goeth not but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21).


Bible has much to say on prayer and fasting. The subject of prayer and fasting is very vital today for successful Christian living and service. As no individual can continue living without breathing, so no Christian can remain spiritually alive without praying or without making use of the benefits of fasting.

Fasting accomplishes a good number of things in the life of the believer. These include chastening and humbling of the soul before God (Psalms 35:13; 69:10), crucifying the appetite to give time to seek the Lord (2 Samuel 12:16-23), focusing one’s attention on God to the exclusion of all else (1 Corinthians 7:5). Moreover, it aids in temptation (Matthew 4:1-11), helps in exercising power over demons (Matthew 17:14-21) and makes prayer powerful and effective.

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER AND FASTING (Psalm 42:1,2; Exodus 22:23; Matthew 7:7-11; Psalm 27:8; Isaiah 55:6,7; Matthew 6:16; 17:21)

Question 1: Why is it necessary to pray and how often should we pray?

From Bible references, prayer means communing with God. It is the soul’s desire for God (Psalm 42:1,2), a cry or supplication (Exodus 22:23), an appeal from a child to the Father (Matthew 6:6), an instinct that must have utterance (Luke 18:7,13), beseeching (or calling on) the Lord (Exodus 32:11; Acts 7:59), lifting up (or pouring out) the heart (Psalm 62:8) and seeking the face of the Lord (Psalm 27:8). Though prayer should be the most natural thing for mortal men, the flesh is often most unwilling to pray. Hence, God has found it necessary to give express instructions concerning praying in the Scripture. There are various commands
to pray in both the Old and New Testaments. All men are commanded to seek the Lord and the wicked is enjoined to forsake his ways in prayer of repentance (Isaiah 55:6,7). As believers, we are enjoined to ask, seek and knock (1 Chronicles 16:11; Matthew 7:7-11). We are commanded to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

**BIBLICAL PATTERN OF PRAYER AND FASTING**
(1 Timothy 2:8; Psalms 5:3, 88:1; Luke 6:12; Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10; Exodus 34:28; Luke 4:2; 2:36,37; Acts 13:2)

The Scripture makes it clear that we can pray everywhere and every time (1 Timothy 2:8). We have examples and pointers to the appropriateness of praying daily – morning (Psalm 5:3), night and day (Psalm 88:1; Luke 6:12;), thrice daily (Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10), without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). God expects every believer to be constant in prayer as this is the magnet that will attract His power upon our lives when exercised in faith and righteousness. Prayer becomes more effective when combined with fasting.

**Question 2: Mention four people who observed prayers and fasting in the Bible.**

Various categories of people – kings, prophets, saints, sinners, men, women and children fasted (with results) in the Old Testament. Examples of people who observed fasting in the Bible include Moses (Exodus 34:28), Ahab (1 Kings 21:27), Ezra (Ezra 10:6), Daniel (Daniel 10:3), Christ (Luke 4:2), Paul (Acts 9:9), the Antioch church leaders (Acts 13:2), Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:23). Those who observed it according to God’s pattern had answers from God. Because they observed prayer and fasting according to the divine pattern, the exercise strengthened their individual lives and ministries, changed the course of events, brought God’s mercy, granted them favour before God and men. When we also observe it in line with God’s command, we shall get result, even greater result.
SCRIPTURAL GUIDE TO PREVAILING PRAYER
(Jeremiah 29:11-14; 33:3; 2 Chronicles 7:14; John 14:13,14; Psalm 91:14,15)

Question 3: Mention three conditions for and three hindrances to answered prayers.

Various passages of the Bible radiate with God’s promises to answer prayer (Psalm 91:15; Luke 11:9; John 14:13,14). But it is also clear that the only form of prayer that God answers must be offered to the Father (Matthew 6:6; John 16:23; Ephesians 3:14), through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 16:23,24; Matthew 18:20). We are enjoined to pray continually, in faith (Mark 11:24), wholeheartedly (Jeremiah 29:13), with forgiving spirit (Mark 11:25), with perseverance (Luke 18:1), in righteousness and obedience (1 Timothy 2:8; 1 John 3:22). Examples of people who received answers to their prayers in the Bible include Moses (Exodus 15:24,25), Solomon (1 Kings 3:11-13), Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 18:31), Zacharias (Luke 1:13), the early church (Acts 4:31), etc.

Question 4: Mention four possible postures for prayer.

There are no hard and fast rules as to the proper posture to assume before we can pray to our Father in heaven. The Bible reveals various positions including bowing down, bowing the knees or the head (Psalm 95:6; Romans 14:11; Exodus 4:31), falling on one’s face, kneeling (1 Kings 8:54), standing, sitting, lying, looking up or lifting up or spreading out the hands (1 Timothy 2:8; Exodus 9:29). Other forms include weeping, talking, agonising and groaning. It is expected that one would close one’s eyes while praying to avoid distraction. Closing one’s eyes in prayer enables the believer to get rid of all things that will prevent him from concentrating fully on the Lord.

However, praying without repentance and salvation from sin, without transformation of life and character, without righteousness, holiness and purity is a waste of time. Righteousness is very important
in our lives. Whatever Christian activities we are engaged in, if our heart is not right with God, our prayers will not be answered. The religious sacrificial activity of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord. Righteousness is our power in prayer. Other causes of unanswered prayers include: disobedience (Deuteronomy 1:43,45), secret sin (Psalm 66:18), neglect of mercy (Proverbs 21:13), stubbornness (Zechariah 7:13), blood guiltiness (Isaiah 1:15), doubt (James 1:6,7), and self-indulgence (James 4:3).

**BENEFITS OF SCRIPTURAL FASTING** (Isaiah 58:3-14; Matthew 6:16-18; 17:19-21; 2 Chronicles 7:14)

Fasting is a scriptural, beneficial, spiritual exercise that can accomplish great things when used in combination with prayer and faith. Basically, fasting means abstinence from food (solid or liquid). The Greek word “Nestho” translated fast, means Ne (not to) and estho (to eat). Fasting is not optional. It is imperative (Matthew 6:16). The Lord Jesus Christ taught the disciples that it is a necessary and rewarding exercise that He expected them to be involved in it (Matthew 9:15).

**Question 5: Why is fasting imperative for all believers?**

It also helps when one is worried (Daniel 6:18), under judgement (1 Kings 21:27), in need or in danger (Ezra 8:21; Esther 4:16), in trouble (Acts 27:9,33) or when ministering (Acts 13:1-3). That fasting complements believers’ prayer is revealed in the case of a demon possessed man whom the disciples could not help (Matthew 17:19-21). When they asked the Master (Christ) why they were unable to cast out the devil, He said, “this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.” Esther was a woman who believed strongly in prayer and fasting. When the life of the entire Jewish nation was in danger as a result of the evil which Haman was determined to carry out, she and her people resorted to fasting and seeking the face of God. She said unto Mordecai “Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three
days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16). Through this singular act and total dependence on God, Esther and all the Jews were saved from the plot of Haman. This is a lesson too loud for indolent and gluttonous believers who cannot set aside a day to pray and fast to develop their spiritual muscle so as to deliver the oppressed world.

Some people have certain objections to fasting but the Scripture has an answer for all such. Contrary to the objection of some Christians, fasting was not abolished with the law of Moses. It neither makes one to be like a false prophet, a Pharisee nor an unbeliever. Jesus did not condemn the hypocritical Pharisee for fasting but trusting in his self-righteousness and despising others (Luke 18:9-14). It is neither legalistic to fast regularly, nor is it wrong to join in corporate fasting.

However, we need not fast as a condition for any gift such as salvation, sanctification or Holy Ghost baptism. The only condition for these is faith (Luke 11:13). Furthermore, extremely long fasting that can tamper with our health and usefulness should be avoided (I Samuel 14:24-28). It is scriptural to fast for as long as our physical strength can carry us.

If believers and Christian workers will only practice the scriptural principles of fasting and praying, we are sure to enjoy the fulness of heaven’s blessings on a continual basis. Fasting and prayer are invaluable means of grace, victory and inestimable spiritual blessings.
LESSON 651
THE MIRACULOUS BIRTH OF SAMSON

MEMORY VERSE: “And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and beareth not; but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son” (Judges 13:3).

TEXT: Judges 13:1-25

The previous chapters of the book of Judges marked a period of recurrent backslidings, servitude and deliverances in the history of the children of Israel. After the death of Abdon, the son of Hillel, the Pirathonite, the Scripture records that “…the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years” (Judges 13:1). This period was the longest servitude of the recorded events in the book of Judges (Judges 3:8,14; 4:1-3; 6:1; 10:6-8). Each period of servitude reflects cycles of sin, judgment, repentance and deliverance. The penalty for disobedience to the commandments of the Lord had been emphasised by Moses, the servant of God after the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt (Deuteronomy 28:15-28).

Question 1: What lessons can sinners and backsliders learn from the servitude of the children of Israel?

All men on earth are created by God and the uniform testimony of the scriptures is that all have sinned and come short of His glory (Romans 3:23). Just like the children of Israel were sold into bondage to the Philistines because of the transgression of God’s commandments, sinners are held captive by the devil through sin (1 John 3:8).

In the chapter under consideration, an angel of God was sent to the household of Manoah to announce the miraculous conception and birth of Samson, whose primary mission “...was to begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines” (Judges 13:5).
Today, the Lord has made provision for the salvation and deliverance of sinners and backsliders who are under the yoke of Satan if only they acknowledge their sins, repent and believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ (Romans 10:13).


Israel’s propensity for backsliding at the time of the Judges reared its ugly head again. They “did evil again in the sight of the LORD” and He delivered them into the hand of their Philistine neighbours to oppress them. It was during this forty-year servitude that the angel of the Lord appeared to the family of Manoah, of the tribe of Dan from Zorah on the western slope of the mountains of Judah to foretell the birth of the next deliverer.

“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son” (Judges 13:3).

For Manoah’s wife, “a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit” (Isaiah 54:6) on account of her barrenness, this was cause for excitement and joy. And, for the oppressed people of Israel, the prophecy of a coming deliverer provided hope and confirmation that the Lord had not forgotten His people. Though He was displeased with the cause of their oppression and captivity, His soul was grieved because of their affliction.

The challenge of childlessness is not strange to God’s people, either in Bible days or in contemporary times. But the Lord is mindful of such “that didst not bear” and “didst not travail with child”. At the appointed time, He visits and takes away the reproaches of such that have been afflicted. He told aged Abraham when all hope was lost, “… I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life: and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son…” (Genesis 18:10);
afterwards, Isaac was born. The Lord hearkened to the voice of Isaac when he entreated Him for his wife who was barren, and they had twin boys. The same happened to Hannah and Elizabeth, and others. Those in expectation of divine visitation today should not lose hope. “For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off” (Proverbs 23:18).

It is of note that children delivered after a period of waiting on the Lord become notable people. The Lord always gives special gifts to those who wait on Him. Consider Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, Samson and John the Baptist. They excelled, did exploits for the Lord and fulfilled the purposes for which they were born. Believers who are confronted with the challenge of childlessness are expected to wait on the Lord and not compromise their faith until the Lord visits them with the needed miracle. In the words of Matthew Henry, a Bible commentator, “Mercies long waited for often prove signal mercies, and it is made to appear that they were worth waiting for, and by them others may be encouraged to continue their hope in God’s mercy”.

**Question 2: What lessons can expectant couples learn from the family of Manoah?**

The announcement of Samson’s birth was immediately followed with the details of his orientation, lifestyle and ministry. The woman was to abstain from all liquor and all such things that would invalidate the vow to which the child would be subjected. She was also lectured on what to avoid in the course of the pregnancy in order not to jeopardize the life and ministry of the coming deliverer. She was warned to “…drink neither wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing” (Judges 13:4). Here, the Scripture unveils the fact that maternal nutrition and lifestyle have influence on the physical and mental health of their babies. If a child would fulfill his/her God-given potential, the mother must take extra measures during pregnancy. Medical scientists have also proven that maternal consumption of alcohol leads to a high prevalence of malformation
of the bodily organs during pregnancy. Pregnant women are advised to avoid medications, drugs, and food supplements that are not prescribed by certified health professionals.

The promised child was to be a Nazarite from birth so the mother was subjected to the law of Nazarites since the unborn baby was to receive nourishment from her. The law of Nazarites was that of exemplary consecration in the land of Israel. Such consecration was required for extraordinary ministry, total surrender and commitment to the service of the Lord. Those who gave themselves up for such vow were expected to be set apart for divine service (Numbers 6:1-13).

Today, every child of God is expected to be given to divine service because they have been chosen and redeemed. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). God demands entire consecration of our spirit, soul and body. Entire consecration and holiness are required from all saints who desire to be used by the Lord for extraordinary exploits. All saved children of God are called unto holiness. This second work of grace – sanctification – has two parts. The part of the believer is to desire it, consecrate to the Lord who has shed His blood for our sanctification, and He will do it (Romans 12:1,2; 1 Thessalonians 4:3).


“Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born” (Judges 13:8).

After the visitation of the angel to Manoah’s wife, she told her husband all that transpired between them. It is instructive that Manoah prayed after the report of his wife. It was not enough to have heard
the revelation of the coming miracle; he prayed over it. He had a pure and sincere motive and the Lord answered him and the angel appeared again unto the family. We note that it is important that he confirmed the personality behind the revelation. The scripture warns us to beware of “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ… for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:13,14). It admonishes us to “…believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

Believers should subject all dreams, visions, revelations and instructions to the revealed word of God to avoid the prevalent spiritual deceptions of these last days. Second, it was in the absence of Adam that the serpent beguiled Eve and deceived her into eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:1-6). Had Eve’s husband been around, perhaps, she would have escaped the deception of the serpent (1 Timothy 2:14). Third, Manoah needed a firsthand encounter to boost his faith in the prophecy. It is important that every believer have a personal encounter with the Saviour in order to strengthen the basis of their faith. It is not enough that the wife changed denomination or religion to join the husband in his church; she must have a personal experience of salvation in order to overcome sin and get to heaven. Fourth, Manoah wanted guidance so as to know “what we shall do unto the child that shall be born”.

**Question 3: What can you learn from the attitude of Manoah about child training?**

When he appeared again, he repeated the same message as he did aforetime: how the mother should avoid strong liquor or any unclean thing. He also emphasized that the child would be a Nazarite from birth. Manoah also prepared to entertain the angel according to the admonition of the Scriptures (Genesis 18:1-8) and prevailing custom. It was a pronounced practice among Oriental people not to allow strangers
pass by without being entertained. Believers too should be in the habit of being hospitable at all times (Hebrews 13:2).

To prove however that the Messenger was divine, he commanded that the gift should be offered to the Lord. “So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on” (Judges 13:19).

PANIC DUE TO SCRIPTURAL MISUNDERSTANDING (Judges 13:22-25; 6:22,23; Numbers 17:12,13; Matthew 8:25; Luke 8:24; Matthew 10:30,31; Isaiah 43:1-5; 35:4)

Manoah expressed fear that they would surely die because it was a common and an erroneous belief among the ancient Jews that anyone who sees God or his angels must die. But the wife countered him with scriptural reasoning: “If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these” (Judges 13:23). Oh child of God! Be assured that He who gave His only begotten Son to redeem thee from eternal perdition would surely take care of thee. He will not allow the enemy to destroy thee; much less allow thee to perish as long as you abide in the love of His Son. Manoah’s wife once again displayed the attribute of a godly companion. Her manners are solid examples of submission, humility and maturity for today’s Christian women.

Gideon also expressed similar fear but was reassured by the LORD “…Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shall not die” (Judges 6:22,23). Sometimes we entertain fear where there was none. Believers in Christ need not fear so long as they abide in the Lord. He has assured us that He would always stand by us in times of danger, persecution or opposition (Isaiah 41:10-14; 43:1-3). Fear has rightly been described as False Experiences Appearing Real. However, every
sinner or backslider have cause to be afraid (Psalm 53:5; Proverbs 28:1).

**Question 4: What challenges does the life of Manoah’s wife pose to believing wives today?**

At the appointed time, God visited the family of Manoah and Samson was born. “And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him” (Judges 13:24). The Scripture was silent on the interval between the initial visitation and the birth of Samson. In the eyes of the Lord, it is immaterial so long as the promise is fulfilled. Believers need to trust in the Lord. Whatever He has promised, He is able also to perform. “...Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19).
Lesson 652
Samson’s Inordinate Affection

Memory Verse: “Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well” (Judges 14:3).

Text: Judges 14:1-20

The preceding chapter introduced the unusual story of Samson, the last of the deliverers recorded in the book of Judges. The events recorded in that chapter distinguished Samson from his predecessors whose history all commenced with their call to ministry.

The birth of Samson, like that of our Lord Jesus and John the Baptist, was announced by an angel of God. He was a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. The implication of his Nazarite status was that he must remain holy and separated unto God and touch no unclean thing, even the carcass of a dead person. He was also required neither to take a heathen as wife nor drink any strong drink all the days of his life.

Samson was raised by God for a special purpose of emancipating the children of Israel from a 40-year long oppression by the Philistines. At the commencement of his ministry, the Spirit of God descended upon him mightily to enable him accomplish his commission. Looking at his unique birth and call, one could only anticipate an exemplary life and uncommon success in ministry. But this was not so for Samson as this study shows that he had a God-ordained ministry but marred it with a character defect. Through inordinate affection he went into compromise with the heathen. In this regard, the study also considers the consequences of compromise and inordinate affection and how believers can overcome it.
SAMSON’S MISSTEPS IN MARRIAGE (Judges 14:1-4; Exodus 34:15,16; 1 King 11:1-4; Deuteronomy 7:3; 2 Corinthians 6:14-16)

Question 1: Why did God warn the children of Israel against marrying a heathen?

Disregard for godly parental counsel and infatuation made Samson to disregard God’s strict warning that none of the children of Israel should enter marriage relationship with the Canaanites. His choice of a marriage partner came at a critical time of Israel’s oppression by the Philistines, a time he would commence his ministry of delivering them from servitude.

Though there were many spinsters among the Israelites, “Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said... now therefore get her for me to wife” (Judges 14:1,2). Realising that he went to look for a wife among the enemies of God, his parents sought to guide him by asking a thought-provoking question that is still relevant for every Christian bachelor/spinster today. “Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?” This question was based on their knowledge of the divine instruction prohibiting marriage of any Israelite to the seven Canaanite nations occupying the Promised Land (Exodus 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:3,4). The outcome would be that “they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods.” Though the Philistines were not among these seven nations, the reason for this prohibition was also applicable in this regard. It could be recalled that Solomon’s harem of wives and concubines turned his heart from following after God.

There are two kingdoms to which all the peoples of the world belong: the kingdom of God and that of Satan. For anyone controlled by God and His laws to seek to enter a lifelong marriage relationship
with another who is controlled by Satan is suicidal. This was where Samson erred. The unchanging warning of the Scripture for all Christians is, “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14). But many Christians today, like Samson, go into unholy marriage because of covetousness. For others, desperation to get jobs or become rich by all means make them go into unequal yoke with unbelievers in business or even take up appointments in alcohol or tobacco manufacturing companies. Due to delay in childbirth, some Christians go to false prophets, herbalists, soothsayers and other questionable places of worship to seek solution. For filthy lucre, some so-called Christians collaborate with unbelievers to loot government treasuries. These are worldly practices that the Scripture forbids (1 John 2:15-17). Our love for God, His cause and glory will make us exercise self-control and live within the boundaries set by Scripture.

**Question 2: What lessons can believers learn from Samson’s moral weakness?**

For crossing scriptural boundary to marry from the enemy camp, Samson had an obvious moral weakness. However, he was still mindful of the divine purpose for his life, seeking opportunities to remove the yoke of oppression by the Philistines from Israel. In Samson, we find the contradiction of character and charisma, morality and ministry. It is clear that a holy calling with an unholy marriage relationship do not match.

**THE SUPER POWER OF A DELIVERER** (Judges 14:5-9,19,20; 1 Peter 5:8; Acts 1:8; 2:39)

In pursuit of fulfilling his marital obligations, Samson went on a visit to his in-laws to-be with his parents. While in transit, by the vineyards of Timnath, a young lion threatened to kill him. “And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in
his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done” (Judges 14:6). Apart from the angelic visitation that brought to light the life and ministry of Samson, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him to confirm and empower him for extraordinary exploits. If anything, the killing of the lion assured him that he could overcome the most lion-like Philistine. There’s little present-day believers can do without the baptism with the Holy Ghost. The attack from the lion shows that people who have great soul-saving ministries are always the target of the devil who tries to assault them before and during their service for God. And since the devil is compared to a roaring lion seeking who to devour, believers will do themselves a world of good to not only get saved and sanctified but also get baptized with the Pentecostal power to continually overcome him. With the slaughter of a lion with bare hands, he went with his parents for an interactive session with his in-laws.

After the first visit, Samson also brought the bride to know his family (verses 8,9). It was at this time that Samson checked the carcass of the slain lion and “behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion”. From it, he harvested honey: he ate and also shared with his parents.

At another time when Samson needed to fulfil the obligation of a riddle he put forth at his nuptials, “the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle...” The Spirit baptism which Christ promised is for “you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39; 1:8).

CONSEQUENCES OF COMPROMISE AND INORDINATE AFFECTION (Judges 14:18; Genesis 12:10-13; 34:1-5; 1 King 11:1-4; 2 Chronicles 18:1,2,31; 2 Timothy 4:10)

In the run up to the exploit of killing the Philistines, an assignment he was ordained to accomplish, Samson
went with his father for the marriage ceremony (verse 10). Disaster loomed large toward the end of the seven-day feast as the Philistines could not interpret the riddle he had put forth. They threatened death if the bride would not entice Samson to divulge the meaning to them. The enticement was anchored on the hook of love Samson professes for her. It was a combination of fair speech and tears that broke Samson’s will and attitude of non-disclosure of the sensitive information. “And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people.” The act of enticing people is old but still being used against unsuspecting targets today. So, believers must be watchful.

From the foregoing, Samson compromised his Nazarite vow by touching a lion’s carcass. He was vexed and deceived by the strange wife. His alliance with the Philistine in marriage also plunged him into the heathen practice of riddle (Judges 14:12-18). Samson also lost his legally married wife to his best man. The manner in which he lost the wife also showed that anger was a problem in his life in addition to lust and a leaking mouth. Having revealed the meaning of the riddle composed from his first Spirit-empowered exploit – “What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?” – Samson angrily departed without taking his wife. And she was given to his best man.

Unrighteous relationships always live a sour taste in the mouth. Abraham’s descent into Egypt because of famine made him tell a lie and almost lost his wife but for God’s swift intervention (Genesis 12:10-13). Dinah, the daughter of Jacob went out to see the daughters of the land and she was eventually defiled (Genesis 34:1-5). King Jehoshaphat went into an unholy alliance with backslidden King Ahab for which he nearly lost his life (2 Chronicles 18:1,2,31). Despite the acclaimed wisdom of Solomon, his inordinate lust of the flesh drew his heart after strange women (1
Kings 11:1-4). Unchecked appetite for the things of the world tilted Demas into backsliding and eventually consumed his faith (2 Timothy 4:10).

**Question 3:** Mention some Bible characters that went outside God’s will and the consequences of their action.

The consequences of teeming up with unbelievers in friendship, fellowship, business or marriage include shame, loss of investment, spiritual and physical death (Proverbs 14:12).

**CURE FOR INORDINATE AFFECTION** (Judges 14:3; Deuteronomy 30:8; Job 22:23; Jeremiah 3:12,22; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:3,7; 5:22; Genesis 39:11,12; Matthew 5:28-30; Daniel 1:8; 2 Corinthians 6:17,18; Romans 12:1,2; Colossians 3:1-5,16; Psalms 119:9,11; Galatians 5:16; Hebrews 10:25; Psalm 27:4; Proverbs 11:14; Matthew 26:41; 1 Corinthians 9:27)

**Question 4:** How can a believer overcome inordinate affection in his or her life?

Salvation and restoration are fundamental experiences to dealing with lust and other sins in life and ministry. Since lust is inbred, sanctification experience brings freedom from it. This experience of holiness must be maintained as it can be lost. Maintaining a pure heart requires discipline in refraining from all appearances of evil (pornography in pictures, film, Internet, magazine, books, etc.) and closeness to the opposite sex. Application of Joseph’s method of taking to one’s heels from defilers is indispensable for all heaven-bound saints. Believers should be decisive in separating from persons/objects of temptation (Matthew 5:28-30) and consecrate entirely to the Lord. They should set their affections on spiritual, heavenly things while trusting God for preservation and deliverance from seducers. Daily crucifixion of self and the flesh and giving priority to God and His word in everything will shield them from sin (Psalms 119:9,11). Every believer needs to live and walk in the Spirit so as not to fulfil the desires of
the flesh. Constant fellowship with other saints will provide the opportunity of admonition, correction, edification and rebuke where necessary to keep them in the fear of God. Counsel from godly parents and ministers should not be ignored. Christians should pray for grace to obey all revealed will of God and be content with what they have. They must be watchful and wise because doing exploits for the Lord is one thing and preparing to get to heaven is another. But it is possible by grace and mercy to serve God in righteousness and holiness and to enter heaven, the place He has prepared for those who love and serve Him (John 14:1-3).
LESSON 653
SAMSON’S VENGEANCE ON THE PHILISTINES

MEMORY VERSE: “And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure” (Judges 15:3).

TEXT: Judges 15:1-20

In the previous chapter, we saw Samson carry out his mission without regard to the commandments of the God of Israel on separation from the heathen nations. God had expressly commanded: “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (Deuteronomy 7:3). The law of Nazarites (to which he was dedicated from birth) was that of exemplary consecration to the God of Israel but we see Samson going into unequal yoke in marriage to a daughter of the Philistines.

Today’s text shows the return of Samson to his wife with a kid, or perhaps a fawn, as a present with the intention of making reconciliation. But much to his chagrin, his wife had been given to his friend. Disgruntled by this betrayal, he vowed to “do them a displeasure” (verse 3).

Question 1: What are the pitfalls in the life of Samson that believers should avoid?


“But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in” (Judges 15:1). Samson’s visit to his wife after a while was perhaps to reconcile with her. His effort at making peace was however futile as his father-in-law denied him access and announced that
he had given her out to his companion. This action infuriated Samson and he set the corn field of the Philistines ablaze. When they reacted by killing his wife and father-in-law, he ruthlessly slaughtered many of them. Samson’s action was taken by the Philistines as an open declaration of war. Consequently, the army of the Philistines went up and camped in Judah. The sight of the Philistines triggered fear in the hearts of the people of Judah. “Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them” (Judges 15:11). The comment of the men of Judah implied their lack of appreciation of the ministry of Samson.

**Question 2: How should believers and ministers relate to unbelievers and fellow brethren?**

Although Samson was consecrated as a Nazarite since birth, his lifestyle was contrary to the demands of a Nazarene. He was raised up to deliver the people of Israel, yet his fellow Israelites rebuked him for invoking the wrath of the Philistines. The remarks of the men of Judah are similar to that of the Hebrew who said to Moses “…who made thee a prince and a judge over us…” (Exodus 2:14). Contemporary believers should radiate the life of Christ in obedience to the Scripture.

“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). We must desist from any deed or attitude that could expose other people to danger. If we truly claim to be God’s children, we should be careful to maintain good works as our lifestyles could affect other people.

**Question 3: What are scriptural injunctions against retaliation? Quote Scripture verses to support your answers.**

Believers are not to seek revenge for ills done to them by fellow believers or unbelievers; neither are they to engage in legal battle against fellow pilgrims. Rather, they should:
(i) Yield themselves to God who declares: “...vengeance is mine; I will repay...” (Romans 12:19);

(ii) Love their enemies and bless those that curse them (Matthew 5:44);

(iii) take wrong and allow themselves to be defrauded to protect their salvation experience (1 Corinthians 6:7); and

(iv) take the steps prescribed by the Lord Jesus Christ to reconcile with such a brother or a sister (Matthew 18:15-17).

However, Samson was raised to deliver the children of Israel from their bondage to the Philistines. In this context, his actions were deemed to be contrived in achieving this goal and purpose of his birth. He was always looking for opportunities to avenge his people’s suffering.

That Samson allowed the people of Judah to bind and hand him over to the Philistines is instructive. “And they spoke unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock. And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands” (Judges 15:13,14). To save the people of Judah from the wrath of the Philistines,

Samson surrendered himself to the people of Judah to bind him. This could not have been done successfully without Samson’s consent but he yielded himself to be bound and delivered to the enemies. In the same way, our Lord Jesus Christ surrendered Himself by the will of God to be arrested, bound and crucified on behalf of mankind (John 3:16). As believers, we should be willing to render selfless service to God and humanity by sacrificing our personal comfort, time, skills, talents and wealth for the salvation of the souls of sinners and backsliders.
DEFEAT AND ROUT OF ISRAEL’S FOES (Judges 15:14-17; Exodus 14:23-28; 1 Samuel 17:45-50; 2 Chronicles 20:20-23; Romans 16:20; Acts 4:31)

“And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith” (Judges 15:14,15). The Philistines were sworn enemies of Israel. They had oppressed them for forty years before Samson was born. No wonder, the angel of God that visited Samson’s parents stated that: “...he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judges 13:5). It is not surprising therefore, that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him to help him defeat the Philistines. The empowerment of Samson is not an endorsement of his wayward lifestyle. God had in the past spoken through a donkey to fulfill His purpose (Numbers 22:28-33). Only salvation, holiness and obedience to God’s word can guarantee a believer a place in heaven, not wonderful works in the name of the Lord (Matthew 7:21-23).

God is always in the business of fighting for His people. And each time He is on the battlefield with His servants, only insignificant weapons are required, and sometimes nothing is needed. In the case of Samson, it was the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15:15) that he used to slay a thousand men and brought to fulfillment the promise: “One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you” (Joshua 23:10). When God was to defeat Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea, only the stretching of the rod of Moses was required (Exodus 14:16,26). To bring down the war veteran, Goliath of Gath, only a sling and a stone in the hand of David were enough (1 Samuel 17:50). And only a song on the lips of king Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah set Ammon,
Moab and Mount Seir against one another until they were completely routed (2 Chronicles 20:21-23).

**Question 4: How can sinners and backsliders overcome sin?**

Under the new dispensation, sin is the greatest enemy of man. And all who desire supernatural assistance in their battle against sin and other works of the devil must exercise faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Sinners and backsliders must acknowledge and confess their sins (Romans 3:23; Psalm 51:5,3), repent and forsake them (Acts 3:19), accept Christ as personal Lord and Saviour (Romans 10:9,10), and continue to follow Jesus (John 8:31,32). Children of God need not worry, but put their trust in the Lord. “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly…” (Romans 16:20) because “…it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you” (2 Thessalonians 1:6). Threats from opposing forces should not deter us from doing the will of God. Persecutions and troubles could not stop the early apostles from preaching the word of God. They were basking in their new found faith, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and working wonders in the name of Jesus when the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees apprehended and threatened them not to obey the Lord. But the Holy Ghost came, filled and gave them boldness to continue the work of the Lord in spite of their foes (Acts 4:1-3,21-24,31).

It is instructive that the Holy Spirit came upon the Old Testament saints only each time there was a divine task to accomplish (Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25;14:6,19; 15:14; 1 Samuel 10:10; 16:13; 2 Chronicles 15:1; 20:14). But under the new dispensation, there is Holy Ghost baptism whereby the sanctified believer is endued with power and is continually filled to live and serve the Lord.

The importance of the baptism of the Holy Ghost in the life of a believer cannot be overstressed. Among other things, the Holy Spirit empowers the Christian to preach the gospel (Acts 1:8); emboldens him before
the enemies of the gospel (Act 4:31); comforts him in trying times (John 14:18); teaches and reminds him of God’s words (John 14:26); guides him into all truth (John 16:13), and helps him in prayer (Romans 8:26).

To be baptized in the Holy Ghost, the believer must possess a pure heart (Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36:25), strongly thirst and desire the experience (Isaiah 44:3; Proverbs 10:24; Mark 11:24), fervently pray and trust God for it (Luke 11:9-13), and open his mouth in faith to be filled (Psalm 81:10). The initial evidence of the Holy Ghost baptism is speaking in an unknown tongue (Acts 2:1-4).

DESPERATE REQUEST OF THIRSTY SAMSON:
(Judges 15:18-20; Matthew 7:7; Philippians 4:6,19; 1 Peter 5:7; Jeremiah 33:3)

“And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?” (Judges 15:18).

Shortly after he had recorded a great victory through the help of the Spirit of God, Samson was thirsty and needed water desperately. All he did was to call upon God. He cares for His own people and will never forsake them. Like Samson, we must “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6). In his prayer, Samson attributed the victory over the Philistines to God before making request for the present need. Our prayer life shows the level of our dependence on God. Christians and ministers of the gospel must be grateful to God for all He has done and is doing for them and through them. They must be humble enough to return all the glory to Him for what they are and are able to accomplish.

Question 5: What is the place of prayer in the life of a believer?

Rather than grumble and complain, needy brethren ought to call upon the name of the Lord in prayer.
The Lord said: “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not” (Jeremiah 33:3). Prayer opens the gate of heaven, moves the hand of God and supplies every need. Individuals, families and church assemblies should pray because prayer is powerful enough to tear down the strongholds of Satan against our peace, progress and prosperity. Believers in need of basic necessities of life – food, shelter and clothing – should take advantage of the privilege that prayer offers and the God that feeds the sparrows and clothes the lilies will meet their needs (Matthew 6:26-28). Those in need of healing and health can come to Jesus, the Great physician, and He will arise to rescue them (Exodus 15:26; 1 Peter 2:24). Those who are under security threats can call upon God. The Scripture says: “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked” (Psalm 91:7,8).

In response to the prayer of Samson, “God clave an hallow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: Wherefore he called the name thereof Enhakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day” (Judges 15:19). Our Lord is the God of possibilities and He knows how to meet the needs of His trusting servants.

Samson drank the water which was exclusively meant for him. Although he was refreshed, the water that Jesus gives satisfies the soul and gives everlasting life. This water is for whosoever is willing to drink. Sinners can come to Christ, drink of this water and be saved. Backsliders can drink and be restored and believers can drink of this water and be strengthened. “Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13,14).
LESSON 654
SAMSON’S LUST AND FALL

MEMORY VERSE “And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah” (Judges 16:4).

TEXT: Judge 16:1-31

Samson had been a thorn in the flesh of the Philistines. He had been greatly used of the Spirit of God to inflict judgment on the enemies of God’s people. Using mere three hundred foxes, he had set fire to consume the standing corn of the Philistines. This, and other exploits, perhaps, triggered the Philistines into alternative strategies to capture and overcome him. They must have been convinced that no amount of physical and military combat could defeat him. The secret of his power was unknown to them. However, they soon discovered his sinful indulgence and unbridled desire for sensual pleasure. With this, they decided to set a trap for him using a harlot.

Samson seems to be beset with lust for women. His body language and utterances suggest that he could not put his fleshly desires under the control of the Spirit. Lust can be described as an inordinate desire for something, especially sexual immorality which gratifies the flesh. Its end result is always ruinous. Believers are warned in several Scripture passages to keep away from anything that leads to lust. “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22). “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:15,16). We
are enjoined to keep our “heart with all diligence” to avoid harbouring habits that would eventually ruin our faith (Proverbs 4:23). Our passions, desires, ambitions and aspirations should be kept under control by the Spirit. “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14).

**Question 1: Why did the Philistines use women as traps to catch Samson?**

**THE BANE OF SAMSON’S LIFE** (Judges 16:1-4; 14:1-3; Matthew 5:28; Proverbs 6:25-29; Galatians 5:19-21; Job 32:9; James 4:4)

“Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there a harlot, and went in into her. And it came to pass afterward that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah (Judges 16:1,4).

The spectacular events surrounding the birth of Samson would have been sufficient to propel him into an unbroken relationship with God. His divine appointment as a judge over Israel by God notwithstanding, Samson was careless in his relationship with the opposite sex. He should have known that he was a gift to the nation of Israel; he was specially sent to be a deliverer and to execute the purpose of God for His people. Samson should have known that he was not an ordinary person whose life mattered but little. As a man of special pedigree, conception, birth and prophecy, and on a special mission for God, Samson should have been cautious, careful, discreet, holy and righteous. But he threw caution to the winds and allowed the demands of his flesh to have the mastery of him. From the events of his life, women became the ruin of his life.

Simply put, Samson exhibited inordinate affection for women. Back in Judges chapter 14, it would seem that as soon as was of age, he ignored divine injunction that the children of Israel should not marry from the heathen nations (Deuteronomy 7:3). Even the objection and godly counsels of his parents were not enough to checkmate his infatuation.
It is against the will and word of God for believers in Christ to marry unbelievers. The negative implications of this action are legion. “For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly” (Deuteronomy 7:4; 1 Kings 11:2). Secondly, it results in unequal yoke in relationship and godly service. “For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). Thirdly, it is an invitation to sin and all manner of compromise. Solomon discountenanced these warnings and ruined his relationship with the Lord and also canceled an earlier promise that God made to him (1 Kings 11:2,31-35).

A man of unearned and unmerited favour before God, Samson was driven by lust until he jettisoned the commandment of God, crossing the forbidden territory. He was indulgent, permissive, relying on his strength instead of on the Lord and listening to the counsel of his parents or seeking God’s face for guidance. His forgetfulness of the conditions for his call and assignment as a judge in Israel and his affection for illicit lust ran through his life and ministry. These, no doubt, must have severed him from fellowship with God.

**Question 2: Why did Samson drift into lust?**

The lustful life of Samson has some lessons for contemporary believers. One, Samson displayed unusual strength in setting on fire the Philistines’ standing corn, but was consumed by the fire of his own lust (Judges 15:3). Two, lust brings sins and death. This means that lust is capable of flushing out the life of Christ in a believer. “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15). As lust firmly took hold of Samson, he did not realize when
God left him. Three, it is dangerous to render service to God in the atmosphere of self-indulgence. Four, Samson could single-handedly destroy a mighty lion, but was overthrown by a so-called “weaker vessel”. The implication of this for believers is that wisdom is better than strength. Samson could easily break the bonds and shackles that men put on him but fell easily to the string of lust. The world has no regard or affection to believers who patronize its seductions either secretly or in the open. “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD” (Isaiah 52:11).

Question 3: **What are the spiritual lessons believers should learn from the life of Samson?**

**BAITS TO SUBDUE AND CAPTURE SAMSON** (Judges 16:5-15; Nehemiah 13:26; Proverbs 6:26-28; James 1:15; Judges 14:3; Galatians 5:16; 1 Corinthians 6:16-18)

“And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver” (Judges 16:5).

Convinced that Samson had an unrestrained passion for women, the Philistines arranged with his new found ‘killer’ mistress to entice him to disclose the source of his strength. Their bait? “eleven hundred pieces of silver”. Delilah was Satan-sent into Samson’s life to destroy his life and ministry and he did not realize it. Instead of being sober and vigilant against the adversary, he let off his guard and sunk into her laps. As Delilah was baited with the “silver” money from every lord of the Philistines, so was Samson baited with voluptuous Delilah. While she was greedy of the gain of money, Samson was blinded by lust. She was willing to go the hog till Samson disclosed the source of his strength in hope of collecting the reward of iniquity. Whenever people permit covetousness and greed to overtake them, they lose every sense of
morality and godliness. How like Balaam! “Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core” (Jude 1:11).

Samson became careless, frivolous and silly with the way he toyed with God’s great gift of strength in his life. In his silliness, he lied a number of times to Delilah about the source of his strength. But because “the adulteress will hunt for the precious life”, she did not give up until she had achieved her goal. Today’s world is filled with such hunters for the precious soul, “having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children” (2 Peter 2:14). Our Lord calls on all His children to watch and pray lest they be taken in the snare of sin and cords of iniquity.

THE DOWNFALL OF SPIRIT-FILLED SAMSON: (Judges 16:16-21; 2 Samuel 11:2-4; 1:19,25-27; 1 Corinthians 10:12)

The knowledge of the consequences of lust should refrain all believers from lustful tendencies and guide them against wasting their lives on sensual things. Many mighty men and women of God in Bible days as well as in contemporary times had fallen from grace and ruined their ministries. How are the mighty fallen!

A number of factors sealed up the doom/fall of Samson. First, he was a lone ranger. Samson was not found in company of godly friends, peers, mentors and counselors. He seemed to have so much confidence in his own ability to overcome the enemy alone. He felt he could deal with every situation all alone because of his extraordinary power. How mistaken! Had he individuals that were close confidants and fellowship members, perhaps, they would have prevailed on him against the dangerous road he was travelling.

Second, he despised the counsel of his parents (Judges 14:3). Even when he was sharply rebuked for his illicit escapades, he shrugged them off with a
snub: “get her to me for wife”. Besides, his attitude to the counsel of his parents showed that he was self-willed which is one of the paths to destruction. Third, he submitted the control of his life to the dictates of his flesh (Galatians 5:16). Fourth, he rejected the application of spiritual principles that moderate the lifestyle of believers. “What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:16-18).

Samson drifted so much into spiritual slumber that the words of Delilah neutralized his consecration and Nazarite vow. His spiritual strength of immunity and resistance to temptation completely collapsed on the laps of a strange woman. “And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death. That he told her all his heart” (Judges 16:16,17). “And she made him sleep upon her knees, and she called for a man and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him” (Judges 16:19). Daughters of Jezebel abound within and without the church today. As such, the saints of God should beware (Revelation 2:20-22).

When we sleep, our spiritual enemies are wide awake scheming wicked devices to ensnare us. Believers are enjoined to be sober and vigilant putting on the whole armour of God so they can stand against the wiles of the devil and his agents (Ephesians 6:11). Samson’s eyes were the inlets of his sin and predicament (Judges 16:1). According to Matthew Henry, “the best way to preserve the eyes therefore is to turn them away from beholding vanity”. It was one of the things the Philistines got rid of after they captured him.

**Question 4: List some factors that led to Samson’s fall and how close believers can be to the opposite sex.**
The fatal fall of Samson is a big lesson for all believers that champion and cherish holiness. The Bible declares, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). As believers, we should take heed to the principles of the Scriptures and its teachings, not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, to abstain from all appearances of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22), not to despise the counsel of godly people (Deuteronomy 5:16), not to forsake the company of believers (Hebrews 10:25), praying without ceasing and to be vigilant and watchful. Finally, we should imbibe the Job-like decision: “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?” (Job 31:1).

**Question 5:** What can believers do to avoid falling into Samson-like temptation?
LESSON 655

SAMSON’S FINAL EXPLOIT AND DEATH

MEMORY VERSE: “And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O LORD GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes” (Judges 16:28).

TEXT: Judges 16:22-31

Samson was raised by God to deliver Israel from oppression by the Philistines. With the continual decent of the Spirit of God upon him, he was able to do exploits. From the previous chapter, we see Samson praying for provision of water and receiving instantaneous answer. Already highlighted in previous lessons on Samson was his problem with lust from which he was not cleansed or delivered until he got into problem. Besides, Samson remained unmarried for several years after the demise of his legally married wife. These, perhaps aggravated his problem making lust to mushroom and led him into unbridled sexual immorality with a harlot in Gaza. Eventually, Samson landed on the laps of Delilah where his life and ministry were terminated.

Samson’s craving for pleasure with women would have been satisfied in a godly marriage if he had heeded divine injunctions and the counsels of his parents. He would have spared himself the reproach of defeat and the pain of dismemberment which he horribly suffered in the hands of the Philistines.

The fate that befell Samson is a great lesson to pilgrims on the way to heaven and ministers or servants of God. We cannot afford to make the same mistakes that he made. We cannot open our eyes and unwittingly walk into the enemy’s traps. As seen from Samson’s misadventure, anointing and divine exploits are no substitutes for a godly marriage established on scriptural principles. Every believer
who seeks to be fulfilled in life and ministry needs to stay within the confines of Scripture in relating with the opposite sex. Aside pleasure, procreation and partnership, marriage promotes purity (Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 7:1,2; 1 Corinthians 7:7,8; 1 Timothy 5:11,12,14). Irrespective of our spiritual status as marriageable adults, including widows and widowers, God says it is not good to be alone.

SERIES OF SAMSON’S PREVIOUS EXPLOITS
(Judges 14:6,9,19; 15:5,15,18,19; 16:3; Romans 11:29; Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 10:20)

Question 1: Mention some exploits of Samson in spite of his besetting sin of lust.

Empowered by the Spirit of God, Samson did supernatural exploits. These include rending a young lion with bare hands (Judges 14:6), beehive management and honey harvest (Judges 14:9), massacre of thirty Philistines at Ashkelon (Judges 14:19), destruction of the standing corn and shocks owned by the Philistines (Judges 15:5), slaying of 1000 men of the Philistines (Judges 15:15), emergence of a miraculous oasis through prayer (Judges 15:18,19) and uprooting the city gates of Gaza and carrying same to a hilltop (Judges 16:3).

Samson’s ability to do exploits with a besetting sin of lust should not confuse present-day believers who stand on a higher dispensational ground of the full light and revelation of scriptures. It is possible to perform miracles and still miss heaven. That was why Christ admonished His seventy disciples who reported their exploits on the field of evangelism not to be carried away with the signs and wonders but to rather rejoice that their names were written in the book of life (Luke 10:17-20). Many Christian servants misplace the priority of ensuring that they retain their names in the book of life through purity of life with a ministry of miracles and deliverance. They focus on doing exploits but pay little attention to their character and conduct which qualify men for heaven. They have ignored that fact that where character fails, every other thing fails.
SAMSON, THE BLIND SPORTSMAN (Judges 16:21,23-27; Joshua 7:1-5; 1 Samuel 4:9-11; Acts 5:1-10; Romans 11:22)

Samson’s gamble and compromise caused him the irreversible loss of his two eyes and his position as a judge in Israel. It turned him into a grinding prison instead of a reigning judge. His capture brought disgrace to God as the lords of the Philistines not only rejoiced but also offered sacrifices to dagon saying, “Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand”. When the people saw blind Samson, “they praised their god: for they said, our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us” (Judges 16:24).

Besides, Samson was brought into the gigantic shrine of dagon filled to capacity with the jubilating Philistines. “And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars” (verse 25). More than the men and women who were in the house, about three thousand of their population also watched the ‘blind sportsman’ from the basement of the temple. His defeat led to a change of his divine calling and career. In him is fulfilled the Scripture, which says, “by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life” (Proverbs 6:26). His fall is a warning to all: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Question 2: From Samson’s experience, mention the consequences of besetting sin for those who fail to repent.

SAMSON’S RECOVERY, DEATH AND BURIAL (Judges 16:22-31; Luke 15:11-24; 1 John 2:1,2; Hebrews 11:32-34; 2 Chronicles 26:4,15,16,19,20; 2 Chronicles 21:18,19)
While Samson was kept in prison, “the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven”. His hair was a symbol of divine presence and the seal of God upon his life. As long as he kept his Nazarite vow, God’s presence and power was mighty in his life. But he lost everything when he fell for Delilah.

The weight of Samson’s fall which included the removal of his eyes, subjection to slave labour in prison and mockery by his enemies had a humbling and sobering effect on his life. He remembered the God of Israel whom he had let down and he prayed. As his hairs began to grow, his faith in God peaked. He embraced the love and mercy of God. He remembered that God who answered his past requests would attend to his prayer of penitence and vengeance on the Philistines.

“And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes” (Judges 16:28).

With faith in his heart that God would answered his prayer, Samson held the two pillars on which the entire house rested and pulled it down, killing the Philistines, their lords, and himself. Thus, “…the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life” (Judges 16:30).

**Question 3: What lesson does the prayer of Samson teach sinners and backsliders today?**

The answer to Samson’s supplication is instructive to backsliders and sinners: that is, God is willing to forgive those who turn from their evil and come back to His ways (Luke 15:18-24). He is ever willing to pardon those who come to Him through genuine repentance. His promise for returning prodigal sons and daughters is, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him” (Hosea 14:4).

The possibilities of prayer in the Christian faith cannot be overstated. The Scripture admonishes all saints to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians...
Through repentance and prayer, Samson found a place in the book of Hebrews’ hall of faith. Samson was categorized among saints like David and Samuel because he called upon the God of Israel (Hebrews 11:32).

“And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life” (Judges 16:30). Samson avenged his humiliation when he pulled down the theatre structure, killing those that were present. However, warfare in the New Testament is different. Believers do not pray for vengeance on human enemies that Christ died to save. Vengeance belongs to God and He dispenses justice without fear or favour at the appropriate time.

It is certain that death is the inevitable end of every human being. However, such death should not be a shameful or violent one. Believers are to note that what matters is our final resting place in heaven and not the elaborate ceremonies carried out in the world today. It is the will of God that no sinner or backslider should die in sin but repent and be saved.

We need to examine ourselves constantly and maintain a high level of sobriety, discipline, holiness and humility so as not to be cast away. We must heed Christ’s counsel to avoid lusting against the opposite sex and sever relationship from every Delilah or Amnon (Matthew 5:27-30; 2 Samuel 13:1-10,15,20,22,26-29).

Success in life and ministry requires that every believer “looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Samson is dead and gone. He accomplished the task of delivering his people from oppression by the Philistines. It is our turn to fulfil our ministry
of preaching the gospel - the great commission of setting the captives of sin free through the power of Christ. We must carry out this assignment with great zeal and passion as Christ did. This is the exploit that God expects of every believer. Samson’s story ended with a testimony: that he, with others, “through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises... out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (Hebrews 11:32-34). Believers should watch, pray and run with patience the race to heaven so as to obtain their final rewards.

**Question 4: What lessons do we learn from the Scripture’s testimony about Samson?**
LESSON 656

PAUL’S PASSION FOR GODLINESS IN THE CHURCH

MEMORY VERSE: “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you” (2 Corinthians 2:4).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 2:1-17

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul dealt with a peculiar problem of sin in the church. He was appalled that “such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 5:1) was found among them. And he was more dismayed that the leadership of the church condoned such misconduct. In his ruling, he recommended that the church should “put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Corinthians 5:13). In response to his letter, the Corinthian church disciplined the offending brother and put him out of the church. Paul’s second letter was a follow-up to his first. In this chapter, he made a strong case for the restoration of the disciplined person.

Question 1: Identify Paul’s burden and passion for the church and the ministry.

In this plea, Paul revealed much of his personal conflicts, convictions, burdens and passions for the ministry. He demonstrated his love for God and his desire that God’s will be done. His love for Christ, his wish that Christ’s name be held in high esteem, his love for the Church, his passion that her purity be preserved, his commitment to see every man’s dignity preserved, his love for the truth and his labours to ensure that the truth is preached marked him out as a model for the body of Christ. We must take a cue from the life of this apostle if we profess faith in Christ and His word.
PRINCIPLES AND PATTERN FOR DISCIPLINARY MEASURES (2 Corinthians 2:1-5; 12:21; Romans 11:22; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:15)

“But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness” (2 Corinthians 2:1). Paul’s nobility in this statement is of note. He displayed passion and concern for the brethren. On one hand, he was eager to visit the Corinthian church and share in their fellowship; on the other, he was reluctant to meet them in such a state as would cause grief. “And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed” (2 Corinthians 12:21). The apostle knew he would not be free to enjoy fellowship with the Corinthians while sin remained unrebuked, unexposed and unrepented of. He would rather abstain from fellowship than fellowship in sin.

Question 2: What guiding principles should regulate church discipline?

In dealing with the scandal in the church at Corinth, Paul demonstrated a balance between goodness and severity. He loved with firmness and rebuked with tenderness. He corrected in love and reprimanded with tears. He extolled fellowship but maintained truth and consistency. This should be the guiding principle in dealing with sin in the church. This pattern is consistent with the New Testament ministry.

Maintaining discipline in the church is a delicate responsibility of leadership. No doubt, Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians was a difficult letter to write. Though it cost him tears, the love for truth and maintenance of purity of the church made him to put in order the things that are wanting. A Christian writer captured it succinctly thus: “In any Church or religious society, there is the necessity to maintain godly and loving discipline if divine standards are to be maintained, especially in matters of soundness in the faith, morals and Christian conduct.”
However, to appropriately execute church discipline, the following steps should be taken:

(1) there should be proper investigation and ascertainment of the offence.

(2) It should be undertaken only if it can be demonstrated to be in the interest of the church and the individual.

(3) It should be implemented in the spirit of love and concern.

(4) The ultimate restoration of the offender should be paramount.

(5) It should be undertaken after much prayer.

(6) It should be based on the Scriptures. When church discipline is applied in the right manner and in the right spirit, it will likely produce positive result.

Question 3: *Enumerate the steps for successful church discipline.*

**PENITENCE AND PARDOН FOR A DISCIPLINED MEMBER** (2 Corinthians 2:6-11; John 21:15-17; Psalm 119:67; Hosea 11:8,9; 1 Timothy 1:20)

The brethren in Corinth implemented Paul’s recommendation by putting the sinning brother out of the church. This severe punishment sobered the brother and brought him back to his senses. But the church was not in a hurry to restore him to the fellowship of the brethren. This prompted Paul to write a second letter to the church. “*Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many*” (2 Corinthians 2:6). Here, Paul made a case for the restoration of the offending brother. He argued that the man had suffered sufficiently enough having repented completely. Church discipline is not meant to punish the victim but as a means to effect his restoration. Even when Paul delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan, it was to the intent “*that they may learn not to blaspheme*” (1 Timothy 1:20).
Question 4: How long should a brother or sister be kept under discipline?

Paul intimated that the brother should not be left under discipline longer than necessary. “So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow” (2 Corinthians 2:7). When a brother or sister under discipline shows sufficient remorse and repentance, the discipline should be reversed. This clearly shows that discipline is not meant to punish but to purify; it is not a tool to humiliate but to humble; it is not intended to crucify but to correct; it should not be employed to disown, discard and damn the offender but to lead him or her to genuine repentance.

The church has several obligations to a penitent brother or sister. In the first place, he should be re-admitted into the fold. During his excommunication, he was put out of the church. This exposed him to further attacks by Satan and evil spirits. After his repentance, he should be welcomed back into the church. Secondly, he should also be re-integrated into the fellowship of the brethren. This means that he should not suffer isolation. Thirdly, he should be released from censorship. His past mistakes should not be used against him. Fourthly, he should be re-assured of God’s love and the church’s forgiveness. People who fell shamefully sometimes find it difficult to forgive themselves. Paul insisted that this man should be comforted. Finally, he should be restored to his original estate and ministry. When Peter was restored, Jesus still gave him the responsibility to “feed [His] sheep” (John 21:16). A restored brother should therefore not be left redundant. He should be re-commissioned to fight the battle of the Lord.

Question 5: What precautions should be exercised in the restoration of a disciplined brother or sister?

However, there is a note of caution in the restoration of a disciplined brother or sister. While prolonged discipline should be avoided, hasty restoration
should also be shunned because it will be injurious both to the backslider and to the cause of Christ. While prolonged discipline may lead to despondency and despair, hasty restoration without sufficient remorse may lead to hardening of heart “through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). Both will give the devil an opportunity to take advantage of the church.

PURITY AND POWER OF A DYNAMIC MINISTRY
(2 Corinthians 2:12-17; 7:5-7; 8:6,7; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Timothy 2:9)

“Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia” (2 Corinthians 2:12,13). Why was Paul particularly disturbed that he did not find Titus at Troas? It was because he was eager to get the news of the effect of his first epistle to the Corinthians from him. As such, a letter was written with pain and tears; he could not wait to get a feedback from Titus who delivered the epistle. We therefore understand his joy when he came to Macedonia to receive the news from Titus that the first epistle produced the desired effect on the Corinthians. “Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more” (2 Corinthians 7:6,7). This teaches us that while we break new grounds in ministry, we should endeavour to consolidate the fruit of our labours.

Question 6: What are the effects of effective declaration of the gospel message?

Paul had a remarkably successful ministry. The number of detractors and adversaries notwithstanding, he could testify of open doors of ministry. He informed Timothy that though he was compelled to preach the
gospel even unto bonds, “but the word of God is not bound” (2 Timothy 2:9). Paul rejoiced at the ultimate triumph of the gospel. He declared that as long as the gospel is preached faithfully and consistently, it will prove to be a “savour of death unto death” or a “savour of life unto life”. There is no neutrality with the gospel. It is for the salvation of some and the damnation of others. Jesus came to give sight to the blind. But for the Pharisees who claimed they had sight, their blindness remained. “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). Paul therefore emphasized the importance of maintaining the purity of the word of God without corrupting it. A corrupted gospel has lost its double edges. It can neither convict sinners nor comfort the saints. “For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:17).
THE SUPERIORITY OF GRACE TO THE LAW

MEMORY VERSE: “For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory” (2 Corinthians 3:9).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 3:1-18

In this chapter, Paul was defending his apostleship and ministry against the accusation of false teachers from Judea whose life and teachings constituted a serious threat to the faith of the Corinthian Christians. Whenever and wherever the genuine exist, the counterfeit is bound to appear. No sooner did the gospel of God’s grace begin to spread among the Gentiles than a counterfeit gospel appeared: a mixture of law and grace. It was promoted by a zealous group of people often referred to as the legalists or Judaizers. They emphasized the need to keep the Law of Moses as an additional requirement for salvation. What they meant, in other words, is that faith in Christ was not sufficient to save the sinner.

The gospel of legalism tended to be popular since human nature enjoys achieving religious goals instead of trusting Christ and allowing the Holy Spirit to work. But Paul rightly recognized these legalists as religious racketeers who preyed on ignorant people. He refuted the doctrine and practices of these legalistic false teachers by showing the surpassing glory of the ministry of the gospel of the grace of God. He contrasted the ministry of the old covenant (law) with ministry of the new covenant (grace) and proved the superiority of the new over the old.

Paul here presents an inspiring example of what it means, in part, to “Fight the good fight of faith” and to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto to the saints” (1 Timothy 6:12; Jude 3). No minister of the gospel can be said to be truly loyal to his Lord who has sympathy for, or makes allowance (directly or indirectly) for false teachers and their damnable doctrines. Addressing the angel
of the church in Pergamos the Lord said: “But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate” (Revelation 2:14,15).

GRACIOUS TRANSFORMING POWER IN THE NEW COVENANT (2 Corinthians 3:1-3; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 11:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-7; John 7:37-39; 16:7-15)

In this epistle, the Apostle clearly distinguished himself from those “which corrupt the word of God”. He reminded everyone in Corinth church that, of all people, he should not need a letter of commendation to convince them of his integrity as an apostle or to accredit his ministry. The testimony of his transformed and exemplary life among the Corinthian Christians was enough commendation (2 Corinthians 3:3).

Question 1: What are the benefits of giving letters of recommendation to believers who relocate to other locations?

Letters of commendation are indeed very beneficial. When saints travel or relocate to another place, it is important for those in the churches they visit to know something about their faith and character. This is very much important nowadays because many fake brethren have entered the church. The practice is also helpful to protect the flock from “wolves”. Also, the church leadership will be able to prayerfully assign them into appropriate ministries to serve. But Paul did not need such a letter for the church in Corinth. He was not only known to the Corinthians, he was also their spiritual father through whom many have come to the faith. The legalistic false teachers who came in to deceive boasted that they carried letters of commendation from some important people in Judea and that Paul had no such credentials. Unfortunately, many of the Corinthian believers followed the boastful
false teachers and broke the heart of the man who had rescued them from legalism.

Ultimately, it is not a letter which distinguishes a true apostle from a false one; rather, it is a kind of divine certification and exemplary Christian living. No wonder Paul challenged the Thessalonian Christians: “Ye are witnesses and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:10). He reminded the Corinthians of his accreditation and the kind of credentials which set the true preacher of the gospel apart from the false. And in so doing, he also contrasted the “letter” and the “spirit”, the old covenant and the new covenant, respectively.

Paul wrote these first three verses assuming his readers recognized that his imagery is biblical, based upon the promise of the new covenant in the Old Testament, its fulfillment in Christ, and its preaching by the apostles. Playing on the imagery of “letter”, he went on to say that these Corinthians were, themselves, a letter. They were the fruit of Paul’s service and of the Holy Spirit’s work in their hearts, turning their stony hearts of unbelief into hearts of flesh. Paul wrote the same of the Thessalonians saints (1 Thessalonians 1:4-7).

**Question 2: Why was the letter of recommendation not necessary for Paul to Corinth?**


Grace is the plan of God from eternity past, and truth is the doctrine that expresses it in time. This plan of grace is perfect because God is perfect. A perfect plan can only come from a perfect God. Therefore, the plan of God excludes man’s merit, ability and talent. The law came through Moses, grace came by Jesus Christ (John 7:37-39). The law is synonymous with Moses; grace is synonymous with Christ. Our relation to Christ is by faith in His atoning blood in
the new covenant. Every unsaved man is under the law in that he is seeking to establish righteousness of his own rather than to accept God’s righteousness through Christ. To attempt to earn righteousness by keeping of the Old Testament Law or any other set of standards is to reject the principle of grace and salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though the Mosaic Law was good, the main problem was that it was weak through the flesh. It told men what God required from them but could not empower them to obey it. But through the gospel of grace, the human nature of sin can be crushed and the heart sanctified to obey God. For the non-Christians, the only power they possess is the power of their sinful nature and they are thus helpless and hopeless, lacking the required strength to keep the law.

**Question 3: Why is inward cleansing important to the Christian life?**

Like Paul, we can be confident as we obey our Lord’s command to proclaim the gospel to lost sinners. Our confidence is not in ourselves, but in God, through Jesus Christ. This confidence in God strikes a death blow to all boasting in one’s ability. Human potential, no matter how great, is not enough. The preaching of the gospel with power and the salvation of lost souls are humanly impossible tasks. Our adequacy is from God. He “hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit”.

The Judaizers were persistently emphasizing the keeping of the law as an additional requirement for salvation. They taught that anybody could obey the law and become spiritual. A legalistic ministry has a way of inflating the egos of people. But when we emphasize the grace of God, we make it clear to people that they cannot save themselves. The old covenant does not give life; it brings about condemnation and death. The Spirit of God, working in the dispensation of the new covenant, brings life.

The old covenant (the Mosaic Covenant) was given on Mount Sinai with awesome evidences of God’s glory,
such as thunder and lightning and trumpet-like blasts. No one was to get too close to that mountain, or they would die (Exodus 19:16-26). The people were so terrified that they pleaded with Moses to intercede with God so He would not come to speak directly with them lest they perished (Exodus 20:18-21). Great glory was associated with the old covenant, even the Shekinah glory (Exodus 16:7,10; 24:16,17; 28:2,40; 29:43; 40:34), but the glory of the new covenant is far greater. Our Lord’s incarnation revealed His glory (John 1:14). Men saw God’s glory at our Lord’s birth (Luke 2:9,14). Jesus revealed His glory to His three disciples at His transfiguration (Luke 9:31,32) and by means of His miracles (John 2:11). When He returns to this earth, it will be in all of His glory (Luke 9:26; 21:27).

**Question 4: Differentiate between the Old and the New Covenant.**

In 2 Corinthians 3:9,10, Paul showed that, logically, the glory of the new covenant must be greater than the glory of the old. The old covenant produced condemnation. The Law of Moses set a standard of righteousness which no one could meet, and thus it condemned men as sinners. The new covenant is the provision of God’s righteousness for unworthy sinners, through Jesus Christ. If the old covenant had glory, how much more glory the new covenant has!

**CHRIST, THE GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT** (2 Corinthians 3:11-18; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Colossians 1: 27)

When Paul took up the story about Moses’ shining face, he filled in details not found in the Exodus account, which fit perfectly and explained why Moses veiled his face after he spoke with the people. Exodus 34 informs us that when Moses met with God, his face glowed. The people were afraid to approach him, but he called them to him. His face reflected the glory of God. Every time he was with God, his face would glow brightly. Moses would then come to the people
to tell them what God had said. While he talked with the people, he veiled his face. When he went to speak with God again, he unveiled his face.

Paul’s point was this, the glory Moses experienced in conjunction with the old covenant was a fading glory; in stark contrast, the glory which Paul enjoyed in conjunction with the new covenant is unfading: “For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious” (2 Corinthians 3:11). Moses needed a veil because the glory of the old covenant, as great as it was, faded away. The messengers of the good news of the gospel need no veil at all, because the greater glory of the new covenant never fades: “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This new covenant glory is that which we see “in the face of Jesus Christ”. We recall that Moses begged God to “see his glory” (Exodus 33:18). God made it clear that Moses could see only a portion of His glory. Specifically, Moses could not see the face of God (Exodus 33:20,23). This greater glory, which we enjoy is the glory we see “in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Question 5: How would you compare the glory experienced by Moses and that which is experienced by believers today?

The Spirit of God is the One who “lifts the veil” and enables us to behold the glory of God in the face of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the instrument by which the greater glory of Christ, and thus of the new covenant, is beheld. The Old Testament spoke of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and of the ministry which the Holy Spirit would play in turning hearts of stone into hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19).

It is the glorious nature of the new covenant ministry which gives saints such hope. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of glory (1 Peter 4:14), who causes us to rejoice
in the midst of our suffering (see Acts 7:55). It is the Spirit of God in us who mediates the presence of Christ to us, and Christ in us is the “hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). This glory we experience in measure now and in a greater measure than Moses. It is also the glory we shall experience to the full in eternity. This is why we are being transformed from (present) glory to (ultimate) glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). This “hope of glory” gives us great boldness in our proclamation of the gospel. Whether men receive us and the message of the gospel, or whether they reject both the gospel and us, this must never dampen our spirit or reduce our confidence in proclaiming the gospel. We know the gospel ministry is a glorious one, now and for all eternity.
LESSON 658
THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST’S SERVANTS DURING TRIAL

MEMORY VERSE: “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God ” (2 Corinthians 4:1,2).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

In the previous chapter, Paul declared that he and his fellow labourers did not need letters of commendation to accredit their ministry. The glorious change in the lives of the Corinthian Christians through the gospel they preached was enough commendation and a testimony of the excellency of the gospel (the new covenant) over the law (the old covenant). While in the old dispensation, only Moses was privileged to speak face to face with God, now all true believers can behold Him with an open face. In view of the power of transforming grace through the gospel, the apostle and his fellow labourers are, in this lesson, constant, courageous and patient in suffering as they serve the Lord. A proper understanding of the gospel ministry, its power and excelling glory will help stabilize and strengthen the character and commitment of God’s servants in the face of trials. This, however, will not be possible without faith which gives a strong conviction for excellence in the ministry.

RELENTLESS EFFORTS OF TRANSFORMED SOUL-WINNERS (2 Corinthians 4:1-7; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12)

Paul, in vindicating his soul-winning efforts, refers to the transforming power of the gospel. The gospel he and his associates preached first transformed their own lives before they were commissioned to preach
it. Commissioned and entrusted with the gospel, they personalized it. “Therefore seeing we have this ministry”. It was a glorious ministry that brought men life, salvation and righteousness; a ministry that is able to transform lives. Such a ministry was a gift from God and the highest privilege under the sun. This, to a great extent, inspired them to constancy and perseverance in their labours.

Question 1: What should be the perception and attitude of believers to the work of God?

The way servants of God view their ministries will determine how they labour towards fulfilling it. If serving Christ is viewed as a burden rather than as a privilege and a great honour (Philippians 2:17), they will not be wholehearted in service or go the extra mile. If it is seen as a punishment from God, murmuring and complaints will set in and there will be no perseverance. Professing Christian servants who take serving God as a means of satisfying or promoting personal interest will always fall into temptation of deceitfulness and unfaithfulness (1 Timothy 6:9,10; Philippians 3:18,19). It is only when we adopt Paul’s positive attitude to ministry that we can hope to have the testimony of a fulfilled minister.

Paul clearly shows that they received the ministry on the basis of God’s mercy and grace and not on any personal merit. Writing to Timothy he said, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who had enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious: but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Timothy 1:12,13). Since it is by God’s mercy and grace we are called to be saints and appointed into the ministry, it is by that token of grace we are enabled to remain faithful and persevering in the work of God with all diligence. So, all Christian servants must acknowledge this and wholly depend on God’s mercy and grace to be successful soul-winners.

Question 2: What lessons can we learn from Paul’s call and exploits as a soul-winner?
Believers owe all they are and have in life and ministry to the mercy and grace of God. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul declared: “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). There is no room for boasting or pride. Viewing success in life and service as human merit is capable of making us think more of ourselves and less of God’s mercy and grace (Daniel 4:29-31).

Paul’s wholesome attitude to the gospel ministry had some practical consequences in his life and work. It kept him from fainting and quitting (verse 1). With the divine calling came divine enabling. He knew that God would see him through. This wholesome attitude also helped him and his associates maintain undisguised sincerity in their work. “We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (verse 2-4). They were quite different from false teachers who handle the word of God deceitfully and walk in craftiness. False teachers try to prove their doctrine by twisting the Scriptures out of context and reject the witness of their own conscience. Paul had nothing to hide, either in his personal life or in his preaching of the word. Everything was open and honest. A steadfast adherence to the truth of the gospel will commend or accredit ministers of the gospel; and sincerity or uprightness will preserve their reputation.

Besides, right attitudes kept them from promoting self. He says, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (verse 5). They did not pass their own notions and prejudices for the word and will of God; neither did they seek to advance their own secular interests. But they preached Christ Jesus, the Lord. The Judaizers of their day enjoyed preaching about themselves and glorying in their achievements (2 Corinthians 10:12-18). But Paul and his fellow labourers declared and conducted themselves as servants of the Church for Christ’s sake. Ministers of
the gospel should not be proud in spirit, lording it over God’s heritage but conduct themselves as servants of Christ. And servants of Christ do not seek to please men in their service (Galatians 1:10).

The gospel is the transforming light of God. The soul of the sinner is filled with darkness. Through the gospel, the grace of God beams light in the soul that those who were sometimes darkness are made light in the Lord (Ephesians 5:8). Paul revealed that they were just earthen vessels that God had chosen to make His glorious gospel known to mankind. God, the Author and Source of the transforming gospel, should be glorified. When a believer preaches and souls are converted, he must acknowledge that the power that transformed the lives of the people came from God who he must praise and glorify for it. Ministers of the gospel are frail creatures being used by God to transform lives.

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST’S SERVANTS DURING TRIAL (2 Corinthians 4:8-12; Job 1:1, 8-19; Daniel 6:1-9, 13-17; Genesis 37:12-36; Acts 6:5,8-15; 7:59-60; 1 Peter 2:21-23; James 1:2-4)

Paul gave account of various kinds of trials they experienced as ministers of Christ. The attitudes and conduct of these apostles in the face of great suffering are quite challenging. They were troubled on every side, afflicted in many ways and met with all sorts of trouble but they were not distressed. They refused to be upset, worry or feel miserable. They knew they had liberty and access to God. They did not give in to depression or despondency. They knew that God was able to support and deliver them. So must we put our trust in God if we wish to succeed as God’s servants and stewards.

The apostles affirmed that their suffering for Christ was continual. In that way, they were always bearing about in their body the dying of the Lord Jesus, setting before the world the great example of a suffering Christ so that the life of Jesus might be revealed in and through them. From the trial of the apostles, we learn that all believers irrespective of their level
of spirituality and ministerial calling should expect trials of faith in one form or the other. Trials of faith do not necessarily mean one has fallen out of favour with God. Job, Daniel, Stephen were men of sterling spiritual credentials and greatly beloved of God, yet they suffered trials and tribulations for their faith in God (Job 1:1,8-19; Daniel 6:1-9,13-17; Genesis 37:12-36; Acts 6:5,8-15; 7:59,60).

Jesus Christ, our Lord also “suffered for us leaving us an example that we should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). Second, God permits trials to fulfill His purpose in our lives. God’s ultimate purpose for His children is to grow more and more into the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). Our faith will be made sure and durable through trials apart from developing our spiritual muscles and godly character (Romans 5:3-5).

**Question 3: What challenge can contemporary Christian servants receive from the apostles’ attitude and conduct during trials?**

The apostles manifested strength of character. They did not faint or lose heart but maintained a steadfast spirit. Even in the worst of circumstances, they were unflinching in their commitment to Christ and the Church of God (Romans 5:4-8) while trusting God to support and deliver them. They courageously stood for and defended the truth of the gospel, maintained the divinely approved pattern of ministry in the face of false teachers who not only handled the word of God deceitfully but preached about themselves and gloried in their achievements. Even when the church did not reciprocate or respond with some measure of gratitude to Paul, he was determined to do more. He told the Corinthians: “And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved” (2 Corinthians 12:15). Through trials, believers are matured and brought to personal completeness in all aspects of Christian grace. Trials equip God’s servants to minister effectively to others when in need of comfort and encouragement (2 Corinthians 1:3,4).
The recurring phrase “but not” in 2 Corinthians 4:8,9 teaches us that in whatever condition the children of God find themselves and no matter how bad their circumstances, they cannot be crushed. We also learn that trials or suffering comes to God’s people in varying degrees and intensity depending on their maturity, ability, experience and calling. When Paul said, “so then death worketh in us but life in you” (2 Corinthians 4:12), he did not mean that other Christians did not suffer at all; rather, he meant that what the generality of the people suffered was nothing in comparison with that of the apostle’s. Believers, workers and ministers need not grudge or murmur and complain when they seem to suffer more than others. If we patiently and joyfully endure, a greater purpose will be accomplished in the end.

**Question 4: How can we explain why the trials or suffering of greater degree are permitted in some believers?**


Paul explains why they did not sink in despair and faint during great trials. Whatever the burdens and troubles of God’s faithful servants, there will always be a reason not to faint. Their faith kept them from fainting: “we having the same spirit of faith” (2 Corinthians 4:13). The apostle received inspiration from the psalmist who said: “I believed, therefore have I spoken...” (Psalm 116:10). True witness for God is based on faith in Him and this faith comes from the word of God (Romans 10:17). Nothing closes the mouth of a believer like unbelief (Luke 1:20). Faith sustains our conviction in the face of adversities. As Paul had the psalmist for an example, so he leaves us an example to emulate: “we also believe and therefore speak”. As we receive help and encouragement from the good words and examples of others, so we should be careful to be exemplary in conduct to others.

Apart from faith in God, the apostles’ hope of resurrection kept them from fainting. They knew that
Christ was raised and that His resurrection was a guarantee or assurance of theirs.

The message of the early Church was Christ’s victory over sin and death. This must be our emphasis too. Paul was looking at the future reunion of God’s people when he said, “...and shall present us with you” (2 Corinthians 4:14). Death may separate us now but the resurrection and the rapture shall reunite us in His presence (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Their assurance that their trials were not in vain kept them from fainting. They knew that God was using their trials to minister to the Church and bring glory to Himself (2 Corinthians 4:15). This should be the same reason for us to patiently and cheerfully endure suffering.

**Question 5: What can believers learn from Paul’s comparison of ‘light affliction’ and ‘weight of glory’?**

Apostle Paul presents a contrast between “light affliction” and “weight of glory”. Paul was weighing the present trial against the future glory and discovered that his trials were light afflictions which worked for him an eternal weight of glory. Ministers of the gospel must be able to weigh things aright on God’s scales. Failure in this area may account for much discouragement, backsliding and desertion in ministry.

This was where Demas missed it when he fell for the fading glories of this world (2 Timothy 4:10). The apostles did not faint in their sufferings because the invisible world was real to them. We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. The great men and women of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 achieved what they did because they saw the invisible by faith (Hebrews 11:10,15-19,27).

The unseen things are eternal while things that can be seen are temporal. By faith, we do not only discern these differences but also make unseen things our chief end and pursuit. We have the examples of the cloud of witnesses – the heroes of faith and our Lord Jesus Christ to inspire and strengthen us to persevere till the end.
LESSON 659
PAUL’S HOPE AND LABOUR
FOR ETERNAL GLORY

MEMORY VERSE: “Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him” (2 Corinthians 5:9).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 5:1-21

In the preceding chapter, Paul emphasized his unwearied diligence and zeal at preaching the gospel despite the troubles and challenges that confronted him. Though the challenges he and other gospel ministers faced gradually weakened their outward man, their inward man was being renewed daily. Paul was not writing to discourage the believers but to prepare their minds not to be deterred by any challenge that may come their way. It is to enable believers maintain a clear conscience before God and men while faithfully carrying out their ministerial duties.

In the present study, Paul shared his hope and labour for eternal glory with the Corinthian brethren. There is a link between hope, the quality of service we render to God and our ability to endure challenges. The hope of eternal reward should make us render selfless service and endure trials that may confront us as we daily bear our cross, labouring in the vineyard of the Lord.

Question 1: What is the relationship between our hope and labour for God?

BELIEVERS’ HOPE OF FUTURE GLORY (2 Corinthians 5:1-8; John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Philippians 1:21-24; Titus 2:13,14)

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1). The issue of eternal glorious body and heavenly home for believers is not a guess work or a mere human assumption. It is a statement of certainty and assurance, based on the word of our Lord Jesus Christ. He said: “In my
Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2,3).

Referred to as the dissolving of our earthly tabernacle (body), death is not the end of life. At death, this present body returns to the dust. Then, we will be clothed with a glorious body to be with the Lord, “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Philippians 3:21). While we are in this earthly tabernacle, we groan due to trials and persecutions; we are also absent from our eternal home with the Lord. To die and be absent from the body means we go to heaven to be with the Lord. This should be the earnest expectation of every Christian.

At rapture, this transformation to a more glorious body will take place. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). To be partakers of this great event, we must be genuinely saved, sanctified and daily engaged in fruitful service for our Master.

**Question 2: What will qualify an individual for the rapture?**

**BELIEVERS’ ENDEAVOUR TO PLEASE AND SERVE GOD** (2 Corinthians 5:9-13; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 9:27; 15:58; Ephesians 4:11-16; 6:10-18; Philippians 2:12-16)

“Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him” (2 Corinthians 5:9). The desire to be with the Lord should spur every heaven-bound saint to purify himself (1 John 3:3), labour to be accepted by the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:9),
and be diligent so as to be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless (2 Peter 3:14). This can be achieved through regular self-examination, watchfulness over our lives, language, ambition and actions. It will also involve resisting temptations that come our way, and enduring trials and persecutions from the devil and his agents. We are also to maintain closer fellowship with God and the brethren. Another reason we should aspire to maintain a spiritually sound life while we await the rapture is that “...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). It is instructive that the believers’ judgment has taken place on the cross of Calvary. Our appearing before the judgment seat of Christ is to receive reward for all our labour while on earth. Those whose desire is to partake in the glorious appearing of our Lord and receive their reward must live holily and be willing to labour for the Master until He comes.

**Question 3: Why should believers aspire to maintain holy lifestyle at all times?**

As believers, the knowledge of our glory at the end of our stay here on earth and the reward awaiting all saints are enough stimulants to move us into the harvest field. For “...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). Also, “knowing therefore the terror of the Lord”, seeing the miserable condition of sinners here on earth and the doom awaiting them in eternity, we must join hands with our leaders to “persuade men” to turn to the Lord. This persuasion involves using everything within our power to lead sinners to repentance. It involves preaching with passion, sharing tracts, giving out messages on CDs, DVD/VCD etc. It also involves interceding for them with a burdened heart and following up the converted ones.
Question 4: **Mention and discuss the reasons believers must go out to persuade sinners to repent.**

**BELIEVERS’ MINISTRY AS CHRIST’S AMBASSADORS** (2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Acts 1:8; 26:19; Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1; 1 Peter 2:11,12)

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Corinthians 5:14). Everything that Apostle Paul and his fellow soldiers did was to honour God. The love of Christ controlled their lives. Like them, we should no longer live to please ourselves; we should spend our lives pleasing Christ who died for us and rose from the grave. As beneficiaries of His love, it will be wrong to keep mute and allow others to perish in their sins. Evangelizing sinners is not optional or something we do when we are less busy; it is a command from the Lord. “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 always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19,20).

The prerequisite for engaging in the ministry of reconciliation remains the same. One must have been reconciled to God. Genuine salvation leads to newness of life, behaviour, ambition and lifestyle. “**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). At conversion, we are not merely turning over a new leaf; we are beginning a new life under a new Master. Therefore, having been transformed by the power of the gospel of Christ and living a life well pleasing to God, every believer owes it a duty to go out to reconcile sinners to God. Besides, sanctification experience, baptism in the Holy Spirit, prayerfulness and the knowledge of the Scripture are vital tools for effective soul-winning outreaches.
Question 5: Enumerate some prerequisites for engaging in the ministry of reconciliation.

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). An Ambassador is a minister of high rank representing his country in another country as its mouthpiece. We are representing the Kingdom of heaven here on earth and our duties include reconciling sinners to God. Besides, as ambassadors, our conduct should reflect the values of our home country. We should never engage in activities that will bring dishonour to our nation, that is, our heavenly home.

Our personal interest must never override the interest of our home country. We are to live a glorious life that will invite sinners into the kingdom of God. We must preach Christ at all times, pointing sinners to the cross and prepare the saints for the coming of the great King. “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:1,2).

Question 6: What are our duties as Christ’s ambassadors on earth?
LESSON 660

PAUL’S SUFFERINGS AND FAITHFULNESS IN MINISTRY

MEMORY VERSE: “Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses” (2 Corinthians 6:3,4).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

In the preceding chapter, Paul assures of the believer’s hope at death or rapture, reminding fellow ministers of the day of accountability before the Lord. He emphasizes that knowledge of the certainty of God’s judgment compels Christ’s ambassadors to persuade sinners to be reconciled to God. He says, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (1 Corinthians 5:20).

Understandably, no ambassador has any agenda of his own but that which he has been commissioned to carry out. It is on this note that the text opens with Paul’s declaration that they, as gospel ministers, work together with God in seeking the salvation of souls. Accomplishing this task of the great commission requires that ministers possess godly virtues and spiritual experiences as Paul enumerates in the text so they can succeed in ministry in spite of challenges and obstacles that may cross their path. The paradox of diversified experiences of Paul in ministry in our text will validate as well as clear doubts as to the strangeness of such in any ministry where they are being re-enacted. Paul states that it is for the salvation of souls and consistent living in the grace of God that informed their godly conduct, relentless labour and painful suffering. And believers who understand this truth of ministers’ labour for their spiritual welfare ought to reciprocate by their commitment to godly principles and conduct.
Partnering with GOD in Soul-saving Ministry (2 Corinthians 6:1,2; John 15:5; Matthew 28:20; Titus 2:11,12; Romans 6:1,2; 1 John 3:10; Isaiah 49:8; 1:18)

Christ revealed that without Him, the oratory and charisma of any gospel minister can do nothing. Thus, He promised: “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20) after giving the great commission to the Church. Paul expresses their partnership with God as a present reality to highlight the gravity of the plea that they should not receive the grace of God in vain. He was inspired to make this plea because the Corinthian church had been bedeviled with spiritual problems that did not show they were bearing desirable fruits of righteousness and grace which they profess.

Question 1: What is the evidence of the grace of God in any professing believer?

The Scripture affirms that, “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11,12). Paul’s concern for the brethren at Corinth is that the gospel of grace should be reflected in the lives: those who have received the grace of God should not live in disgrace. Or, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Romans 6:1,2). There is a marked difference between those who have never received or lost the grace of God which they received and those who have a current experience of it. “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (1 John 3:10). It is on this note that Paul alludes to Isaiah 49:8 to call the religious who is bereft of grace of God to salvation in Christ. Believers and Christian ministers must be careful not to arrive at a cheap conclusion that everybody in the church is born again. Irrespective of
status, where evidence of grace is lacking in anyone or group of people, the call to salvation experience is the most appropriate message to be preached. Apart from making reference to appropriate scriptures, we must endeavour to show sinners the time of salvation and readiness of God to save those who repent of their sins and exercise faith in Christ (Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 86:5; Matthew 11:28; John 6:37; 1 John 1:9).

**PURE CONDUCT AND BLAMELESSNESS IN MINISTRY** (2 Corinthians 6:3,4; Philippians 2:15; 1 Timothy 3:2,10; Titus 1:6,7; 2 Peter 3:14)

Apostle Paul reveals that while partnering with God to win souls into the Kingdom and encouraging them to continue in the grace of God, he and his fellow ministers also strived to lead exemplary graceful life so that the ministry should not be blamed. He acknowledges that it is the wrongdoing or offence of individual members and ministers of the gospel that bring blame on the ministry. Therefore, all believers and ministers of the gospel of Christ must be blameless and impeccable in character. He emphasizes in his epistles to Timothy and Titus that these are indispensable qualities and virtues that all ministers of the gospel must possess. The reasons for this are obvious. First, that in addition to our unflinching commitment to rescuing the perishing with the gospel, we must also live out the gospel practically for the world to believe our good news. Second, inconsistency in our Christian life do bring setbacks to the task of evangelism. Third, since the ministry is liable to criticism and attacks of the people of the world, the ministers of the gospel must be very careful to live above board. Christ’s counsel in this regard to all His servants in Matthew 10: 42 is “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves”.

**Question 2: From our text, why should all believers and ministers of God live a blameless life?**

It is possible to live the blameless life as some saints did in scriptures. Noah lived a blameless life in his crooked generation and Joseph lived an impeccable
life that made Pharaoh and the people of Egypt to acknowledge the supremacy of the Almighty God. So also were the three Hebrew children. For the innocence and obedience of Daniel, the heathen King Darius declared: “I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end” (Daniel 6:26). Zacharias and Elisabeth walked before God blameless (Luke 1:60). Paul also challenged the Thessalonians how he and his companion ministers behaved themselves holily, justly and unblameably among them (1 Thessalonians 2:10). Following these examples, especially those of Christ our Lord and Saviour, we too must be blameless and spotless to be successful in the ministry of reconciliation. This is imperative because a Christian life preaches louder than his profession. No one can live a blameless life without transformation by the grace of God and the accompanying salvation experience.

PERSEVERANCE AND STEADFASTNESS DURING TRIALS (2 Corinthians 6:4-10; 4:8-12; Matthew 5:11; 1 Peter 2:21; 2 Corinthians 11:23-30; 2 Timothy 2:12; 3:12)

There are challenges in ministry. To this truth, Paul agrees and shows how true ministers of the gospel must conduct themselves so as not to become a stumbling block to the gospel they preach. Though they are making genuine efforts to save the lost, he and his partners in service also took care of the character and conduct: “… In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God…” (2 Corinthians 6:4). Since all saints are called into the ministry of reconciliation, we must all live worthy of the gospel we preach.

Questions 3: Identify the trials and sufferings mentioned by Paul in our text and saints who went through them in Scripture.

Though the gospel of Christ brings peace, hope and
joy to the world through His messengers, the people of the world will not all receive it; some will resist it and persecute the preachers (Matthew 24:9). The trials that accompany preaching of the gospel require doggedness on the part of every believer and minister to overcome. Paul says, “in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God”. They proved to be true ministers of God “in” much patience, afflictions, necessities, distresses, stripes, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watchings and fastings. Note that most of these items are pluralized to show frequency of occurrence. So, if our experiences are similar to that of Paul and his fellow ministers, there is no cause for alarm. We must remain dogged and faithful so as to fulfill our ministry the way Paul did.

In verse 6, Paul changes the preposition to “by” to reveal the spiritual qualities that make a suffering minister excel and triumphant in ministry. We secure divine approval and triumph in ministry “by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left” (2 Corinthians 6:6,7). Sufferings and afflictions are part of the gospel (Matthew 5:11; 1 Peter 2:21).

**Question 4: Why must believers patiently endure sufferings for the sake of the gospel?**

The Bible is replete with examples of many servants of God that faithfully suffered for the sake of the gospel. Apart from Apostle Paul who recounted his fiery trials in Scripture (2 Corinthians 11:23), Moses preferred to “…suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25). Prophet Micaiah was imprisoned and afflicted for telling King Ahab the truth (1 Kings 22:27). Daniel was thrown into the den of lions while Nebuchadnezzar threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the burning fiery furnace for not worshipping his image. The Apostles were beaten and commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus again, but were happy to suffer shame for His name and
kept on preaching daily (Acts 5:40-42). Stephen was stoned to death for speaking the truth.

Suffering for Christ for the gospel’s sake may come in forms of hunger on mission field, persecution of the gospel ministers by the enemies of the gospel through killings, destruction of places of worship, denial of land to build churches, etc. A true minister of God will not be moved by these transient sufferings and afflictions. Apostle Paul considered the supreme love and incomparable price paid for him by Christ as sufficient reason to endure suffering for the gospel. He says, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Since the present afflictions cannot be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us, we must remain patient and steadfast. The Bible says, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us” (2 Timothy 2:12). The present sufferings must be patiently and faithfully endured so that we will not lose our rewards.

Verses 8-10 present contradictory statements that are real in every soul-saving ministry. These contradictions exists in the world; Satan and his agents also work hard to discredit such ministries and bring them down.

Apostle Paul says they approve themselves as ministers of God, “By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things”.

EXHORTATION TO GROWTH IN CHRIST-LIKE LOVE AND FELLOWSHIP (2 Corinthians 6:11-13; Exodus 17: 11,12; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; Philippians 4:18)

Having made clear the demands of God from his ministers to the Corinthian believers, Apostle Paul challenges them into love and affection for the faithful, caring and loving ministers of God. He reminded the
believers at Corinth that “...our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged” (2 Corinthians 6:11), meaning that they have spoken to the Corinthians freely and related to them with an open heart. Such fellowship is required in the church today for genuine revival to be experienced. The Spirit of God admonishes the believers to “lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking” (1 Peter 2:1) for spiritual growth.

Question 5: In what areas can church members demonstrate affection to God’s ministers?

Paul expected a similar response in fellowship from the brethren: “Now for a recompense in the same (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged” (2 Corinthians 6:13). Just as the ministers of God laboured on the flock, they must reciprocate this with practical affections for them. This kind of mutual and reciprocal love for faithful ministers is demonstrated by the Macedonian Christians. “Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints” (2 Corinthians 8:4).

Also, the Philippian saints communicated with Paul as concerning giving and receiving for which he pronounced an apostolic prayer upon them. “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). For the church of God to be triumphant against the gates of hell, the role of obedience and submission to leadership cannot be over-emphasized (Hebrews 13:17).
LESSON 661
HOLINESS WITH HOSPITALITY

MEMORY VERSE: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22).

TEXT: Luke 10:30-37

The Scripture teaches that without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). God is holy. He demands practical holiness from every believer in Christ. But He detests holiness without love and compassion. There is a lack of charity on the part of believers today.

“And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead” (Luke 10:30). The parable was a product, an answer to a lawyer’s question on works necessary for heavenly citizenship. Every sincere seeker must desire to know the nature of holiness that will get him to heaven. From Jesus’ answer, the necessity of our study is underscored. He talks about the necessity of absolute love (which of course includes holiness) for God and service to our neighbours. But the lawyer, feigning ignorance of the true meaning and interpretation of the law and “willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29). In Christ’s answer, we find the truth of holiness with hospitality set forth.

Question 1: What is the nature of true holiness?

As the church awaits the rapture of the saints, a re-examination of the elements of true holiness appears indisputable and expedient. In this parable, generally called “the parable of the good Samaritan”, the Lord sets forth two kinds of holiness - one outward and the other deeply rooted in the heart. One practical, imbued with grace and love, the other is theoretical,
only resident in the head. One is professed and the other is warm, hearty service. The one spurious, the other genuine. Spurious because it is dry and holds no feelings for anyone, especially those who are suffering. It is wont to “pass by” on the other side of duty and service. It is unfortunate that the Levite and the priest, two officially ‘holy’ ministers of the Jewish temple, fell into this category.

TRUE CHRISTIANITY AND THE ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE (Luke 10:37; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 6:9,10; 1 John 3:16)

The Lord calls the victim of the bandits, “a certain man.” The fact that the victim of this gruesome act is a human being qualifies him to be “thy neighbour.”

Question 2: Who is your neighbour?

Many there are who have been wounded by sin and left half alive. There are others who are wrestling with the troubled sea of life within and outside our fellowships, calling for a helping hand.

If we would show practical Christianity we must help them. The Lord enjoins us to do good to all men. But it calls us with a stronger appeal to be kind and good towards those who are in the household of faith. Necessity is laid upon the brethren to care for one another, pray for one another, visit one another and love one another. Your Christian brother is your immediate neighbour regardless of racial, social or tribal differences. We should do for them what we would do for Christ if He were physically present with us.


“And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side” (Luke 10:31,32). It is unfortunate that “religious men”, those in the service of the Great King, and by obligation expected to manifest His
gracious caring attributes, should be charged with indifference. It is a contradiction in terms! Ministers of the gospel – house fellowship leaders, zonal leaders, women representatives, coordinators and pastors – are by virtue of their office and calling obliged to serve others. They are not to close their eyes to the physical and spiritual plight of those they are charged to lead and feed.

The priest’s office is a sacred one. They were chosen and set apart as holy vessels unto God (Exodus 28:1-3). By virtue of their calling, they are to stand between God and the people. In the Old Testament economy, the priest is to offer up prayers, thanksgiving and sacrifices for people. He becomes the people’s representative in “things pertaining to God” (Hebrew 5:1). By the same token one would have expected the priest in this parable to discover in the ugly incident, a call to duty, a privilege to help the helpless. Unfortunately he did not. Coming down from the services at the temple, he forgot the acts of mercy, ignored the half-dead man’s wants, and passed by on the other side. He steeled his heart against the charitable impulses, which the occasion should have evoked. He must have thought that as a priest, a touch on the half-dead would defile him. He forgot that the law was made for man and not man for the law.

**Question 3: Why couldn’t the Levite and the priest stop by to help the victim of the robbers?**

“But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:13). Many times believers allow protocols and the call of duty to hinder them from rendering services to people in need. We are apt to give a tract more than a cup of tea, a message than a morsel of bread. Jesus was disappointed by the action of this priest. And the Levite was no better!

The Levite toed the path of the priest though he came near to behold the victim of the bandits. One would have thought at first sight that for him to have made
effort to go near, he was persuaded to help. But no sooner had he come near “and looked on him” than he went his way. What could have been his reason? After all, he came near, saw him, and beheld the damage done to his life!

The priests and Levites, by their calling and service, were to preserve the laws of Jehovah in all its integrity and purity. They were to see that its requirements were duly complied with, dispense justice in accordance with its injunctions and pass on the law to posterity (Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 17:18; 31:1-13). It is shocking therefore to see these ministers in the Levitical priesthood fall short of the requirement of the law.

Whatever their reasons, their actions are inexcusable. But before we slam the door of judgment against them, are Christians in the House Caring Fellowship system not guilty of the same? They feel that their sanctification will diminish if they dine with the sinner or stoop low to serve. They think they will be less Christian if they weep and commiserate with the bereaved.

The New Testament saints, like a Levite and a priest, are the called of God and are expected to exhibit Christlike love. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

God delights in mercy. He exalts service of love and justice above sacrifice (Proverbs 21:3). There are people who lay claims to sanctification and holiness but are devoid of God’s true love which finds expression in service and good works.


“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound
up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” The attitude of the Samaritan is a symbol of practical Christianity (hospitality blended with holiness). In this “Samaritan”, a tribe generally hated by the Jews because of their so-called mixed blood, is found a striking lesson for saints in every generation.

Although the nationality, religion or age of the victim is not disclosed, this Samaritan cast aside racial or religious prejudice and discrimination and stopped to help him. He did not discountenance the victim on ground of not being a member of his family or close acquaintance; he offered needed help. Underneath his action is a thick layer of compassion. He was moved by it. How he manifested a virtue seen in the Saviour! “But when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). He did not just profess to have compassion; he translated it into action as he “went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine” (Luke 10:34).

**Question 4: What lesson can we learn from the action of the “Good Samaritan”?**

How many people are waiting in our churches and neighbourhood today, wounded by adverse circumstances of life, waiting for us to pour in the oil and wine of good mercy to mollify their wounds!

The oil and wine he poured into the man’s wound were best remedies; one was to dress the wound, and the other to heal. He gave his best. How wonderful will the body of Christ be if we, with the availability of grace, minister to our brethren in their hours of need? Instead of piling up excuses on why we cannot help, we should go the extra mile to assist one another both physically and spiritually. The great cry for practical love cannot be louder than it is now.

The Lord, having convincingly driven home His message, then put this question to the enquirer: “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?” (Luke 10:36).

The lawyer, who had sought to justify himself through certain “good” works and had feigned ignorance of who a neighbour is, could not but testify to the excellent spirit exhibited by the good Samaritan. The Lord closed His message with a charge to the lawyer and by extension to the New Testament saints to “Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:37). The church of God stands to profit tremendously if we heed this commandment of the Lord in these days of hypocrisy and falsehood. In the Lord’s call to holiness and hospitality lies the secret of a growing church. A church which would make this call its watchword stands to profit tremendously, numerically and spiritually. Jesus Himself demonstrated it.

**Question 5: How can we demonstrate holiness with hospitality?**

“Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise” (John 21:13). Simon Peter and the rest of the disciples had abandoned the Great Commission He gave them. They had forgotten the magnitude and the urgency of their task and were set to pursue a different goal. One wonders whether these disciples, who had been with the Master, learning and beholding His mission to the world, thought of the consequence of their action. Grave as it might be, the loving Lord brought them back to duty through love.

The Lord’s strategy in bringing them back to their primary assignment presents a great challenge to all who would practise holiness with hospitality. Our hospitality (in contrast to compromise) can help backsliders back to the narrow way. Those who are weary in life’s battle can be strengthened to lay hold on the sword of the Spirit again. If we will not see the Lord without holiness, we will not even get near the pearly gate without hospitality.
LESSON 662
SERVING ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE

MEMORY VERSE: “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Romans 12:10).

TEXT: Romans 12:9-13; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

Paul’s discourse on the essential teaching of Christian living glides from vital Christian service and ministry within the body of Christ to daily practical Christian relationship that underscores Christian brotherhood. These teachings are put forth with an obligatory tone leaving no place for excuses or exemptions. This present body of teaching zeros in on the life of love and its full-blossomed fruits. Unfeigned love produces selfless, unpretentious and excited service one to another in the Church. Love is more important than all the spiritual gifts exercised in the church today. Great faith, acts of dedication or sacrifice, and miracle-working power produce very little without love. Love makes our actions and gifts useful. This is the hub of Christian life and relationship. If we have all things and lack in love, we have nothing. All the activities and ministry we engage in, in the Church are unprofitable if the love of God is not at its foundation. Although people have different gifts, love is available for everyone.

CHRISTIAN LOVE: THE BASIS OF SERVICE
(Romans 12:9, 10; John 13:34, 35; Philippians 1:9; Romans 13:10; Hebrews 13:1)

The Lord took extra pain to teach and show the disciples the new commandment – love. This is the only virtue that could help them to reach the uttermost parts of the earth. It is the propelling quality that could fire our zeal. The desire to serve one another is fulfilled when the heart is rich in love. We cannot give any excuse of being too busy or too occupied so much as not to be concerned about the physical and
spiritual needs of our brethren. God who looks at our disposition, thoughts and hearts. He who protects and keeps us and our motives, “and shall render to every man according to his work.”

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34, 35).

**Question 1: What is the place of love in Christian service?**

What articulates and loudly declares our relationship with the Lord is not our preaching, ushering or singing in the choir. It is our life of love that tells the world that we are disciples of Christ. The measure of our love should be the measure of the love of Jesus for us. The strange thing amongst believers is that Christian activities seem to drown the love of God in our heart. The more activities we get engaged in, the less of love we have for the brethren. True fellowship always dies where love ceases to exist. This is the reason many fellowship centers are witnessing low turn out.

But here, Paul the Apostle, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit strives to reserve the trend. He laces up Christian business and fervency with a life of pure love. The order, therefore, is that our love must not decrease and our Christian engagement must always increase. Besides, our love must be pure and unfeigned. It is disheartening that most of us have learned how to pretend to love others – how to speak kindly, avoid hurting their feelings, and appear to take an interest in them. Some are even skilled in pretending to be moved with compassion when they hear of others needs, or to become indignant when they learn of injustice. But God calls us to real and sincere love that goes far beyond pretence and politeness. Sincere love requires concentration and effort. It means helping others become better people. It demands our time, money, and personal involvement. Because of the prevalence of feigned
love among believers, Peter the apostle had this to say: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22).

**Question 2: How is love best expressed?**

Our society today confuses love and lust. Unlike lust, God’s kind of love is directed outward toward others, not inward toward ourselves. It is utterly unselfish. This kind of love goes against our natural inclinations. It is possible to practice this love only if God helps us set aside our own desires and instincts, so that we can give love while expecting nothing in return. Thus, the more we become like Christ, the more love we will show to others in the body of Christ. Our love must not be smiles covered with bitterness and hatred. Our love must be devoid of lust. It must not be one that loves the opposite sex and excludes his gender from his deeds of love. Covetousness must be stripped off our life of love. We should not love because of what we stand to gain or enjoy from the relationship.

Again, our love must be impartial – free and full; love for all without discrimination or ulterior motive. Our love must be one that is fervent, not passive or disinterested. Some say: ‘I love people but I don’t know how to show it’. But they err. Love is expressed in actions of affection, kindness, consideration and empathy.

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). Love overlooks the mistakes of others, forgives others very readily even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. When we do this, we are really following God (Ephesians 5:1). The Lord wants us to manifest love in our actions and relationships with one another. In fact, this is the very basis and foundation of our activity in the Church and ministry in the body of Christ.
Our love must not approve of sin. We must eschew or run away from any act or conduct that has the stain of sin. Gossips, backbiting, negative criticism must be abhorred. We must not be party to anything that would discourage or put down a brother or a sister. On the contrary, we should cleave to that which is good. Remember the golden rule always and live by it. “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

If you want people to love you, you should love them first. If you want people to forgive you, appreciate you and speak well of you, do the same to them. If you want your mistakes and oversights to be overlooked, do the same to others too. If you do not want false stories about you to be peddled, do not do that to others too. This is the foundation of our service.

**COMMITMENT AND ZEAL IN GOD’S SERVICE**
(Romans 12:11,12; Acts 18:25; Psalm 69:9)

“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer” (Romans 12:11,12).

**Question 3: Mention six things that should characterize our Christian service.**

Six things are noted in these two verse as characteristics of our Christian service. **First**, not slothful in business; **second**, fervent in Spirit; **third**, serving the Lord; **fourth**, rejoicing in hope; **five**, patient in tribulation; and six, continuing instant in prayer. All these must be carefully considered and cultivated if we want our service to be acceptable to the Lord.

The charge to eschew slothfulness in business applies both to our daily private pursuits and our Christian service. “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies” (2 Thessalonians 3:10,11). We should be diligent in the daily execution
of our secular work. A true believer must provide for the need of his family members. God places a very high premium on dignity of labour.

Besides, women also should not be slothful in domestic business. The home of Christian women should not be left untidy or their personal body unkempt with the excuse of a heavy load of Christian service to bear. Again, believers who are involved in the work areas of the Church are here addressed not to be slothful in business. The preacher in the Church must create time to study and read the Bible through and through before ministering to God’s people. If you will be a member of the choir in your church, you must be prepared to give the hours of long and arduous practice required to minister in songs to the people of God.

Fervency of Spirit involves some personal internal motivation and desire to carry on a given task. This is described as zeal. It strips our service of every form of lukewarmness and passivity. “For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me” (Psalm 69:9). Serving the Lord in whatever capacity – cassette/ literature distribution, hospital visitation, prison outreach, etc., must be performed with cheerfulness and zeal. “Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart”. Our service must be “as unto the Lord” (Ephesians 6:6; Colossians 4:23,24).

THE SACRIFICIAL LOVE AMONG THE BRETHREN (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:16; 1 John 3:16-18; Galatians 5:13)

“Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality” (Romans 12:13).

Question 4: How and what can we distribute to meet the needs of other believers?

Here we have the commandment of the Lord concerning our service. It is a responsibility for all – ministers, members, young and old members of the
Church. Some feel they are so penurious that they have nothing to distribute. But they miss it. In fact, the reason why we must give is because we don’t have. While we may not have something tangible or material to share, we can speak kind words to comfort the sorrowful and encourage those who are discouraged. “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father” (1 Thessalonians 1:2,3). Our love should not be partial and passive. Our profession of love should not be a mere theory. We must show mercy to the needy and give to meet the needs of other saints. “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him” (1 John 3:16,17).

Supreme love for God and love for our fellow men attracts blessings from God whose injunction we have obeyed. There will be divine supplies when we are in need. Besides, God’s favour will be upon us, there will be answers to prayers when we call upon Him and He will continue to fulfil His promises in our lives and endeavours. He will make our days like “the days of heaven upon the earth” (Deuteronomy 11:21). We must happily lay down our resources and material things before the brethren if we say we love the brotherhood. This is the New Testament commandment. It is the summary of the law and the prophets put together. We must serve one another in love.
LESSON 663
DIVINE HEALING AND HEALTH

MEMORY VERSE: “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matthew 8:17).

TEXT: Matthew 8:1-17; Exodus 15:26; 1 Peter 2:24; 3 John 2

The scriptural doctrine of divine healing and health has been viewed from different angles by believers of different ages. This has always been as a result of their perception of the ‘limit’ of God’s power, mercy and love. However, from time immemorial, believers have always been receivers while sceptics have received nothing. Similarly, if we believe today, all divine blessings including healing and health can be ours (John 11:40; 2 Peter 1:3). A survey of the length and breadth of the chequered history of God’s dealing with man, reveals that healing is God’s will. God is a good God and it is His will that His children live in good health as well as enjoy divine healing throughout their days on earth. This thought is unequivocally stated by John the beloved in his epistle: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 2). It is not the will of God that any of His children should remain in sickness, oppression or diseases.

There are one hundred and forty-five occurrences of the words heal, healed, healer, healeth, healing, healings and health in the Bible, which is an indication of the divine plan concerning our healing and health. Since Old Testament days, healing has always been an integral part of God’s covenant with His people; God has always included it as a part of His blessings upon those who are obedient to His word (Exodus 15:26; 23:25,26; Deuteronomy 7:12-15).

Question 1: How do you prove that healing and health are integral parts of God’s covenant with His people?
Healing was easy in the old covenant but it is even much easier in the New Testament. This is because God had revealed Himself as “the God that healeth”. It was so easy that Naaman almost lost the opportunity of being healed. He did not expect getting healed to be so easy. He was told by the prophet Elisha to just go to Jordan, dip himself seven times into the water and he would be healed. That was not to take that much time. As he went and dipped himself in the water “according to the saying of the man of God” he came out clean. The instruction was simple but his healing was complete. He was healed, not by river Jordan, but by the power and authority in the Word of God through His ordained servant.

Healing and obedience to the instructions of God and His ordained servants are inseparable. While venomous snakes were biting the children of Israel and many of them were dying, they were told to obey a simple instruction: look up and be healed. This same principle applies also in the New Testament. We are to look up to Jesus Christ who died on the cross (John 3:14).

**Question 2: How does the brazen serpent typify the Lord Jesus Christ?**

Hannah who, because of her barrenness, was in bitterness of soul had her situation changed for life as a result of just an eighteen-word pronouncement of Eli the man of God. “Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him” (1 Samuel 1:17). It was that simple. If you are barren, the Lord can heal and make you fruitful if you can believe the words of God and stop fretting yourself.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus healed people in cities and villages of His day. As there were no hospitals as we have them today, they lived in primitive
conditions that there were a lot of sicknesses and diseases among the people. In His characteristic style, Jesus would teach in their synagogue, preach the kingdom of God and heal those who were sick among them. This was His three-piece method: teaching, preaching and then healing. As the people came to listen to His teaching and preaching, they applied what they were taught to their lives and it generated faith in them (Romans 10:17) and they were healed.


A clear understanding of what the Bible teaches on healing and health ensures a continuous state of soundness for the believer. Healing and health belong to the children of God. A careful study of God’s words deepens the truth in the believer’s heart and helps him to apply it in his life. This, in turn, generates and increases faith in his heart (Romans 10:17). Healing is not needed in heaven, as there is no sickness there. It is for God’s children on earth and they should expect to be healed any time they are sick. Just as when children are hungry, parents always make bread available, so also, whenever a child of God is sick, God always makes healing available. If you are sick, God can heal you. Every morning, children ask bread of their parents without doubting. They believe that their parents are able to provide for them so they are not afraid. Believers are to come to God for healing with that same confidence. They should realize that healing is their bread and it is available for them.

The healing and health that unbelievers enjoy are crumbs that fall from the children’s bread. It is worthwhile to remember that after Jesus had fed the five thousand, there were still twelve baskets remaining. For every crumb of healing and health that unbelievers enjoy from God, there is abundant provision for His children to enjoy.

However, believers should also bear in mind that there are others that are sick who need healing. By praying for those who are sick, believers can share their health with them. “And these signs shall follow
them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:17,18). This healing bread should be shared with one another.

**Question 3: What are the believer’s responsibilities towards enjoying continuous divine health today?**

The believer does not rest his hope on medical science for his healing and health. He trusts God for perfect health from day to day. When he is sick, he depends on the armour of prayer and faith (1 John 5:14,15; Matthew 7:7). However, it is not sin to receive help from the practice of medicine that has nothing to do with invocation of evil powers. Besides, certain cases like child delivery, caesarean section, orthopaedic surgery, etc., require the skill of trained medical personnel in hospitals, maternity and clinics. We should afford ourselves of all God-provided opportunities for health and longevity. God has made every provision for our healing and health. And we should live daily in the realisation of His provisions.

With all the provisions that God has made for the believer to enjoy healing and health, it is still necessary for him to adequately look after himself. This is the part he has to play if he is to continue to enjoy good health. He should, as a matter of duty, ensure that his feeding habit is proper and his diet balanced. He should also maintain good personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness, appropriate physical exercise, and total avoidance of harmful habits that are capable of damaging his health. Right intakes of fruits, fibres and other nutritious foods promote good health while wrong feeding such as intakes of junk food only clog the system without commensurate nutritional values. The good thing about our heavenly Father is that He has made these things. Fruits and vegetables are not only available all year round but are also affordable to as many as are willing to utilize them, so that there is no room for excuses. If the
money wasted on junk food is thoughtfully expended on what will build up body immunity against illness, we will be saving our family and the church the agony of running from one hospital to another. Let us be wise.

Sin and sickness are close pals, so are holiness and health. Without doubt, God has an unfailing healing and health plan for mankind but there are millions of people who, by virtue of the fact that they have not come into covenant relationship with God, do not know the blessedness of enjoying these provisions. A close look at biblical history shows that people who obey God are made and kept healthy by Him. The contrary goes for children of disobedience. Theirs is a life of turmoil, pestilence and disease. Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Jesus Christ, Peter and John are names that do not go hand in hand with sickness. Biblical records of sickness often go with such names as Abimelech, Manasseh, Naaman and Elymas, the sorcerer, to mention a few. Hard-hearted Egyptians had a good toll of plagues and pestilence, while the children of Israel had divine prosperity and health according to God’s promise.

**Question 4: What is the connection between Christ’s sacrifice and the believer’s healing and health?**

Sickness came as a result of the curse of the law for disobedience to God’s command. On the contrary, God entrenched healing as an integral part of what Jesus procured for us on the cross of Calvary (1 Peter 2:24). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13a). Therefore, if you are lost in sin, He is waiting to save and to change you. All you need to do is to take the initiative and come to the Lord and be saved. He forgives sin and saves sinners. He changes sinners and gives them power to live as sons of God. He restores the invalid to health and strength. He cures the incurable and delivers the oppressed.
GOD’S HEALING POWER AVAILABLE BY FAITH:
(Exodus 15:26; Matthew 7:7; Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6).

There is no doubt whatsoever as to the power and willingness of God to heal all who are sick and turn to Him for help. The cases of Abimelech, Miriam, Naaman and many others are testimonies of God’s willingness to “save the sick” when He is called upon with simple faith. It was a common phenomenon with Israel of old that diseases and evil characterised rebellious times (Deuteronomy 28:15-29,58-61) but after repentance, obedient times became healthy times! (Exodus 23:25,26).

Question 5: What is the place of God’s Word, power and will in our healing today?

It is clear from God’s Word that all can be healed and kept healthy today. Diligent meditation on God’s Word will assure our heart of the possibility of sound health “all the days of our life”. God’s Word is a word of power and has an innate potency for the miraculous (Romans 1:16; Psalm 107:20). Besides, the power of God is unlimited. Generally, the Bible highlights two types of power – the dynamic power and the legal power (in Greek: “dunamis” and “exousisa” respectively). The first connotes ability, energy and strength, the second, authority, right and attorney. The Father gave both to the Son. The Son has, in turn, given them to the believers (Luke 9:1; 10:19-21). “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8). The same power that God had since eternity is still at work today for the believer. But only those who would dare believe receive. God’s will is clear on healing and health, and it is His will that you enjoy them. He has made ample provision for this (3 John 2; Matthew 6:10; Isaiah 33:24; Deuteronomy 7:15).

Question 6: Which of God’s redemptive names signify that He is our Great Physician?

God’s name, love and mercy all make us to know also, that we need not remain under the curse of the law today. God’s revealed redemptive names are seven
in number: and they are: Jehovah Shamma (Ezekiel 48:35), Jehovah Shalom (Judges 6:23,24), Jehovah Ra-ah (Psalm 23:1), Jehovah Jireh (Genesis 22:14), Jehovah Nissi (Exodus 17:15), Jehovah Tsidkenu (Jeremiah 23:6), Jehovah Rapha (Exodus 15:26) signifying presence, peace, shepherding, provision, banner, righteousness and healer respectively. Nothing sets forth the validity of God’s willingness and ability to heal His people and keep them healthy more aptly than the last on the list of His redemptive names, namely, Jehovah Rapha or Jehovah Ropheka: “I am the LORD that healeth thee” or “I am the LORD thy healer” (Exodus 15:26; Isaiah 53:4,5; Matthew 8:16,17; 1 Peter 2:24). As if that was not enough, He “anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:38). Of course, this was to declare that healing and health are His will and to show His readiness to do His people good. Love gives to the needy and relieves the suffering while mercy withholds suffering from those who rightly merit it. God is all-loving and merciful. Sicknesses and diseases are therefore definitely not from Him. They are from the devil (John 10:10; 1 John 3:8b).

The Spirit of God indwells the believer (Romans 8:14). This is the same Spirit through whose agency He made the world and everything that is therein, at the completion of which everything was very good (Genesis 1:31). It will give no credit to the Lord for the third Person in the Godhead to co-habit the same temple (our bodies) with Satan’s agents such as sickness and diseases. For this cause also, the child of God can and should remain healthy.
LESSON 664
MICAH INTRODUCES IDOLATRY IN ISRAEL

MEMORY VERSE: “And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest” (Judges 17:5).

TEXT: Judges 17:1-13

Our text records the stealthy incursion of idolatry into the religious fabrics of God’s chosen people. Aided and persuaded by his mother, Micah started a household temple which was actually a shrine. In the course of the ill-advised enterprise, he arrogated to himself functions assigned only to the nation’s official high priest. Though his private temple was stocked with imitations of the emblems at the tabernacle in Shiloh, it was in competition with it. This importation of pagan practice into Israel was in direct violation of God’s revealed will. The effort was divisive, ignoble and condemnable (Exodus 20:22-24; Deuteronomy 4:15-19; 12:5-7,11,12).

Question 1: What challenge can we receive from Micah’s defection?

It is unfortunate that the tribe that produced a personality like Joshua was also at the forefront of leading the nation away from the God of their fathers. It is so worrisome that despite Joshua’s parting encouragement and warning in this regard, the infamous degeneracy is linked to his own tribesman. “And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah...” (Judges 17:1). Micah’s misadventure was in stark contrast to Joshua’s faith, faithfulness, discipline, devotion and godliness. The challenge here is that Christian believers, households and organisations should develop strategies to effectively transmit godly values so that succeeding generations can practice and preserve them (Ezra 7:25; Jeremiah 35:6-16; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:5,7,9).
The ugly development in this study was a result of the influence of gentile neighbours that Israel allowed to dwell within their borders. The vacillation of Israel in implementing God’s decree to completely rout and supplant their gentile precursors in the land was already taking its toll. The result was their contamination and eventual condemnation. Christians should avoid fraternising with any agent of anti-scriptural practice (Deuteronomy 7:16-26; Proverbs 1:10; 4:14, 15; Romans 16:17; Ephesians 5:11; 1 Timothy 6:5; 2 John 10,11; Revelation 18:4). They should be quick to rebuke such as may be found among them, project Christ and preach His gospel of salvation to all they come in contact with.

The narrative opens with an incident of a theft in a family. One thousand one hundred shekels of silver was a large sum in the reckoning of the times; it could pay the Levite-turned-priest in the text for more than a hundred years. As there was neither hope nor clue of recovery of the money despite her appeals, mother decided to pour open imprecation on whoever was responsible. Upon this, Micah eventually owned up, and the owner declared that she had dedicated the money to God for graven and molten idols. “And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son” (Judges 17:2).

Question 2: What can we deduce from Micah’s reaction to his mother’s declaration?

Micah’s restitution was not an outcome of genuine repentance, but an apparent apprehension of the consequences of the curse. Though the money he returned was happily received and the curse ostensibly reversed, his spiritual condition was
nothing better. The likes of Micah should realise that whatever the disposition of an aggrieved person, God is consistently angry against evildoers (Psalm 7:11; 76:7). Unless there is genuine repentance, the record of sin constantly reverberates, and the sinner remains repulsive in the sight of God.

Secondly, realizing the idolatrous implication of his mother’s declaration of the purpose to which she had dedicated the money, he was reluctant to retain it. “And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee. Yet he restored the money unto his mother…” (Judges 17:3,4). The confusion in the woman’s suggestion is so evident since images are completely forbidden in the worship of the true God (Deuteronomy 27:15). Unfortunately, Micah’s initial scrupling soon gave way as he eventually gave in to his mother’s corrupting influence, and became the manager of the evil project. “And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest” (Judges 17:5).

Thirdly, Micah lacked close counsellors that could help him on matters of his faith: his closest confidant and counsellor appeared to be his backslidden mother. But being a father of grown up children, Micah was expected to resist the overt defection. His yielding to his mother’s persuasion was proof of his shaky stand on matters of religion and true righteousness. Thereafter, he got his sons and others into worshipping at his “rebel chapel”. How one confused person corrupts many others! (Ecclesiastes 9:18; 2 Timothy 4:3,4). Whether with little persuasion or much pressure, unstable souls get influenced by evil and corrupters and become agents of destabilization and devastation for many unsuspecting and careless souls. However, believers can be strong enough to withstand all the wiles of the enemy through the grace and power of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians
Genuine conversion experience, personal conviction, committed leadership and effective fellowship with brethren of “like precious” faith could be of immense benefit in this regard (Proverbs 27:9; Hebrews 10:24).

The absence of a sovereign oversight aggravated Micah’s pull to idolatry. “In those days there was no king in Israel...” (Judges 17:6). The Israelites in Micah’s day generally lacked leadership check. The outcome of everyone doing “that which was right in his own eyes” was that crime and violence escalated and many ultimately ended up doing what was wrong in the sight of the Lord.

**Question 3: What lessons can contemporary Christians learn from the societal permissiveness of Micah’s time?**

Believers should not be antagonistic to civil government no matter the perceived shortcoming of those vested with the duties of statecraft. Christians are called to be law-abiding and interceding (Jeremiah 29:7; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; 1 Peter 2:13-15). In contemporary Christian setting, the importance of ecclesiastical control cannot be over-emphasised: those in church leadership positions must perform their oversight functions with utmost diligence, while followers should be submissive and cooperative (Romans 12:8; Hebrews 13:17).

**A CONSCRIPT’S ERROR AND ILLUSION** (Judges 17:7-11; Numbers 16:8-10; 1 Kings 13:33,34; Ezekiel 13:19; 1 Timothy 6:10)

Generations of Levites were conscripts in God’s spiritual army primarily to fight against the incursion of evil, to prevent defilement and to assist in the process of making atonement for sin. Their choice had been by divine fiat. They were born into peculiar assignments with special privileges. Their fulfilment in life lay in aligning with the demands of their calling as outlined by God. Unfortunately, there were some dissenters in the tribe: the Levite in today’s study was one of such. It was obvious he was discontent
with the divine arrangement. Living in a world of illusion, he supposed he could make it better outside the confines of God’s allotment. He did not stay in any of the cities or villages appointed for Levites, but opted to sojourn in Bethlehem from where he came across Micah.

“And there was a young man out of Bethlehemjudah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there” (Judges 17:7). His degenerate lifestyle negated God’s will for him, yet he did not bother to seek divine help.

**Question 4: Why did Micah need the services of this wandering Levite?**

It was easy to recognise the mockery in the whole setup as long as Micah’s son served as priest. Attendance and patronage at the temple being consequently lower than anticipated, the coming of the Levite presented a hope of providing some form of legitimacy for the shrine. The appointment of the Levite was based solely on his genealogical credential. In similar situations in contemporary times, it is usually skewed in favour of academic, charismatic or seminary qualifications. While these have their worth and usefulness, a Bible-believing church should always be guided by scriptural principles and place a higher premium on character (Exodus 18:21; Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:7,8).

**Question 5: Comment on what attracted the Levite to Micah.**

The Levite, thought to be “Jonathan, the son of Geershom” (Judges 18:30), decided to pitch his tent with idolatrous Micah because the latter offered him promotion, payment and provision. These factors still delude some Christians and church workers from their calling in contemporary times. Unfortunately, Micah’s payment with all his provision of lodgement and vestments were not comparable to the benefits accruable from divine provision which the Levite snubbed. Believers should realise that the overall cost of decamping from Christ far outweighs the temporal benefits. Indeed, it is sheer folly to abandon
ministerial calling for anything else (Jonah 2:8; Jeremiah 2:7,8; 10:8).

That the Israelites had reneged in remitting their due tithes for the maintenance of the Levites was quite condemnable. The resultant abandonment of assignments that were fundamental to the spiritual well-being of God’s people should warn Christians to regularly pay full tithes and offerings for the sustenance of God’s projects on earth. However, the failure of one person, group or category was no justification for the criminal misadventure of Jonathan: he could have taken up any other legitimate business to earn a decent living so as to remain relevant in the execution of his divinely assigned role among the people of God.

The Levite’s acceptance of Micah’s offer shows his shallowness, ignorance, low esteem and despicable non-compliance to God’s word. His subsequent submission to Micah’s consecration clearly indicates his gross illusion as to the essence of his levitical privileges. Instead of using the encounter with Micah to correct the growing error, he sacrificed his moral duty for his temporal needs, and became fully yoked in idolatry (2 Corinthians 6:14).

**CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES OF IDOLATRY**
(Judges17:12,13; Proverbs 30:12; Isaiah 44:20; Matthew 15:9; Romans 1:21-23)

Carvings and images of saints on church altars are reminiscences of Micah’s errors. Their minds and conscience being defiled, the patrons and members of such assemblies become abominable though they profess to know God (Titus 1:16). However, idolatry in our age is not limited to the graven or molten images. It can secretly lurk in the minds of its captives through ungodly principles, inordinate pursuits, unbridled egotism, undue gratification and covetousness (Colossians 3:5,6). The elevation of pleasure beyond the rightful claims or demands of God upon one’s life, excessive adulation of a hero or celebrated talent, submission of oneself to another person in hope of mundane advantage, are elements of modern idolatry.
“And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest” (Judges 17:12,13). It is surprising that for an affront over which one should fear a just retribution of God’s wrath, enemies of the cross can still hope for His blessings. The blessing in reference here is obviously in terms of economic advancement and other physical parameters. All they care for is the accruals, “whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame…” (Philippians 3:19).

Question 6: What can we learn from God’s attitude to the incident in the study?

As the lesson comes to a close, we cannot fail to notice the Lord’s silence in the text. The absence of direct divine response or comment on the issue in the text is not a proof of indifference or tacit approval of disobedience or apostasy. Having revealed His will through every means possible, the Lord does allow humans the liberty to express their love by obedience without coercion or inducement.

However, wilful departure from divine will grieves the Holy Spirit, leaves the disobedient void of prophetic restraint, disposes the sinner to heart-hardness, leads to reprobation and the risk of sudden unmitigated judgment (Psalm 50:16-22; Ezekiel 3:26; Daniel 3:16-30; Hosea 4:17; Acts 7:42; Romans 1:21-23,28; Revelation 14:10). It is therefore, imperative for every contemporary believer to diligently study the Scriptures, be resolutely committed to keeping the terms of the divine covenant and avoid the error of the likes of Micah and his compromising Levite-priest in this end time.
LESSON 665
DAN SEEKS TERRITORIAL EXPANSION

MEMORY VERSE: “And the coast of the children of Dan went out too little for them: therefore the children of Dan went up to fight against Leshem, and took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and possessed it, and dwelt therein, and called Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their father” (Joshua 19:47).

TEXT: Judges 18:1-31

In the preceding chapter, Micah became idolatrous, introduced it in Benjamin and appointed a renegade Levite to be his priest. This was a typical manifestation of apostasy which characterized individuals and entire tribes in Israel at the time of the judges. In this study, the absence of leadership in Israel was again mentioned as a reason for the lawlessness in the land. In fact, the truth that “there was no king in Israel” featured four times in the book of Judges (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). The consequence of this rudderless lifestyle was obvious: “and so every man did what was right in his own eyes”. The role of spiritual leadership cannot be downplayed by any generation of people who seek to please God. Besides, freedom without restraint and responsibility and loose living in disregard of God’s word lead to the abyss of moral corruption and destruction (Proverbs 14:12).

Dan, the last tribe to obtain their inheritance, found their lot too little for them because they were sandwiched between the two powerful tribes – Judah and Ephraim – and they were pushed from the southern coast by the Amorites (Judges 1:34). Consequently, the Danites could only move northward in search of a new territory to support their fast growing population. It was on this expedition for a new territory that their depravity manifested as they discovered Micah’s idols and his Levite-priest. They pillaged the idols, bribed the priest, hijacked him and thereafter destroyed
the people of Laish who dwelt carelessly. Thus, the Danites became the first tribe in Israel to formally embrace idolatry and it was not a surprise that Dan later became one of the two places chosen by King Jeroboam to place his idols (1 Kings 12:25-33). At the beginning of the chapter, idol worship was a family affair but has now become a tribal affair. Sin is cancerous; “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9).

Question 1: What are the temptations associated with seeking greener pastures which believers need to watch?

THE SEARCH FOR NEW TERRITORY BY THE DANITES (Judges 18:1-10; Joshua 2:1,23,24; Numbers 13:1-3,17-20,30; Judges 17:7-12; 1 Kings 22:5; Deuteronomy 8:7-10; John 14:1-3; Revelation 22:3-5; 21:3,4; Psalms 34:9,10)

The increasing population of the children of Dan made their dwelling place too small for them. They were the second highest, next only to the tribe of Judah (Numbers 1 and 26). They sent five valiant men to search out the land just as Moses had sent twelve spies and Joshua, two. These spies were to go and furnish the entire army with necessary information needed to capture the land. This military strategy – reconnaissance – is absolutely necessary in spiritual warfare and work. Christian service, especially church planting, should be done with prayerful surveying and planning. There is need to assess the place of intent, the people, their custom, religion, etc. so as to make adequate preparations.

On their way to Laish (also called Leshem – Joshua 19:47), the Danite spies got to mount Ephraim and lodged in the house of Micah who had gone into idolatry. During that short stay, they yielded to the influence of Micah’s idolatry and this translated into setting up of those idols which were embraced by the whole tribe. Lodging in the house of Micah exposed the Danites to his collection of idols. Also, they saw the Levite-priest who, being an accomplice, was offering idolatrous services for pecuniary purposes.
While the spies dwelt in the house of Micah, they interacted with the Levite and discovered he was not an Ephraimite. He volunteered some useful information about all the idols and groves that were in Micah’s house, the status of the priest and his vulnerability. We must be careful how we give information to strangers in these days of global security challenge.

Then, the strangers gave the first hint of their own spiritual decline by asking the idol priest to ask counsel of God for them concerning their journey to Laish. The people left the true priests in Shiloh where they should have received sound divine guidance to ask counsel from an idolatrous priest. It is wrong to leave divinely appointed spiritual leaders and wander to prayer houses and commercial prophets who, though disguised as Christian ministers, are not different from soothsayers. Undue inquisitiveness and prying into the future can make a professing believer fall into the hands of false prophets in these last days. God prohibits the practice of divination or sorcery in whatever form (Deuteronomy 18:10-13; Ezekiel 21:21-24; Hosea 4:12; Jeremiah 23:21,22,32).

**Question 2: What is the spiritual import of believers seeking new territory today?**

The Levite conveyed an encouraging message to the Danites and his prediction came true. Fulfilment of his prediction did not convey any divine approval that he was a true priest. God can use anything to speak to people. He used an ass to speak to Balaam and a cock to blow the whistle for Peter when he denied Christ.

The spies eventually arrived Laish which is about 100 miles from Zorah. The commitment of these Danites is instructive to modern day preachers who cannot go the extra mile for the Kingdom’s sake. Jesus travelled to several places on foot to preach the gospel. Paul, the apostle, crisscrossed many lands. These are examples that God expects believers to follow.

At Laish, the spies found that the inhabitants were disorganized, unguarded, far and quite isolated from
other communities. They deduced that the people were prone to attack and plunder. It is not a mark of godliness to be isolated in the community where we live on the excuse that we want to be separated from the world. Spiritual or moral separation, which the Bible enjoins, is quite different from isolation based on prejudice or fanaticism which limits our Christian witness and exposes us to danger.

The land of Laish was also described as being very good and without “want of anything that is in the earth”. This land, though good, cannot be compared with heaven where there will be no more sorrow, death, tears, crying or pain. The Danites desired a better land and believers must desire heaven where, in reality, there will be no want of any good thing.

The spies returned after their search with good and encouraging report to the Danites. Laish was described as being desirable and its conquest attainable. The report of these spies agree with that of Caleb and Joshua and the two spies sent by Joshua. It encouraged the people to take positive steps and move towards their desired goal. Christian reportage should encourage and motivate people for great exploits. Faith in God makes us see giants as prey.

THE SINFUL ACT OF THE DANITES (Judges 18:13-26,30,31; Exodus 20:15,17; Luke 3:14; Matthew 5:39-41; Romans 12:19)

The Danites chose six hundred armed men to go and attack Laish. They left Zorah for Laish, arrived at Mount Ephraim and came to the house of Micah. The spies who surveyed the land informed their fellow soldiers of the idolatrous items in Micah’s house and encouraged them to forcefully take possession of them.

The Danites forcefully took the idols of Micah and persuaded his priest to follow them so he could have a larger ministry and reward. They did not regard God’s command against stealing and idolatry; neither did they reciprocate Micah’s hospitality to the spies. Though Micah was idolatrous, he deserved a better
treatment from the Danites who had benefited from his kindness. They were simply ingrates.

When Micah noticed that his idols had been stolen, he went in company of his neighbours to challenge these pilferers. By his action, he showed commitment to his idols and risked his life to confront them. Idolaters worship the god they can carry; believers worship God who carries them. But some believers’ commitment to God is a far cry from those of idol worshippers (Isaiah 46:3-7). Believers need to place greater value on their spiritual heritage of salvation, sanctification, Holy Ghost baptism, Bible doctrines and be more diligent in keeping them than idol worshippers their gods. We should hold them carefully lest they slip from us.

**Question 3: How should believers value spiritual things?**

Micah, unable to rout the Danites, lost his idols and priest to them. The Levite was easily bought over by the Danites with the bait of popularity, gain and materialism. For the same reason, Satan still seek to lure believers from Christ, their righteous Master. Judas was contented with thirty pieces of silver to betray the Lord; Esau gave up his birthright when offered pottage; and Demas forsook Paul’s companionship because of his love for mundane things of the world. Let us watch against the antics of the god of this world.

The Danites eventually set up the idols that they stole from Micah’s house for worship. It is ridiculous that men sculpt their own gods, and the living worship dead images of their own making, gods that can neither defend itself nor its owners. By this action, the Danites became the first tribe to begin full-scale idolatry in Israel.

**THE SUPPRESSION OF LAISH BY THE DANITES**

(Judges 18:27-29; 1 John 2:15-17; Ephesians 6:11,12; Psalms 46:1-7,11; Isaiah 37:35; 38:6; Zechariah 12:8; Jeremiah 50:34)

**Question 4: How can believers avoid similar pitfalls that made Laish easy prey?**
The armed Danites came to Laish, smote the inhabitants with the edge of the sword, took over the city, renovated it and renamed it Dan, after their father. Lack of security consciousness as an isolated settlement made the defeat of Laish easy. We become easy preys for the enemy when we live solitary and secretive lives. Believers are warned not to seek repose on earth being pilgrims as they are in the midst of foes that are ready to devour them. Satan, his demons, the world and the flesh watch for unguarded moment so they can strike. Therefore, we must watch, pray and network with other believers (1 Peter 5:8). We need to cherish the old-time practices of having prayer and evangelism partners and regular visitation. Christians should also put on the whole armour of God and use every means of grace to overcome in life’s battle. However, we should remember that we are not defenceless. God is our Refuge and present help in time of trouble. He is ready to defend us against satanic attacks.

Care must be taken lest our quest for enlarged coast draw us into ungodly practices that displease God. While there is nothing wrong with a desire for enlargement and increase, we must never forget that “better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right; and better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith” (Proverbs 16:8; 15:16).
LESSON 666
MORAL PERVERSION IN GIBEAH

MEMORY VERSE: “Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him” (Judges 19:22).

TEXT: Judges 19:1-30

The account of the tragic and heinous wickedness perpetrated by “certain sons of Belial” in Gibeah in the text mirrors the extent of moral degeneracy in the town. Bereft of the Spirit of God and emboldened by the absence of governmental sanctions, there is hardly any depth of depravity sinners cannot descend. Gang- raping a woman to death in Gibeah was a result of the prevalence of violent crimes and absence of leadership to curtail people’s excesses in Israel (verse 1). A peaceful society is achieved when the character of individual citizens changes positively and the law is upheld and enforced by its leadership.

However, some citizens still break the law and damn the consequence even in societies where it is dreaded. This highlights the need for genuine transformation of heart and life, which can only happen through commitment of believers to preaching the soul-saving gospel (James 5:20). The Scripture also enjoins believers to contribute to orderliness in the society by “submitting to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors...” (1 Peter 2:13,14).

Question 1: Why should believers promote orderliness in the society and how can this be done?
THE DANGERS OF PARENTAL INDULGENCE AND IMPIETY (Judges 19:2; Proverbs 22:6; Ezekiel 16:44,45; Corinthians 3:3; Luke 6:42)

At the root of the horrifying events in our study is the singular act of rebellion of the concubine against her husband and disobedience to the word of God. Concubines are second-rate wives permitted among the Jews in the Old Testament (Genesis 25:5,6; 22:24). In this particular case, parental indulgence seemed to have encouraged this woman in evil. “And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father’s house... and was there four whole months” (verse 2). The seed of whoredom may have been sown in her infant heart in a family where the word of God was not revered, where parents tolerated or tepidly rebuked obscenity of language or behaviour, pornography or indecent dressing; or where the parents themselves indulged in such vices. It is sad that her acts of whoredom did not meet with any action expressive of resentment or rebuke from her father. No doubt, the knowledge that her father would condone her immorality and receive her into his home after such abominable acts must have encouraged her sinful life. Parents, in most cases, cannot be exonerated from the vices in their children’s character.

Question 2: Explain the importance of bringing up our children in a godly way.

Since one cannot impart what one does not have, it is necessary for parents to be born again, and so be enabled to live upright lives before their children.

THE BLESSING OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION (Judges 19:3-9; Matthew 18:21,22; Romans 5:8; 12:17,18; Mark 11:25; Acts 24:16; Ezekiel 16:49)

There are some commendable character traits in the life of the Levite. “And her husband arose and went after her, to speak friendly unto her and to bring her again...”. In Israel under the Mosaic dispensation, such a grave infraction was visited
with capital punishment. Though the concubine deserved condemnation, her injured husband, the Levite, set out on long hazardous journey for the purpose of reconciling with her. Though he was not in any way responsible for her action, he did not wait for some expression of contrition and apology before considering any form of reprieve for her. He forgave her even before she thought of reconciliation. Forgiveness of personal wrongs and reconciliation are accorded great prominence in the gospel of Christ. To Peter’s question: “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?”, the Lord answered, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven”. The word of God precludes us from retaliation in matters of personal wrongs, and commands us to forgive those who offend us. “Recompense to no man evil for evil”, and “if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:17,18). Obedience to these Scriptures leads us to forgiveness and reconciliation with those who wrong us. The blessings of obedience to these precepts for both the offended and the offender include peace of mind, better health, greater security and possibility of a lasting friendship in place of anger, suspicion, rancor and strife.

Question 3: What are the benefits of forgiveness and reconciliation?

Retaining offences in our hearts hinders us from receiving forgiveness from God and answers to our prayers. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25).

However, we notice the absence of vital imperatives in the entire process of reconciliation between the Levite and his concubine. At no point did the father-in-law or the Levite remonstrate against the woman’s sin. She herself did not in any way express any regret or repentance to God or to her husband. Contrition and repentance form the cornerstone of an enduring and
sustained reconciliation. They lead us first to God against whose commandment we contravened. He alone has the power of ultimate forgiveness, and gives the grace and power to keep us from future offences. They also lead us to make appropriate restitution to our fellow men who have suffered from our misdeeds.

**Question 4: What is restitution and what is its importance in preventing offences and fostering a lasting reconciliation?**

**THE DESPICABLE PERVERSION OF THE GIBEANITES** (Judges 19:10-30; Proverbs 21:31; Psalm 3:5; 4:8; Acts 27:10-14; 1 Peter 4:9; Romans 1:21-24)

The Levite’s willingness to overcome evil with good elicited a warm reception from his father-in-law and his daughter. The father-in-law, basking in the joy of a fresh reconciliation constrained the Levite to extend his stay beyond the third to the fifth day. The Levite and his company eventually departed and “came over against Jebus, which is Jerusalem...”. By the time they arrived Jebus, the sun was about to set. His servant therefore suggested that they pass the night in the city of the Jebusites. The Levite preferred to reach a city of Israel (Gibeah) rather than turn aside into “a city of strangers”. He assumed (and reasonably too) that greater safety awaited them in a city of Israel than elsewhere. Their unexpected experience teaches that safety is of the Lord even in a most secured place because the devil and evil men lurk everywhere (Proverbs 21:31).

While not totally discarding our human carefulness, effort and informed judgment, we must never rely on these only. We must “trust in the Lord with all [our] heart; and lean not unto [our] own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). The most knowledgeable of men still needs divine guidance in those matters which, in human judgment, are of seeming certainty. By relying on their knowledge and experience, the ship owner and his crew barely escaped death when they ignored Apostle Paul’s Spirit-inspired counsel that
their voyage to Rome would be with hurt and much damage (Acts 27:10,11).

**Question 5: Why do we still need to pray even in matters whose outcome or forecast seems certain?**

The warm reception given to the Levite and his company by the old man is worth mentioning. Such hospitality is commanded by the word of God. We are enjoined to “use hospitality one to another without grudging” (1 Peter 4:9) and not be “forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2).

“Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door... saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him.” These words are reminiscent of the encounter between Lot, the angels and the homosexuals of Sodom (Genesis 19:4-11). It is almost inconceivable that a group of men so vile, profane and perverted could be found in Israel. It shows that sin and wickedness know no national or racial boundary. It is only Christ that makes the difference.

**Question 6: What spiritual condition lies at the root of homosexuality, lesbianism and such lewd perversions? What is the way out?**

“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginings, and their foolish heart was darkened... For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet” (Romans 1:21-24).
Men’s mind and personality are affected when they abandon God. The word of God makes it clear that homosexuality and lesbianism are abominations (Leviticus 18:22), and self-defilement (1 Timothy 1:10). Those who practice them are excluded from the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9,10). Any individual, society or government that indulges or gives approval to these abominable practices will court God’s wrath. However, if they return to God in repentance through Christ, they will be healed and restored (Hosea 6:1).

Blinded by their perverted passion, the “men of Belial” were deaf to all the entreaty of the old man to spare his guest. “And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly.” In his importunity, he went to the extent of offering both his daughter and the Levites’ concubine to the perverted men. This offer is condemnable as it amounts to appeasing a sinner with another sin, “or doing evil that good may come”.

Being adamant, the Levite released his concubine whom the evil men of Gibeah abused all night. At dawn, she returned to the place her husband slept but collapsed at the doorstep and died. The grief-stricken and perplexed Levite devised a horrifying way of making public his experience in the hands of the men of Gibeah in order to demand for justice. He took the body of his concubine home, cut it into twelve pieces according to the number of the tribes of Israel, and sent to each tribe, a piece of her defiled flesh. In times of danger or poverty, believers must avoid taking any rash decision that can adversely affect other family members. We must maintain Christ-like selflessness and avoid any sinful trade-off while seeking security and wealth.
LESSON 667
ISRAEL DEMANDS
JUSTICE FROM GIBEAH

MEMORY VERSE: “Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel” (Judges 20:13).

TEXT: Judges 20:1-17

The previous chapter narrated the gory details of how some men of Gibeah did evil by raping a woman to death. A Levite whose estranged concubine was reunited with him was travelling with her from Bethlehemjudah to mount Ephraim. On their journey, the couple had to pass through the territory of Benjamin and they chose to lodge in Gibeah, among their fellow Israelites rather than in Jerusalem which was then occupied mainly by strangers. But in Gibeah, some men attempted to commit sodomy with the Levite and possibly harm him and his host. To save his head, the Levite gave them his concubine and the men raped her all night which led to her death. In the morning, the Levite found her lying dead at the door and took her, cut the corpse into twelve pieces and sent a piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Israelites had drifted away from God and abandoned His laws. This led to unimaginable abominations and evil committed by individuals and whole communities in the nation. For instance, Micah, a man from mount Ephraim, and the whole tribe of Dan went into abominable idolatry by setting up images and worshipping them. Even the Levities who were specially chosen by God to serve Him and lead the people in true worship became lawless and self-serving. They were not left out of the national corruption as some of them, despite the fact that they were given cities to live in, wandered about seeking greener pastures and ready to offer idolatrous services
because of ungodly gain (Judges 17:7-13). So, the case of homosexuality and murder in Gibeah was just another sore point in the gross apostasy of Israel. It showed that some of the people had sunk into the depth of depravity for which Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed (Genesis 19:4-13).

When the Israelites received the news of what happened in Gibeah of Benjamin and saw the chunk of the victim’s flesh, they were aroused and decided to enforce justice against the perpetrators. They gathered to defend the law of God and stem the tide of evil in the nation. Though it was commendable that they demanded justice against the evildoers in Gibeah, what about the destructive influence of other sins in the larger society? The negative response of the Benjamites and the civil war that followed are the inevitable harvest the nation reaped because they departed from God and His law. The lesson here is that when an individual, family or nation abandons God, the inevitable result is a harvest of confusion, sorrow, pain and destruction.

**Question 1: What was the consequence of Israel’s drift from God at this time?**

**THE DEED OF WICKEDNESS REHEARSED** (Judges 20:1-7; Joshua 22:11-34; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 Timothy 5:21; Deuteronomy 1:16,17; Proverbs 18:5; Romans 2:1-3,21-23)

“Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beersheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpeh” (Judges 20:1). When the Israelites received news of what happened in Gibeah, they gathered the men of war, twenty years and above, from the entire nation except the tribe of Benjamin. The expression, “from Dan even to Beersheba” signified the entire country. Dan was located in the northernmost part while Beersheba was in the south of the country.
Question 2: Why did Israel send messengers to the tribe of Benjamin and what does this teach us in the administration of justice?

The tribe of Benjamin to which Gibeah belonged, did not respond to the summon and were not present at Mizpeh; so, Israel had to send men to them asking that the culprits be released to face justice (Judges 20:3,12,13). The steps taken by the Israelites to address the crime committed by the men of Gibeah are commendable. They were prompt and unanimous in their response; four hundred thousand men gathered and were united, “knit as one man”. They decided to follow due process in dealing with the issue, notwithstanding the charged atmosphere.

First, they asked the Levite whose concubine was raped and murdered to rehearse his own side of the story before the entire congregation. He explained what happened, though he left off the fact that he selfishly traded his concubine for his own safety. After listening to the Levite, Israel sent to the tribe of Benjamin asking, “what wickedness is this that is done among you?” (Judges 20:12). That was an opportunity to hear the other side of the story, but the Benjamites were uncooperative.

There had been a similar case in Israel when majority of the tribes mobilised against the eastern tribes of Reuben, Gad and half tribe of Manasseh on account of the altar they built on the other side of Jordan shortly after they occupied Canaan. The eastern tribes explained their motive and defended themselves against the allegations of setting up a rival worship; and with that there was peace and unity (Joshua 22:11-34). One would have expected the Benjamites to also exonerate themselves or bring their strong reasons why the culprits should not face execution as demanded by Israel. Instead, they became hostile and prepared for war.

Question 3: What steps must we take when cases of improper conduct are reported in the church?
The action of Israel in our text underscores the importance of fairness in matters of improper conduct. We must act promptly and follow due process to ensure that justice is administered in the church or elsewhere. There should be thorough and unbiased investigation to ascertain the truth (Deuteronomy 19:18). The Scripture enjoins us to, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”; do “nothing by partiality”; “do no unrighteousness in judgment”; “judge righteous between every man and his brother”; not “overthrow the righteous in judgment” (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 Timothy 5:21; Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:16; Proverbs 18:5).

In order to ensure fairness in judgment, we must listen to all the parties involved. While listening, we must depend on the Holy Spirit to guide us and reveal the truth or otherwise in the matter. The guilty person should be punished and the innocent cleared. No one should allow tribal, family or friendship ties to becloud their sense of judgment.

Sin must be dealt with in a holistic way in order not to lose the battle against widespread evil in the church. Leaders must ensure that as they attempt to bring other people to justice, they should be equally free from sin and corruption. The children of Israel were appalled at the terrible crime of the men of Gibeah, but they did nothing about the idolatry in the tribe of Dan. This challenges us to examine ourselves and first deal ruthlessly with sin in our own lives before we attempt to deal with it in the lives of others. There is no reward for people who engage in service without purity.

DETERMINATION TO AVENGE THE WICKED ACT (Judges 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 13:12-16; 22:22; Leviticus 18:22-30; 20:10,13; Jude 3; Philippians 1:27)

The children of Israel sent messengers to the Benjamites to demand that they give up the rapists and murderers among them for justice. This was a fair and just demand based on scriptural principles (Deuteronomy 13:12-16; Leviticus 18:22-30;
20:10, 13). By this demand, the Benjamites were given the opportunity to absolve themselves of complicity in the crime and to prove that they were not in support of the wickedness. On their part, the Israelites proved that they wanted peaceful solution and not war. They did not expect that the matter would become a prolonged conflict (Judges 20:10). All they wanted was that the culprits be brought to book and evil purged from the land. Unfortunately, the matter degenerated into an all-out war and loss of several lives.

**Question 4:** What can we learn from the zeal of the Israelites against the wickedness of the men of Gibeah?

The children of Israel manifested great zeal and commitment to deal with the sinners in Gibeah. They were determined to see that justice was meted to the culprits. The Israelites were united in the battle against lewdness in the land, even to the point of risking their lives. Believers should spare no effort in dealing with sin in their own lives and in the church. They are to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. Like the Israelites, they are to unite in spiritual warfare against the kingdom of darkness and be ready to make necessary sacrifices to ensure that evil does not thrive in the church of the living God. Anything that can pollute the legacy of sound doctrine of God’s word must be resisted.

The reason Israel adduced for insisting on justice against Gibeah was to “put away evil from Israel”. It was not a revenge mission or personal matter but a desire to purge the land and avert divine punishment against the nation. Christ’s servants must also have right motives as they deal with sin in the church. We must ensure our eyes are set on God’s glory and not in pursuit of any private agenda or personal advantage.

**The Defence of Criminals by the Benjamites** (Judges 20:12-17; Exodus 23:2, 7; Jeremiah 23:14; Ezekiel 13:22)
Though the men of Benjamin heard of the evil their tribal men committed against the Levite, they did not attempt to punish the offenders; rather, they rallied their entire tribe to fight against those demanding for justice. They turned down the call for justice and decided to mobilise for war in defence of evil. “But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel” (Judges 20:14). By this action, the Benjamites strengthened the hand of Gibeah in wickedness.

**Question 5: Point out some wrong attitudes manifested by the Benjamites.**

The reaction of the Benjamites to Israel’s demand for justice leaves little to be desired. It proved that they allowed tribal sentiments to becloud their sense of justice. Second, it showed that they valued tribal reputation more than obeying the law of God. Third, they were biased and unprepared to hear from the man whose concubine was violated and killed. Fourth, by taking a stand against the other tribes in an unrighteous cause, they proved that they were thoroughly backslidden and steeped in arrogance. Of a truth, “the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways; but the LORD weigheth the spirits” (Proverbs 14:14; 16:2; 21:2).

Whichever way it is considered, the Benjamites carried their tribal sentiment too far by mobilising 26,700 people to confront Israel’s 400,000 soldiers. They may have unwittingly felt that they had God on their side while thinking that the Israelites were idolaters. Also, they were probably relying on their 700 sharp slingers and the fact that they were more familiar with the hilly terrain around Gibeah. In the end, they paid dearly for their misjudgment. Surely, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”. “When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom” (Proverbs 16:18; 11:2).
Question 6: What can we learn from the response of the Benjamites to Israel’s demand for justice against Gibeah?

The conduct of the Benjamites in this case is an example of the growing tendency to tolerate and even defend sin in some Christian assemblies. Both members and leaders, though aware of ongoing sinful practices in their church, refuse to confront them. When we fail to discipline erring members or speak out against evil practices in our assemblies, we encourage evil and the end result can be disastrous, not only for the culprits but for the entire congregation. The Bible enjoins us to rebuke those who sin so that others, who may be in similar sins or intending to do so, may fear (1 Timothy 5:20). “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9).

From the Benjamites, we learn that we must not defend sin or sinners; rather, we should expose and lead them in the path of repentance and total recovery. Two, we must avoid tribalism. Three, we should not be wise in our own eyes, but be ready to always listen to the voice of reason and examine our stand vis-a-vis the word of God. Four, when we are rebuked or challenged over a wrong deed, we should humble ourselves and repent in order to avoid destruction (Proverbs 29:1).
LESSON 668
CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND BENJAMIN

MEMORY VERSE: “And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah” (Judges 20:20).

TEXT: Judges 20:18-48

Prior to this study which focuses on the bloody civil war between the tribe of Benjamin and remaining tribes of Israel, some men of Gibeah had gang-raped a woman to death. This was a proof of the increasing lawlessness and corruption in Israel at the time they lacked judicial oversight and everyone did what was right in their eyes (Judges 19:1-30). Subsequent events led to a civil war.

The way the battle was fought, lost and won presents unforgettable and solemn lessons for present-day pilgrims on the need to fear God. Though the men of Israel were upbeat about bringing the rapists in Gibeah to book, they were blind to the gross idolatry and perversion of true worship among them. The tribe of Dan which was one of the tribes mobilized against the Benjamites was already involved in full scale idolatry, and the same law of God which condemned the rapists stipulated execution of idolaters (Judges 18:29-31; Deuteronomy 13:12-17; 17:2-9). As a result of their failure to deal with sin in their own lives while attempting to punish the sin of others, the Israelites were defeated twice.

Sin attracts God’s judgment. The judgment may be deferred but it will eventually come in God’s own way which is quite different from that of man. We must not also forget the saying that, “he who comes to equity must come with clean hands”. Both sides suffered heavy causalities because they were unable to resolve their conflict amicably. War can never be a viable alternative to peaceful conflict resolution,
either in the church or society. As God’s ambassadors of peace, believers do not promote conflict.

**Question 1:** *From the account in our text, why is it important for believers to avoid beating the drum of war whenever there is a conflict?*

**DANGER OF PRESUMPTION AND OVERCONFIDENCE IN BATTLE** *(Judges 20:18-25,8-11; Ezekiel 14:1-5; Proverbs 3:5-8; Numbers 27:21; Psalm 19:12,13; 33:16; 1 Kings 20:10-30)*

Israel responded to the defiant attitude of the children of Benjamin by mobilizing 400,000 soldiers against them. They presumed that they would win as they go to fight their brethren, the Benjamites. Before going to battle, the counsel they asked from God was: “**which of us shall go up to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first**” *(Judges 20:18)*. The prayer of Israel at this time was not whether they should go to battle or not; they had already decided they would *(Judges 20:8-11)*.

**Question 2:** *Why were the Israelites confident of victory over the children of Benjamin?*

Rather than wait on God to know whether they should fight against the Benjamites or not *(Numbers 27:21)*, they were presumptuous and overconfident. They must have concluded that they were fighting God’s cause, trying to defend the law of God against sexual immorality; and their 400,000 men force would naturally overrun the paltry 26,000 soldiers of Benjamin. Israel also presumed on God’s backing in the war and they felt all He needed do was to join them midstream and give them direction.

God answered the Israelites according to the folly of their prayer. Despite their seeking counsel from God, they were defeated and 22,000 lost their lives. Even after this defeat, they “**set the battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day**” and went before the Lord weeping and seeking counsel. The question they asked was,
“shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother?” (Judges 20:23). If they were not presumptuous, this prayer should have come before setting the battle in array. Again, they were confident of victory not because they relied on God’s promise but trusted in the size of their army. They neither saw the need to look inwards and examine themselves nor think it appropriate to make necessary sacrifices unto God. Consequently, they were defeated again and another 18,000 men were lost.

We cannot use God for our own ends, and it is only when we put Him first in all our endeavours that we can experience His faithfulness. If the Israelites had been more concerned about the defence of God’s honour and jealous for His name, that would have led them to a deeper repentance. Most likely, their soul-searching would have also pointed out the idolatry of the tribe of Dan and the general laxness in the entire nation. The mobilization of Israel against Benjamin, as it were, was mainly provoked by their emotional response to the pieces of the victim’s body that was sent to their tribes.

Question 3: What can we learn from the defeat of Israel despite that fact that they had a just cause?

We need to avoid presumption and overconfidence in our walk with God. We should not lean on our own understanding but trust the Lord for counsel and guidance. Second, there are times when sheer large numbers are of no advantage. Though Israel had a large army and their opponent could be rightly described as “little Benjamin” (Psalm 68:27), they were defeated. They forgot that “there is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength” (Psalm 33:16). Third, there are occasions where God’s affirmation is not a guarantee for success. Though God answered the prayer of Israel as to which tribe should lead in the battle against Benjamin, that did not prevent their defeat.
There is a great difference between mere divine acquiescence and God’s perfect will. Consider God’s perspective and summary of Saul’s coronation (1 Samuel 8-10). Hosea captured His commentary this way: “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath” (Hosea 13:9-11). In spite of the clear involvement of God in the affair of choosing Saul as king, it was all a matter of His permissive will and it ended in disaster. The same was true of Israel in their first two encounters against Benjamin. We should avoid running our lives, family, church or ministry on the steam of God’s permissive will because that will not turn out to our profit in the end.

**DIVINE FAVOUR THROUGH GENUINE REPENTANCE AND HUMILITY** (Judges 20:26-28; James 4:8-10; Isaiah 55:6-9; 30:26; 57:15-18; Jonah 2:7-10; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Leviticus 26:40-42)

After suffering two successive defeats and loss of 40,000 soldiers in battle, the Israelites saw the need to humble themselves before God and ask for His mercy.

**Question 4: How did Israel prove that they were truly repentant and ready to depend on God in their campaign against Benjamin?**

Israel did not set the battle in array against Benjamin neither did they presume or trust in their military advantage any longer. They came before God, wept, fasted and offered necessary sacrifices in acknowledgment of their own need for God’s mercy before confronting their brother’s shortcomings (Judges 20:26; Matthew 7:1-5). Their prayer on this occasion reflected a subdued spirit and readiness to remove the log in their own eyes so they could see clearly to remove the speck from their brother’s eye. They asked God, “Shall I yet again go up to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or
shall I cease?” and God’s answer was also complete: “Go up; for tomorrow I will deliver them into thine hand” (Judges 20:28). God gave them both direction and assurance of victory.

Genuine repentance of Israel attracted divine favour. They were ready to give up their attack against Benjamin, if God would so direct; after all, it is His word they endeavoured to defend. By this attitude, the Israelites proved that they were no longer pursuing mere self-motivated mission; neither were they manifesting a ‘holier-than-thou attitude’.

But Israel delayed their repentance until they had suffered heavy causalities before considering their ways. Men often wait until they get into desperate situations before they humble themselves before God, but it need not be so with us, as believers. We must not wait until we experience some tragedies in life before we turn to God to get rid of self-will. The scriptures enjoin us to “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:8-10).

It should be noted also that God is ever merciful and faithful to forgive His penitent people. When Israel humbled themselves before the Lord, He also gave them His favour and granted them victory in battle.

DEFEAT OF BENJAMIN AND VINDICATION OF ISRAEL’S CAUSE (Judges 20:29-48; Joshua 8:1-26; Proverbs 11:21; 16:5; Ecclesiastes 8:11-14; Job 20:5; Psalm 37:35-37)

The children of Israel did not allow the previous defeats to hinder them from making a third attempt, especially after God had given them assurance of victory. Believers must not allow past failures to hinder them from making fresh attempts; they should learn from their mistakes and reposition themselves for progress.
The Israelites recovered themselves from the presumption of facing the Benjamites head on and they devised appropriate strategy in battle. They employed the same strategy that Joshua used in defeating Ai (Joshua 8:1-26). The Israelites caught up with them and killed almost the entire army except a few who took refuge in the rock Rimmon for four months. Besides Gibeah, the Israelites also killed the inhabitants of other cities of Benjamin and torched their houses. Even their livestock were not spared; at the end of the battle, the entire tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped out.

**Question 5: What can we learn from the eventual defeat of Benjamin by Israel?**

While the Israelites were purged of their overconfidence and presumption, the Benjamites appeared to have fallen into the same delusion. Their victory run in the first and second battles had made them complacent and less discerning. But unknown to them, Israel had undergone a transformation and God had restored his support towards His penitent people.

Sinners and backsliders must ponder the fate of the Benjamites and quickly turn to God. A sinner may prosper and seem to escape divine retribution, but it is only for a while. Those who appear to prosper while living wicked lives are treading on slippery ground and their destruction will be so sudden and calamitous.

**Question 6: Point out some sundry lessons you learn from this study.**

Of the conflict between Israel and Benjamin, there are many lessons for the believer. One, there are times we may suffer temporary defeat while pursuing a just cause. In such cases, we should examine ourselves, do necessary spiritual stocktaking and launch out again. Two, we should not give up, even when it appears evil is winning over righteousness. We must remember that “the triumphing of the wicked is short and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment” (Job 20:5). The psalmist said, “I have seen
the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace” (Psalm 37:35-37).

Three, those who justify and defend the wicked make themselves liable to God’s wrath. The Sodomites and rapists in Gibeah should not have been shielded by the Benjamites. Shielding them showed they approve of their evildoing. As a result, they partook of the divine judgment against the ungodly. Four, the major cause of conflict among believers is sin. Becoming partisan or tribal when it comes to dealing with plain issues makes conflict to escalate in the church. Five, we see the necessity of self-examination before judging others. The children of Israel needed to judge themselves and atone for their own shortcomings before avenging the sin of the Benjamites.

Six, we must learn to develop and use appropriate strategies in carrying out God-given assignments. Regardless of the advantages we seem to have, we cannot dispense with the use of proper strategy in our spiritual warfare. Seven, members of a Bible-believing church should learn to correct and discipline erring members in love, seeking their restoration and not their humiliation. In everything, we should humble ourselves and have an eye for God’s glory.
LESSON 669
WARNING AGAINST UNEQUAL YOKE


TEXT: 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Right from the Old Testament narratives to the dispensation of grace, God frowns at unequal yoke between believers and unbelievers. By creation and redemption, believers belong to God in body, soul and spirit. The implication of divine ownership is that believers occupy a special place in God’s heart (Deuteronomy 7:6). Believers are a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people... called [you] out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). This shows that the believer is God’s property and cannot be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers” who are controlled by the devil.

In the text, Apostle Paul urges believers not to form a binding relationship with unbelievers as such would weaken their Christian conviction, commitment and obedience to God and His word.

A proper understanding of parallels in the text presents unarguable constraints and convey divine expectation of believers’ lifestyle in the world. The perpetually conflicting parallels are: “righteousness” versus “unrighteousness”, “light” versus “darkness”, “Christ” versus “Belial”, “he that believeth” versus “an infidel” and “temple of God” versus “idols”. None of these can ever pair for good. In one group is God, Christ and believers but in the second is Satan, demons and unbelievers.

Question 1: Explain the contrasts in the text and their implication for the believer.
COMMAND TO SEPARATE FROM THE WORLD (2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:7-11; 1 Corinthians 5:9,10; 10:20,21; Deuteronomy 7:2,3)

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”

Unholy intimate relationship between a believer and an unbeliever is what Scriptures refer to as unequal yoke. The text opens with a military term which calls the Christian soldier to keep in his own ranks; and not leave the Christian community to join that of the heathens. The questions which follow in the succeeding verses show that there was a sort of fellowship that some Christians had formed with the heathens and if not speedily checked would infallibly lead to final apostasy. Even in the Old Testament, God commanded the Israelites to separate themselves from the heathen around them. “And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them... I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people. And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.”

Avoiding unequal yoke with unbelievers does not mean that the Christian must give up his lawful trade, profession, business, for then he “must needs go out of the world” (1 Corinthians 5:10). Although believers are not expected to isolate themselves from unbelievers for the sake of winning them for the Lord through the gospel, they should not go into marriage, business or close personal relationships that could make them to compromise their faith.

Sadly, today, some believers go into unequal yoke with unbelievers in marriage. They do this without giving a thought to the negative implication of their action. Unequal yoke is practised in marriage when a believer, man or woman, goes to marry a sinner or a so-called Christian of questionable character.
Friendship is another area a Christian goes into unequal yoke. Believers must be careful of the type of friends they keep. If a true Christian’s bosom friend is an enemy of the cross, s/he is into unequal yoke. “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).

Entering business partnership with a non-Christian is unequal yoke. Besides, when a believer picks up chieftaincy titles, becomes extravagant in naming, weddings, burial and even ‘house-warming’ ceremonies like unbelievers, they compromise with the world.

**Question 2: What is unequal yoke? Mention areas we must watch?**

As Christ cannot be in agreement with Belial, believers who have discovered God’s light through repentance from sin and faith in Christ should have no fellowship with the works of darkness. The Christian and heathen act on very different principles. And everyone who is a true believer and determined to please the Lord will be earnest in renouncing the world and seek to order his life by God’s standard.

**CAUSES OF UNEQUAL YOKE** (2 Corinthians 6:15,16; Genesis 16:1-3; Mark 14:10,11; 2 Timothy 4:10; Joshua 9:3-21; Judges 14:3; 2 Samuel 17:1-4)

Without a clear view of the believer’s identity, it will be difficult to survive the pressure to compromise. The Bible teems with records of people whose lives should serve as warning to contemporary believers. The journey which culminates in unequal yoking begins from a point: not taking heed to the warnings of God.

**Question 3: Enumerate the causes of unequal yoke.**

Some of the reasons most believers go into unequal yoke with unbelievers include: inordinate affection (2 Samuel 17:1-4); impatience (Genesis 16:2,3); willful
disobedience (Judges 14:3); worldliness and carnality (2 Timothy 4:10); covetousness (Mark 14:10,11); business or military alliance (2 Chronicles 18:1-3); and ignorance (Joshua 9:3-21).

One strong reason the believer must not get into unequal yoke is that he is indwelt by God. He is “the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people”. The implication is that God, his Father will supply all his needs and guide him aright in all things. Indwelt by God, the believer cannot live by the principles and lifestyle the god of this world has dictated for his own people. “Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen...” (Jeremiah 10:2). In language, dressing and attitude, the believer must show he is the holy temple of God, and be wary of unequal yoke in every aspect of life because of the great consequences in time and eternity.

CONSEQUENCES OF UNEQUAL YOKE (2 Corinthians 6:17,18; 1 Samuel 28:6; 1 Kings 11:1-5; Numbers 31:7,8)

Unequal yoke often leads to compromise; it makes the believer to “touch... unclean thing”. It steadily weakens the foundation of his spiritual strength. Besides, it will imperceptibly cool off the fervency of spirit which attended his first love.

The Lord’s warning to Israel against unequal yoke in marriage was in view of its dire consequences that the heathen spouses will “turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly” (Deuteronomy 7:3,4). Unequal yoke in marriage has led to the outright backsliding of believers who were once heaven-minded.

The Scripture is replete with characters who slipped into unequal yoke and lost their relationship with God. When Saul was anointed king of Israel, he had a good relationship with the Lord. But when he later
resorted to familiar spirits, he did not hear from God anymore; he died a backslider. Samson’s life and ministry were cut short as a result of unequal yoke. Prophet Balaam died in battle while fighting against the people of God. King Solomon’s heart was turned away from the God of his fathers when he married Ahab’s daughter and had “seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines...” (1 Kings 11:3). King Jehoshaphat lost a fortune with the ship on the sea for doing business with the godless.

**Question 4:** Highlight some consequences of unequal yoke and the path to restoration.

**CALL TO SEPARATION AND RESTORATION** (2 Corinthians 6:17,18; 2 Timothy 2:19; 7:8,9; Hosea 14:4; Joel 2:25-29)

God is calling all who are like Ephraim who “hath mixed himself among the people” whom “strangers have devoured his strength” to separation and restoration. “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty”. Response to His call through repentance from all known sins, and faith in Christ bring restoration to sonship. Aside the Fatherhood of God, there will be restoration of all blessings lost and assurance of living with Him in heaven for believers who abide in Christ till the end.
LESSON 670
THE PURSUIT OF PURITY
IN THE CHURCH

MEMORY VERSE: “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 7:1-16

Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians revealed the problems, pressures and struggles of a church called out of a pagan society. He addressed a variety of issues in the lifestyle of the brethren, including factional tendencies, pride, litigation, immorality, idolatry, abuse of the Lord’s Supper and spiritual gifts, among others. On a particular instance, he instructed that a sinning brother be placed on discipline as a warning that sin must not be tolerated in the body of Christ.

The chapter under consideration provides us with the positive outcome of the discipline: the backslidden brother “sorrowed to repentance” (verse 9) and got restored. This account brought comfort to the Apostle’s heart in spite of his many ministerial tribulations and trials. Thus, when rebuke or discipline is carried out with the right motive and received with the right attitude, it brings about repentance and restoration to those concerned.

Apostle Paul rejoiced greatly that the primary purpose of his first epistle through Titus had such a positive impact in the lives of members of the church at Corinth. They developed the right attitude towards sin and those who might try to defile the church. Therefore, he exhorted the brethren to pursue and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. Reading through his epistles to the churches, Paul never hid his desire and utmost pursuit of purity in God’s church which is “…the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).
THE PURSUIT OF A CONCERNED MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL (2 Corinthians 7:1-7; Galatians 1:6-12; 2 John 3:1-3; Matthew 21:12,13; Hebrews 12:14)

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

The apostle refers to the promises mentioned in the last three verses of the preceding chapter as strong reasons for believers to follow after holiness. Christians are saved so that they can be partakers of God’s holiness. The use of the phrase “…Let us cleanse ourselves…” is clear proof that believers have a part to play in remaining holy unto the Lord. Every believer has a part to play in cleansing himself from “the filthiness of the flesh and spirit…” which is capable of defiling him and the church.

**Question 1: What do you understand by “filthiness of the flesh and spirit”? How can the church be cleansed from it?**

Filthiness of the flesh connotes external pollution, defilement by outward actions committed in the body, such as impure words, idolatry, adultery, fornication, incest, sodomy, murder, drunkenness, revelling, etc. Filthiness of the spirit has connection with internal pollution or defilement through internal acts of the mind: evil thoughts, lusts, pride, malice, envy, covetousness and such like (Mark 7:21-23). Our world teems with spiritual pollutants capable of destroying the believer’s testimony of holiness. There are scenes of pornography, immorality, inordinate affection, lust of the eyes and the pride of life which the believer must avoid in order to remain holy. We are to make conscious efforts at stemming these agents of pollution from gaining the mastery of us.

Paul challenged the believers to receive him and his associates as they have not wronged or defrauded anyone (2 Corinthians 7:2). He said this, either because some felt that he had been too severe with the discipline he placed on the incestuous man or
because some false apostles and teachers had polluted their minds against him. Whatever the case, the Apostle was sure that the testimony of their integrity was public knowledge. “Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:10). In contrast to any unwarranted ill-feeling towards him, the apostle to the Gentiles said, “ye are in our hearts to die and live with you” (2 Corinthians 7:3). He, together with other ministers were willing to sacrifice everything for the believers’ spiritual advantage, even to the point of death.

Apostle Paul’s concern for the physical and spiritual welfare of the brethren in all the churches that God helped him to establish was never in doubt. In his affectionate manner, when he came to Macedonia, after leaving Troas, he was anxious to know the success of his first epistle and how the brethren fared (2 Corinthians 7:3-7). No doubt, they suffered from opposition of pagans, Jews and false brethren; “without were fighting” and “within were fears...”. Hence, he became apprehensive lest the teachings of the false apostles should have perverted their minds from the truth and corrupted the church. No wonder he was relentless in intercession: “Always in every prayer of mine for you... Making mention of you in our prayers... Praying always for you...” (Philippians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; Colossians 1:3). However, the apostle and other leaders were comforted by the feedback they received from Titus, “…When he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me, so that I rejoiced the more” (2 Corinthians 7:7). Christian workers and ministers should always evaluate the impact of their work, efforts, programmes and messages on the life of the flock. They should be interested in the growth and progress of believers under their watch to ensure that their labours are not in vain.

Question 2: What should be the pursuit of every genuine Christian?
Every Christian should seek to perfect “holiness in the fear of God,” by resisting and avoiding sin in all its inviting and seducing forms. We should also set the fear of God before our eyes.

News of the brethren’s “earnest desire” and “fervent mind” caused the Apostle to rejoice in spite of the numerous challenges he faced in the course of propagating the gospel. Nothing encourages and gladdens a Christian servant’s heart than to see that his labour for the Lord is prospering (3 John 4).

**THE POWER OF TRANSFORMATION IN THE GOSPEL**
(2 Corinthians 7:8-11; Acts 2:36-38; 4:4; 6:7; 14:21-25)

Ministers of God do not have regret for declaring the totality of the truth. Nothing else has the potency to convict and convert a soul that has gone astray like the undiluted gospel (Psalm 19:7). Speaking to the Romans, he said, “for I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth…” (Romans 1:16).

Paul’s epistle brought about “godly sorrow” which produced genuine repentance, transformation and complete change of heart and conduct among the Corinthians. Some may sorrow and yet not repent of their sins. Judas Iscariot was a good example (Matthew 27:3). He regretted that he betrayed and sold his innocent Master but did not genuinely repent of his sins. On the other hand, Peter was forgiven and restored back to the faith because he repented genuinely after he denied Christ. The brethren at Corinth sorrowed after a godly sort because they realized that they had sinned against God.

**Question 3:** Differentiate between “Godly sorrow” and “the sorrow of the world”

Godly sorrow makes its victim restless till he or she finds pardon through the mercy of God. It leads to salvation, newness of life and assurance of going to heaven. But the sorrow of the world leaves sinners in their old way which leads to death, destruction and eternity in hell.
Question 4: From 2 Corinthians 7:11, mention evidences of transformation that the gospel brought to the Corinthian church.

The Apostle’s epistle made the Corinthian Christians obedient to the gospel. “What carefulness it wrought in you...”. They became wary of sin and its consequence.

Secondly, they were cleared from guilt and condemnation as they took steps to put away evil from among them. Moreover, they had vehement desire to rectify what went amiss. Thirdly, they had the right attitude towards sin and the sinner, especially the ones among them. Lastly, they were submissive to leadership and developed zeal for God’s work and His house.

THE JOY AND BLESSEDNESS OF AN OBEIDENT CHURCH (2 Corinthians 7:12-18; Hebrews 13:7,17)

“...Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you (2 Corinthians 7:12). Paul reiterated that his epistle to the church was not simply to get the delinquent punished or to merely do justice to those who had suffered as a result of the sin found in their midst. Rather, it was for them to have the fullest proof of his fatherly affection for them, and his concern for the honour of God.

Moreover, the highpoint of his joy and comfort was that the Corinthians were obedient to the word of God written to them. First, they carried out the discipline which he ordered and refused to cooperate or compromise with the offender in his depravity. This should be the attitude of true Christians who are not to be part of the syndicate that aids and abets sin in any form in the church. The position of all members – leaders and workers alike – should be consistent with God’s standard against sin. Second, Paul had confidence in their obedience and trusted that he would not be disappointed. “For if I have boasted
any thing to him of you, I am not ashamed; but as we spake all things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found a truth” (2 Corinthians 7:14). Third, the report of Titus to Paul in Macedonia about the improved state of the Corinthian church, their love for the Apostle as well as Titus, coupled with their reverence for the latter’s authority as Paul’s representative, whom “with fear and trembling ye received him...” made the apostle to testify he had “confidence in you in all things”.

This painted a clear picture of the joy and blessedness that should exist in any Bible-based fellowship where obedience to the word of God form the catch-phrase of every member.

While ministers labour over their members, members should reciprocate same through godly affection, reverence, obedience to the word and righting all wrongs like the Corinthians did. “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your soul...” (Hebrews 13:17). This gladdens the heart of ministers and causes them to labour with joy. Disobedience among members of a church, on the other hand, makes the work of a minister difficult, burdensome and uninteresting.

**Question 5: How can you describe a blessed church?**

In conclusion, the Apostle was now fully persuaded that the scandals which threatened to destroy the foundation of holiness in the church and divide it along factional lines had been put away. He now believed that oneness or unity in pursuit of holiness was feasible among them; that they were on the path of being restored to biblical purity and excellence. Now, their character was firmly fixed to do the will of God. These are the expectations of every servant of God from the members. Nothing short of these would gladden the heart of a pastor or shepherd of God’s flock. Assured of a new dawn among the brethren occasioned by these positive developments, the Apostle joyfully remarked: “I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things” (2 Corinthians 7:16).
LESSON 671
PATTERN AND PRECEPTS
FOR GODLY GIVING

MEMORY VERSE: “And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:5).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 8:1-24

The previous lesson dwells on maintaining purity in the church through conscious efforts of every member to cleanse oneself from all forms of filthiness and discipline erring members. In any Christian assembly where members possess pure hearts, there will be self-sacrificing love. Paul the apostle proceeds from the subject of purity to exhort the Corinthian church, in the text, on the necessity of showing charity toward the poor saints in Jerusalem and Judea. He challenges them to emulate the good example of the churches in Macedonia who made contributions to alleviate the suffering of poor believers at Jerusalem due to war, famine and persecution. The Macedonian churches graciously rose to their rescue by giving financial assistance, though they did not personally know them. They gave generously in spite of their deep poverty and intense persecutions. The Macedonian churches comprised of those in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea which were planted by Paul and his team during their second missionary journey.

Question 1: What can we learn from the concern of Paul for the brethren in Jerusalem?

Though Paul was called the apostle to the Gentiles, he cared also for the Jews who were Christians as well as those yet to be converted (Romans 9:1-3; 10:1). Present-day believers must be like-minded by sparing thought for brethren in adversity and practically supporting them. Christian leaders are to follow the good example of Paul by using practical and scriptural illustrations in their messages in order to stir up the faith of their congregation to give sacrificially to the
work of God, support church projects and help the needy brethren.

**PATTERN OF SACRIFICIAL GIVING DESPITE PERSONAL CHALLENGES** (2 Corinthians 8:1-6,9; 9:6-8; 1 Kings 17:8-16; Mark 12:41-44; Luke 6:38; Proverbs 11:24,25; 22:9; Galatians 6:7-10; Exodus 25:2; Deuteronomy 15:10)

Paul the apostle commended the charity of the Macedonian believers. Though he did not make any request, they pleaded or compelled him to receive their contribution for the brethren in Jerusalem. They knew that whatever they gave to God, either in support of His work or to meet the needs of His children, would reciprocate divine benevolence. Paul's testimony concerning them that they were joyful despite intense persecutions, and liberal, notwithstanding their extreme poverty, is proof that believers can live out practical Christianity in spite of outward negative circumstances. It is obviously an expression of God’s grace when extremely poor people show great liberality.

The secret of expressing such commendable liberality despite one’s poverty lies in genuine conversion. The Macedonians first surrendered their lives to God and were saved from sin; thereafter, they submitted to their God-appointed leaders. Everyone needs to give his/her life to God first before giving their substance to Him. Stinginess and holding back from God are manifestations of a heart that is not surrendered to Him. If we yield ourselves fully to God and acknowledge His divine ownership of all things, we would find it easy to part with anything He demands from us. Prevailing negative economic situations should not hinder us from participating in a good cause for Christ’s glory.

**Question 2: What are the principles of Christian giving from the example of the Macedonian believers?**

The exemplary giving of the Macedonian churches furnishes believers with the following principles: one, they must first give themselves to God before their
substance. Two, negative circumstances and poverty should not hinder us from giving generously to God and His people. Three, we should give voluntarily and willingly without compulsion. Four, our giving must be purposeful and timely. Reasons for giving are to advance God’s work, help the needy, lay treasure in heaven, prove our submission and devotion to God, and thank Him for His manifold blessings (Philippians 4:15-18; Proverbs 19:17; Galatians 2:10; Matthew 6:20; Deuteronomy 14:22,23; Malachi 1:6-8). Five, when we begin a good work of charity, we must continue to the end. The Corinthians began their preparation to give to the brethren in Jerusalem over a year; at some point, their zeal cooled off until Paul stirred them up. Whenever we make pledges to support God’s work, we must redeem them. Six, we should give in proportion to our income. Seven, giving is a practical proof of our love to God. Eight, giving requires grace. Believers will give promptly and freely without complaining or murmuring if they have God’s grace. The Israelites were enabled to give for the construction of the tabernacle; the widow of Zarephath sacrificially supplied Elijah’s need; the woman of Shunem took care of Elisha; the widow in the temple cast all her living into the treasury; and the Macedonian believers gave to needy Jewish believers out of their deep poverty because of their grace-filled hearts (Exodus 25:1,2; 35:4,5,20-29; 1 Kings 17:8-16; 2 Kings 4:8-13; Mark 12:41-44).

**Question 3: Why do people fail to give? Point out its effect in the church.**

When people lack the grace to give, there is much sluggishness in making contributions to support God’s work, and ministers have to devise several methods to motivate people to give. During the reign of Solomon, people gave abundantly but it was more out of necessity than from willing minds. As soon as Solomon died and his son took over, people sought relief from the burden, which led them to revolt and divide the kingdom (1 Kings 12:1-19).
In the times of prophets Haggai and Malachi, people were more concerned about their personal gain and comfort than God’s work. The result was that the construction of God’s house became an abandoned project, people gave the bad portions of their possessions to God and failed to give even the minimum tithe that God commanded (Haggai 1:1-5; Malachi 1:6-8; 3:8-12). The consequence was that there was protracted poverty and financial loss.

**PRECEPTS OF SCRIPTURAL GIVING FOR CHRISTIANS** (2 Corinthians 8:7-15; 9:8; 13:14; Matthew 20:28; Philippians 2:6-8; Exodus 16:18; Mark 12:43,44)

In verses 7-15, the apostle used several cogent precepts to motivate the Corinthians to this good work of charity. First, he urged them to grow in the grace of giving just as they were growing in other gifts and graces (2 Corinthians 8:7). The Corinthians abounded in faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence and love. They were really charismatic and fervent but appeared slow when it came to practical sharing of their substance. We learn that our spiritual growth should not be lopsided; we must grow and abound in every virtue. Christian giving is a virtue we all need to develop and sustain.

Second, he pointed out the example of our Lord Jesus who gave up His heavenly riches and became poor so that we can be rich. The Son of God became the Son of man so that we could become sons of God. Christ is our perfect Example (2 Corinthians 8:9; 9:15). The example of the churches of Macedonia was a pattern present-day Christians should emulate.

Third, there must be willingness, good intention and zeal to begin the good work. It was necessary for them to perform what they purposed, and finish what they had begun (2 Corinthians 8:10,11). It is not enough to have good desires, there must be a performance of that which is purposed.

Fourth, there should be mutual dependence in the body of Christ. God does not share financial resources
equally among His children. His design is that the strong should support the weak and those who have excess should supply the lack of those who do not have enough. It would be recalled that the brethren in Jerusalem for whom contributions were solicited once had enough. At the inception of the church, they pooled resources together and none of them lacked (Acts 2:44-46; 4:34-37). But things changed and there was need among them. The needy person today can become the possessor of great wealth tomorrow. So, we should exercise caution in the way we treat those who have little of this world’s goods. Let our abundance supply their want today so that tomorrow, if there is lack, their abundance may also supply our need. The contribution of relief by the Gentile churches for the brethren in Jerusalem illustrates the interdependence of the church worldwide. Believers belong to one body and what a section lacks, the other supplies.

**Question 4:** *What are the precepts used by the Apostles to stir up the Corinthian Churches to give unto the brethren in Jerusalem?*

**PRACTICAL SINCERITY AND INTEGRITY IN MONEY MATTERS** (2 Corinthians 8:16-24; Romans 12:17; 14:18; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-10; Philippians 2:25; 2 Corinthians 7:4,14; Revelation 17:17)

The apostle showed a pattern of transparency and integrity in handling money in the church. Rather than handle the contribution of the churches directly, he set up a team of honest men with proven integrity to be in charge. This way, there was a system of checks and balances to prevent misappropriation. This arrangement also freed Paul from any accusation of personal enrichment from the proceeds of the people. It is the duty of all Christians to act prudently in money matters to forestall suspicion. While it is needful to act uprightly in the sight of God, we must also endeavour to provide things honest in the sight of men. An honest character and a pure conscience are requisites for usefulness in Christian service.

Paul refused to have the entire management of the
funds (1 Corinthians 16:3,4). Though he was honest, he permitted the Corinthian church to appoint someone among them whom they trusted to join in managing the funds. He knew his enemies may find occasion to accuse him falsely. He therefore insisted on having someone appointed by the churches to handle the contributions. In our dispensation, when large sums of money are committed to ministers for gospel projects, it is wise to follow Paul’s example for the sake of accountability and scrutiny. Ministers should commit financial matters to trusted and faithful hands to avoid any occasion for slander. Our usefulness as ministers depends on our irreproachable character. Transparency in life and money matters should be the watch-phrase for every heaven-minded believer and minister.

**Question 5: What can ministers and believers learn from the way Paul handled money in the early church?**
LESSON 672

THE PRACTICE OF ACCEPTABLE GIVING

MEMORY VERSE: “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 9:1-15

The scriptural precept of sharing our material substance with the needy occupies a place of prominence in Christ’s teaching and the apostles’ exhortation to believers (Luke 6:38; 1 John 3:17). In the preceding chapter, Apostle Paul attributed the generous liberality of the Macedonian church to “the grace of God bestowed” on them. Therefore, the basic condition for acceptable giving is genuine salvation experience.

Question 1: What is the basic condition for acceptable giving in the sight of God?

Apostle Paul, in our text, was very earnest in articulating the importance of giving to needy saints. He also clearly outlined the acceptable way of performing this Christian obligation so that it can be most profitable to both the giver and the beneficiaries. He underscored how acceptable giving brings glory to God.

PRINCIPLES OF ACCEPTABLE GIVING IN THE CHURCH (2 Corinthians 9:1-6; Romans 15:25,26; 2 Corinthians 8:2; Galatians 6:10)

The basis of Paul’s appeal for freewill offering from the Corinthians was the need to send material relief to the saints in Jerusalem, consequent upon the famine there (Romans 15:25,26). It is obvious from our text that the church at Achaia and that of Macedonia had needs of their own. In fact, out of their “deep poverty”, the Macedonian church “abounded unto the riches of their liberality” (2 Corinthians 8:2). Their exemplary giving teaches us that it is wrong to think
that we must satisfy all our needs before we can give, either to finance a gospel project or meet the urgent needs of our brethren. Contrariwise, occasions that call for our giving should be regarded as opportunities to prove our unconditional obedience to the word of God. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”. If we pray for, and receive the grace of acceptable giving, we will always be looking for opportunity to give.

The apostle’s appeal was addressed to the church in Achaia. No doubt, there must have been members in that church who were economically better off than others. However, no economic group was particularly recognized and none was excluded. The tendency to refrain from giving generously until we are personally recognized or isolated into a special group falls short of biblical examples. Also, no one is exempted from giving because of his or her low economic status. The truth is, God does not prize the size of what we give but the faith which underlies our giving. The sacrificial giving of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:9-16) and the widow who cast only a mite into the treasury that was commended by Christ reveal godly attitudes in giving that believers need to emulate.

**Question 2: Mention at least three important principles to be observed in giving acceptably to God.**

**PROPERTIES OF ACCEPTABLE GIFTS** (2 Corinthians 9:2,7-9; Hebrews 10:24; Proverbs 27:17; Matthew 25:41-46; Proverbs 11:25)

From the text, it is apparent that the church in Achaia had an earlier notice and had promised enthusiastically to make the contribution now being demanded. Their earlier overwhelming response to Paul’s appeal provided effective basis of his challenge to their sister church in Macedonia. He puts it thus: “your zeal hath provoked very many”. The situation here is neither that of carnal comparison nor of unhealthy competition. Instead, it is a commendable example of how our action and commitment to the
Lord can be instrumental in provoking our brethren to greater love for God, commitment to His church and other good works (Hebrews 10:24). Such mutual encouragement is one of the benefits of Christian fellowship. We must always consider how our words and actions may affect the brethren and the glory of God in the church.

“Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before…” (verse 5). Sending Titus and some brethren to the Corinthians ahead of time underlines an important property of an acceptable gift – that of being deliberate and free, not imposed or extorted under pressure. The notice beforehand would enable “every man (to give) according as he purposeth in his heart.” Acceptable giving should be thoughtfully determined.

Besides, it must also be free from every form of coercion or competition with others, “not grudgingly or of necessity” but cheerfully. Also, it should be bountiful. The bountifulness of the gift must be relative, being defined by both the giver’s ability to give and by the size of the need of the person to be relieved or the cost of the project.

The Scripture reveals that the bountifulness of our gift connects with the richness of divine blessing we expect from our giving. The Apostle employed the agricultural imagery of sowing and reaping to drive home his point. “But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (verse 6). A farmer who expects a bountiful harvest is careful about the quality and quantity of the seed he sows.

**Question 3: Mention three important properties of an acceptable gift in God’s sight.**

Giving to the needy and for the support of gospel projects is an expression of the believer’s confidence in God’s ability and in the integrity of His word. Giving,
particularly when it is not bound by compulsion of duty or done to get the applause of fellow men, ranks high in God’s sight as a distinguishing characteristic of His children. On the other hand, insensitivity to the plight of our fellow men or the cause of the gospel will attract His displeasure (Proverbs 21:13; Matthew 25:41-46). It is an evidence of the sincerity of our Christian profession (James 1:27). Selfless giving to the needy brings divine favour, mercy and prosperity upon the giver (Isaiah 58:10; Proverbs 11:25), besides securing peace and safety (Psalm 41:11).

**Question 4:** Mention other places in the Bible where blessing and favour are promised to those who give to the needy or the work of the gospel.

**PROFITS OF ACCEPTABLE GIVING** (2 Corinthians 9:10-15; Psalm 112:9; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Romans 5:17; 6:23)

The Scripture promises good return on investment for giving to the needy or gospel projects. “Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness” (verse 10).

Faith in the infallible word of God frees us from the wrong notion that we become poorer when we give bountifully to the cause of the gospel or the needy. As a seed sown into the soil would eventually germinate and yield fruits, whatever we give acceptably is far from being lost. A farmer may choose to eat all his grains, but he will be wiser and richer by deferring his enjoyment and sowing them. Rather than being impoverished, the resultant harvest will be greater than what was sown.

Thus, acceptable giving does more than enrich the giver. One, it glorifies God by yielding many thanksgivings unto His holy Name by the gratitude of beneficiaries of the gift. Two, there is joy in those who are relieved by the gift. Three, those who promote the collection of the gifts are fulfilled. Four, the bond of unity and mutual concern is strengthened (1
Corinthians 12:26). Five, all who love the Lord will be happy that the will of God is done and the cause of the gospel advanced. Besides, it is a demonstration of God’s grace in the church.

**Question 5: Explain how the practice of acceptable giving brings praise to God and joy to men.**

Apart from the blessing of obedience to God, the prayer of the recipients for givers brings further blessings. Those who are relieved by the generosity of the givers can best recompense their benefactors through prayers.

Finally, the Apostle ends his address with a note of exultant prayer: “**Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.**” His heart must have zeroed in upon the love of God expressed in the gift of His only begotten Son – Jesus Christ. While he spoke of the necessity of sacrificially ministering to one another, he must have thought upon the greatness of the sacrifice of Christ and how incomparable it is with our call to sacrifice. “**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).

A sinner, being destitute of the treasure of God’s grace cannot give acceptably. He must first receive the “unspeakable gift” of God – our Lord Jesus Christ. Then, he is qualified to give of his substance with faith in the riches of God’s grace and faithfulness.

**Question 6: What is the greatest gift a man can receive from God and what is its effect in man’s ability to give acceptably?**

Faith in God’s omnipotence and faithfulness will lead us to liberal, cheerful and thoughtful giving and position us for the limitless possibilities of God’s temporal and eternal blessings. “**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**.”
LESSON 673
SAINTS' SPIRITUAL WARFARE

MEMORY VERSE: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:3,4).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

One ill in the Corinthian church which Paul the apostle tackled in the text was that she harboured false apostles who doubled as critics of his Christ-like lifestyle and soul-saving ministry. They alleged that when he was present with them, he would appear low and humble in disposition but when absent, he would write with authority which they felt was not only fickle but also an expression of pride and carnality. They stopped short of calling him a hypocrite who walked in the flesh.

The Apostle responded to the slander by justifying his meekness and gentleness towards them as Christ-like. Since Christ, whose example he was following, was intolerant of sin by His act of cleansing the temple, the Apostle feared he might demonstrate similar Christ-like boldness towards false apostles who misunderstood his change of disposition as being carnal and self-seeking. Like Christ and Paul, Christian servants must be lowly in heart and lifestyle while growing intolerant of sin and falsehood. They must be careful in handling information about their spiritual leaders to avoid doing the devil’s work of peddling falsehood. If anything, the Apostle recognised that falsehood was a tool the devil wanted to use to cast aspersions on his apostleship and ministry. Thus, this study furnishes us with the reality of an on-going spiritual conflict, its essence, proper disposition for successful execution and the potency of weapons at the disposal of saints.
Question 1: Mention three Christ-like attributes of Paul the apostle in the text that should characterise all believers.

PORTRAIT OF A SAINTLY WARRIOR (2 Corinthians 10:1; 6:1; Numbers 32:27; Jeremiah 1:10; 23:29; Matthew 11:28,29; 1 Corinthians 4:1,2; 1 Peter 2:22,23)

Since sin originates from Satan, he inspires and controls sinners to live contrary to the plan and purpose of God. Sinners are enemies of God and Satan finds them as tools with which he fights against God’s plan of redemption for mankind. In this regard, false prophets were the tools he used to fight against the soul-saving ministry of the Apostle. No matter how Christ-like a believer or minister of God may become, the devil will still engage him in battle. Satan always hates people and things God loves. He is angry that the believer is not only off his hook, but also entitled to great privileges he has lost permanently. It grieves him that the genuine Christian is in partnership with God to continually liberate hell-bound captives. His main grouse is not with the economy or career of the believer but his spiritual life and soul-saving activities.

Satan’s attempt at any of the former is merely a means to an end: he contends for the precious soul. However, the believer has a sure anchor in God who has always made good His promises to defend, uphold, enhance and glorify His saints (John 10:10; 2 Timothy 4:18). Each believer should therefore confidently maintain a consistent conviction, comportment as well as commitment to the Lord.

Unless one is holy, he will always be on the losing end in spiritual warfare. Therefore, saintliness is a precondition for effectiveness in spiritual battle. Like Paul, the lifestyle of a believer should follow the example of our Saviour and Lord. “Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ...” (2 Corinthians 10:1). While meekness is the strength of the spirit that enables and empowers a believer to calmly accept or suffer wrong
without bitterness, gentleness implies mildness in temperament and character which manifests in tenderness and care for the feelings of others. They both infuse a humble disposition and an amiable quality in a personality. The Greek culture to which Corinth belonged normally equated these virtues with weakness. However, they are honoured by God, displayed by Christ and come as fruit of the Spirit. In Christian service, they engender a self-effacing trait that magnifies the Lord rather than the minister or his gifts (Numbers 12:3; Matthew 5:5; 11:29; Galatians 5:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:7).

**Question 2: Why is it important for saints to be meek and gentle?**

These attributes are very important for a believer because they help him to submit to the word of God unreservedly on all matters (James 1:21). Two, they are highly valued and appreciated spiritual ornaments for the discerning (1 Peter 3:4). Three, they facilitate cordiality in Christian fellowship as they enhance forbearance and forgiveness, lubricants that reduce friction in relationships (Ephesians 4:12; Colossians 3:12-15). Four, they help a believer to be considerate of others in recognition of his own unenviable past. This, in turn, inspires patience and hope that current sinners could be prospective converts and potential instruments for God’s glory (Titus 3:2). Five, they are powerful agents for the restoration of the faltering and halting (Galatians 6:1). Six, they are essential for fighting the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:10-12). Seven, they are evidence of divine wisdom (James 3:13,17). Since these two are part of the fruit of the Spirit, they are actually inseparable in the real sense. The absence of one puts a question mark on the authenticity of the other in the life of a believer.

**Question 3: Briefly comment on the lifestyle of a saintly warrior.**

Being conscious of the continuing and unending nature of the devil’s antagonistic schemes, the saint is always on guard and does not open the door of his soul to Satan. He realises that he who fights on the
side of God cannot be a property of the devil. “He that is born of God does not commit sin” (Ephesians 4:27; 1 John 3:8-10). Knowing that the offer of sin is a snare for the soul of the saint, he vehemently refuses it on a continuous basis.

The saintly warrior cannot afford to be ignorant of the devices of the enemy through false brethren, false vision and prophecies, false ministries and miracles, and damning suggestions from dear ones (Nehemiah 6:10-14; Job 2:9; 2 Corinthians 2:11; Galatians 2:4; Revelation 2:6). While not being a victim of the spirit of suspicion, agents of the enemy can be known by their fruits, tried by the illumination of the word of God and by the operation of appropriate spiritual gifts (2 Samuel 22:29; Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 7:16-23).

A saintly warrior does not love the world. Rather, he is so committed to pleasing the One who has chosen him to be a soldier, by devoting quality time to hearing, reading, meditating on the word of God and fellowshipping with the Lord (2 Timothy 2:4; 1 John 2:15-17).

Being so persuaded of the unfailing promises of God, the battle-ready saint is so courageous to lead the Christian life and to fight the battle of the Lord. He is always spiritually kitted, being always sensitive to the Lord (Joshua 1:5-9; Ephesians 6:10-18).

PURPOSE OF SAINTS’ SPIRITUAL WARFARE
(2 Corinthians 10:1-3; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 12:1; Romans 8:5; 1 Corinthians 4:15-17; 11:1,2; 1 Timothy 6:12)

Using diverse means, Satan tries to truncate or corrupt a Christian’s service or ministry through distraction, temptations, persecutions, aspersions and heresy (Luke 8:12; Acts 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 2 Timothy 3:10-12). Paul had to contend for the spiritual welfare of believers who were being swayed by certain Judaisers. From the beginning, Paul had tutored his converts, both by doctrine and practice, to live according to Christ’s superior admonitions at the expense of their debased national culture. In
like manner, ministers and workers in contemporary church setting should preach against cultural practices which contradict the doctrines of Christ. These false doctrine peddlers vaunted and bragged about their credentials which, due to their background Greek culture, appealed to some members in the Corinthian church and attracted them to the soul-damning heresies.

**Question 4: Give reasons for Paul’s toughness through letters.**

Being a very conscientious and faithful apostle, Paul’s over-riding consideration and concern in ministry was to make his converts full followers of Christ alone (1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 2 Corinthians 11:2,3). Now, he was apprehensive that they might be deceived and lured away from Christ into perdition. The change in situation necessitated a change in disposition and approach. While he was with them, he was weaning them for Christ, but with this sad development, he had to war with their enemy to claim them back to the Deliverer.

This challenges contemporary believers to double efforts to confront strongholds over the tempted, tried, persecuted or afflicted in the churches; to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

Spiritual battles can also be fought to claim promises for personal, family, financial or ministerial breakthroughs and victories over challenges in order to appropriate God’s provisions and promises. In addition, Christian workers and leaders have to engage in rigorous spiritual battles in the course of the Kingdom expansion campaigns. Reaching regions hitherto unreached and breaking new grounds in evangelistic outreaches requires that we neutralise and overpower the evil princes that might have been in charge hitherto.

Spiritual battles can be quite intense and involving. But they cannot be won with physical weapons. George Duffield appropriately captures it this way:
“Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Stand in His strength alone; The arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own: Put on the gospel armour, and watching unto prayer; Where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there”.

**Question 5:** Comment on the contrast between physical and spiritual weapons in ministry.

Paul’s antagonists boasted of their learning, exulting rhetoric and oratorical prowess. Actually, there is nothing wrong with these as long as they are subsumed under the superior weapons of the Spirit. In fact, it will be tantamount to indolence and parochialism for any contemporary Christian to discourage literacy or good sermon delivery on the pretext of spirituality (Acts 7:22; 1 Corinthians 7:21-24). Paul himself had all that his antagonists prided themselves on – respectable Jewish background, enviable learning and certification, letters of commendation from the apostles in Jerusalem, and more. Yet, he downplayed all these for the excellency of Christ (Acts 15:22-29; 22:3; 2 Corinthians 11:22-27; Philippians 3:7,8). Christians should develop themselves in any legitimate exercise for greater usefulness. Good as these are however, they are still ineffective in the defence of the gospel or the onslaught against the hordes of hell without spiritual weapons. “**Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God**” (Ephesians 6:13).

Paul the apostle made bold to debunk the allegation that he and fellow ministers lived by the dictates of or “**walked according to the flesh**”. He expressed this clearly in his epistle to the Roman believers. “**Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live**” (Romans 8:12,13). Believers live as humans (walk in the flesh) but “**do not war after the flesh**”; they do not fight physical battles. The servants of God must not strive. We fight spiritual battles with spiritual weapons.
POWER OF SAINTS’ SPIRITUAL WEAPONS (2 Corinthians10:4-6; Joshua 6:20; Psalm 110:2; Isaiah 41:14-16; Jeremiah 23:29; Zechariah 4:6,7; 9:10; Acts 13:12; 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Hebrews 4:12; 11:30-33)

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds...” (2 Corinthians 10:4). Physically, a stronghold is a fortified place that is secured from incursion by perceived enemies who seek to capture their targeted preys. In spiritual terms, it is a place where a particular anti-gospel group, activity or set of opinion or dogma thrives. It generally keeps the inmates in check, limits their liberty, and puts them in bondage. The devil often builds invisible stronghold of culture, traditions, philosophies or religions around some sinful captives either against their will, with their consent or as a consequence of covenant entered with their dead or living representatives.

The truth however is, saints of God can withstand any wile or antic of the devil. By wielding the sevenfold weapon of truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, helmet of salvation, the word of God and prayer. Besides, fasting and prayer, praises, the blood of the Lamb and the name of Jesus are unfailing weapons at the disposal of the righteous (Ephesians 6:10-18; Matthew 17:21; Revelation 12:11; Philippians 2:9-11).

No matter how formidable an evil stronghold may be, God’s army can penetrate, crack and bring it down. “Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David” (2 Samuel 5:7).

God-given spiritual weapons are potent in “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”. There exist imaginations (thoughts that are contrary to the plans and purposes of God), things and personalities that assume positions above the word of God, and seek to neutralize the knowledge of God people hear to reduce or prevent it
from bearing fruit and also prevent the spread of the gospel. Though “the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” (Psalm 2:1-4; 83:4-8,17,18; 21:11), the Lord will laugh His foes to derision and accomplish His purposes when saints embark on spiritual warfare. Through the spiritual warfare of the early church, Paul, who “verily thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus...” became an apostle who bore His name to the Gentiles (Acts 26:9). As saints lead godly lifestyle and faithfully preach and pray, current persecutors can emerge as intercontinental preachers like Paul.

The weapons are also capable of revenging all disobedience to the gospel by false teachers of any sort and in any place in this gospel dispensation. “And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled” (2 Corinthians 10:6). The incidents of Bar-Jesus, the Philippian damsel, Herod and other catalogue of exploits in Scripture, as well as those through contemporary anointed ministers convince and assure of the power of spiritual weapons to revenge disobedience or resistance to the gospel (Acts 8:9-13,19-24; 13:6-12; 17: 29-34; 19:19,20).

Question 6: Why is the believer’s obedience an indispensable condition for divine vengeance on the disobedient?

However, Paul placed divine vengeance on condition of complete obedience of the Corinthians to the gospel. God is not unrighteous to fight for a disobedient believer against a disobedient demon or false prophet. All children of God obey Him in all things. Those who disobey God’s precept on restitution, marriage, holy living, and evangelism, among others lose the right to enforce obedience and enjoy divine vengeance on the devil and his agents.
LESSON 674
TOTAL FREEDOM FROM SIN

MEMORY VERSE: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).

TEXT: 1 John 3:1-10

John the beloved, in the text, celebrates the glorious freedom everyone who is saved enjoys in Christ. It amazes him that God takes the initiative to forgive sinners who are by nature given to wicked works. Considering the justice of God which stipulates death penalty for every sin that man commits, nobody on earth – as long as he is conceived and born by a woman – would escape His judgment. But His supreme love chose to punish sin in the sinner’s Substitute, thereby giving opportunity for man to enjoy His salvation. Love made Jesus to accept this divine verdict of suffering death penalty for the sins of mankind. Truly, there is no “greater love” than this: the righteous dying for the unrighteous. Love is strong as death.

Question 1: Describe the wonder of God’s love as manifested in your life, family or in the life of a fellow believer.

For love, He bore the pains of crucifixion and died to rescue us from present and eternal doom. He also rose to give us strength to live a life of total freedom from sin. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1).

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH GOD’S LOVE (1 John 3:1-3; John 3:16; 1:12; Romans 5:5-8; Galatians 3:26; 4:6; Romans 8:15; 2 Peter 1:4; John 8:36; Romans 8:2; Galatians 5:1)

The word “behold” summons our attention to the gracious work God’s love has wrought in us by reason of which we are now distinct in character and lifestyle.
from the people of the world. God’s love is so deep that we cannot fathom it. The manner of love which God has bestowed upon us is so wonderful and unique that eternity will be too small for us to unveil its mystery. It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us. The Bible says, “Scarcely, for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die”. Every one of us would have been banished to hell forever were it not for the mercy and love of God.

**Question 2: What are the steps a sinner/backslider needs to take to be set free from sin?**

In love, God makes sinners to become his sons/daughters. Though the Scripture declares that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; and that the wages of sin is death, God planned man’s salvation even while the sinner is still relishing his sinful pleasures. This was the reason He gave us the greatest gift on earth. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Jesus suffered, died and rose again so as to forgive, cleanse and save every sinner from sin and make him a child of God. This gracious transformation God does in the lives of people does not come by wishful thinking. It happens through the sinner’s acknowledgment of the great love and sacrifice of Christ at Calvary, praying for forgiveness and cleansing in the shed blood of Christ, and receiving Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). The words, “becomes the sons of God”, reveal that all are not children of God (Ephesians 2:3; 5:6; Colossians 3:6; Luke 15:11-24) but are, at the point of repentance, transformed from who and what they were to another spiritual state of newness of life and character. Everyone who repents of his sin and receives Christ by faith is not only set free from sin but also given power to live a new life of
righteousness. “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”.

DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF GOD’S CHILDREN (1 John 3:2-10; Psalm 86:5; 1 John 1:9; Romans 8:16; 6:1,2,18,20,22; Titus 2:11,12; John 8:32; Galatians 5:1)

The major identifying mark of every child of God is total freedom from sin. So, the greatest title anyone can obtain in this world is that of being called a child of the Most High God. Many religious people do not have the assurance of total freedom from sin and being called children of God. They cannot boldly declare with other children of God that “Beloved, now are we the sons of God”. Incidentally, it is this assurance that births the hope of seeing Christ at His coming, that makes believers bold to affirm their conviction that “we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is”.

Question 3: How may one know that he/she has become a child of God?

Assurance of salvation is a function of faith in God’s truthfulness and power to do whatever He says. He cannot lie. When He declared in the Scriptures that He is “ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon [Him]”; that, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”, He fulfils His part in the lives of those who do their part by genuinely repenting of their sins. And when we humbly pray to Him, He answers because He delights in our freedom from sin. We know this from His word, not from our feelings or the whispers of the devil, the liar, who seeks to confuse us.

Besides, God sends the Spirit of His Son into the heart of everyone who is converted to assure him that he is now His child. Those who do not have this initial deposit of the Spirit of God that “beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God” do not belong to Christ. It is this same Spirit that kindles holy passion
and love for God, His word and people in the heart of the believer. By His operation, the believer who is set free from sin hungers to know more of God through regular fellowship attendance and constant reading, studying or listening, meditating and praying—in the word of God. As a child of God, he finds the Spirit helping him in prayer, calling “Abba, Father”. As a new creature, God hears and answers his prayer of faith as this is the only communication line through which he can receive more grace for abundant and victorious Christian living. Thus set free from sin, the believer is to seek to fit into the mould of Christ, to be conformed to His life of righteousness as the express image of the Almighty God.

**Question 4:** Mention two erroneous beliefs that encourage loose living by professing ‘believers’.

God does not have any sinning child. Those who are not free from sin are not His children. In the days of John the beloved, the Gnostics taught that conduct is not important to the spiritual man and that whatever actions he puts forth, he can never be defiled. There is modern-day Gnostics. Preachers who tell us that we can live anyhow as long as we believe in Jesus are “*forgers of lies*” (Job 13:4). It is not only what we believe, how we behave also matters. That is why Apostle John devoted time to proving that there is a marked difference in lifestyle and conduct between those who are saved and those who are not free from sin. And believers today should not be deceived by the spurious claims of so-called believers who still live in sin and claim to have received the grace of God. If anything, the grace of God teaches us that “*denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*”.

Loose living encouraged by the doctrine of eternal security of believers is the bane of present-day Christianity. The Apostle Paul knew that everyone who receives God’s grace is free from sin. He says, “*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we,*
that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” It is the height of self-delusion to live in sin among the choristers, ushers, ministers, workers, and feel comfortable that you are a child of God. Sin is “the transgression of the law” of God or lawlessness. A saint cannot engage in illicit affairs or impregnate another man’s daughter, tell lies, steal, curse, fight, or kill.

The uniform testimony of Scripture is that it is not possible to be a sinner and a saint at the same time. “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness... For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness... But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life”.

The word of God is so clear on the standard of conduct expected from professing believers. Those who really abide in Christ do not sin. Those who claim that they are in Christ and are living in sin are deceiving themselves. He that does righteousness is righteous; for a righteous man is known by the righteous acts which he does. For if a man sins, it is evident that he is not abiding in Christ. To taste of eternal salvation requires that we abide in Christ till the end. Abiding in Christ is not only evidence that the believer is totally free from sin but it is also an antidote to falling into sin and be lost. “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him...Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin... he cannot sin, because he is born of God”. It is dreadful to be given this portion to read at the gate of heaven as reason for disqualification from entering in. But the truth is that one cannot claim ignorance of it anymore. If it were not possible to be free from sin Christ would not have declared “sin no more” and “go and sin no more” to those who received forgiveness from Him before His crucifixion (John 5:14; 8:11). Obviously, His death and resurrection place us on a higher spiritual platform to live a life of complete freedom from sin.
It is a terrible thing to be ensnared into sin. Sin stings like scorpion and injects poison into the spiritual life blood of compromisers. It should not be once named among us “as becometh saints”. Sin is horrible. It grieves God, annoys the Spirit of God and displeases the Saviour. Sin is deadly: it spreads and kills with reckless speed. It were better for a believer to die than for him to taste the bitter dregs of sin. So, the believer should hate sin and steer clear of it. Those who toy with sin and promise themselves to repent later are only gambling with their chances of seeing God on the last day because they may never return. Therefore, to yield to the seductions of sin is to secure accommodation in eternal hell.

Today, many people play religion. They love outward show but they lack true freedom from sin. Such people may make loud professions, shout hallelujah a thousand times and attend every Christian conference, they cannot claim to have experienced scriptural Christianity unless they are free – totally free from sin. If we do anything in the name of religion but lack personal freedom from sin, we are deceiving ourselves. True Christianity is centred on entire freedom from sin. Anyone who has not reached the point of having nothing to do with sin, has not discovered or experienced God’s great purpose for his life.

The Bible has therefore given us a clear yardstick for determining false and true profession: “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.” From the total revelation of Scripture, we have seen that we are either children of God or children of the devil. It is important that we examine ourselves lest any of us become lost through the deceitfulness of sin.

**PURPOSE OF CHRIST’S SACRIFICE** (1 John 3:5,7-9; 2 Peter 1:3; Deuteronomy 30:6; 1 Peter 1:15,16; Matthew 5:8; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:23,24; 2 Corinthians 7:1)
From our text, Christ “is pure”, “in him is no sin” and “he is righteous”. The uniform testimony of Scripture is that He lived a sinless life. He once enquired from His critics, “which of you convinceth me of sin?” His enemies confessed that they could find no sin in Him. Pilate said: “I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man”. Believers are saved to pattern their lives after Christ who is our perfect Example. They are saved to do righteousness and good works as He did. Anyone who does evil and sins shows he is of the devil because Christ does not save us to live like the devil.

Question 5: Mention the benefits sinners and saints can enjoy from Christ’s sacrifice.

Christ was “manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.” He came to the world to save sinners. His entire mission was opposed to sin. To commit sin is to render the death of Jesus useless; to run counter to His holy nature and to prove that we do not know Him (1 John 3:8,9). Those who sin belong to the devil. A true believer “doth not commit sin”. Sin is so strange to saints that they cannot speak a sinful word or act in a sinful manner. A true child of God cannot touch sin. “He cannot sin because he is born of God”. He has been “renewed... after the image of him that created him in true holiness”. He is so filled with the nature of God that he cannot sin. Therefore, those who sin cannot claim that they belong to God.

Christ was “manifested to take away our sins”, not only our outward sins but also our inbred sins. Doing good works and loving our brother with uninterrupted pure motive can only happen when we are sanctified. At sanctification, He destroys the rock-nature of inward sin and implants His nature of righteousness that makes us obey and love Him perfectly. God sanctifies the believer who hungers and prays earnestly by faith for this experience.

Questions 6: Why is sanctification an indispensable experience every believer must possess?
The declaration of the Scripture concerning this indispensable experience should unsettle those who are contented with just being saved. Christ says, “the pure in heart” are blessed because it is only they that can see God. Where then is the blessedness of your Christian profession if you cannot see God at the end of life, having failed to obtain this experience that Christ’s sacrifice has procured for you? How do you hope to get to heaven having not possessed the experience and living in “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord?” Hearts that brew hatred, malice, lusts, evil thoughts and devices, etc. disqualify from seeing the Lord. To be correct in comportment and Christian decorum when anger, jealousy, and stubbornness are struggling for preeminence in the heart are signs you may not be there to answer during the roll call that will be taken in heaven one of these days. God has a holy intelligence that decodes actions and motives behind them. He knows those who are His, those who He has cleansed from outward and inward sins.

Those who are totally set free and who hope to see the Lord on the last day do not only possess the experience of sanctification but also keep watching, examining and purifying themselves in preparedness for the imminent return of our Lord so as to be found worthy to enjoy the promised inheritance of saints in heaven. “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” “Dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”
LESSON 675
THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

MEMORY VERSE: “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).

TEXT: Galatians 5:22,23; John 15:1-8

In Christendom, there is an emphasis on Christian character. Everyone appears to know that the true New Testament Christian life has a striking manifestation of a Christ-like pattern of character. The Scripture gives this character-pattern a pungent expression in Peter’s second epistle: “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-8).

Question 1: What is meant by the expression “fruit of the Spirit”?

These true Christian virtues are collectively called, “the fruit of the Spirit” and couched in the best words in Galatians 5:22,23. Here, we have the exact definition of the total Christian personality and a beautiful resumé of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount presented in a most digestible form. It is the character of Christ reproduced in the Christian through the Holy Spirit. It is as though all New Testament principles are wrapped up there.

Some people produce the fruit of human efforts or what may be best described as “works of the human spirit”. Such people strive, endeavour, and by a great exercise of the will produce some fruits – good culture, courtesy, calmness (outward), kindness, endurance –
which are only commendable to fellow human beings. But these products of natural effort are not the fruit of the Spirit revealed in Scripture. They come from man’s labour. They are more of man’s invention. That is why we call them fruits of human effort or works of the human spirit.

Works belong to the workshop, whereas fruits belong to the garden. Fruit is the silent growth of the abounding life, whereas, work comes from the skilful factory hand. The presence of fruit – the fruit of the Spirit – assigns the grace of the Christian character to the true Source – God.

THE NATURE OF THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT
(Galatians 5:22,23; Ephesians 5:9)

In direct contrast to the works of the flesh, Paul the apostle, by inspiration, states the nine fruits produced by the Holy Spirit in the believer. They are: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance…” (Galatians 5:22,23). They are collectively called, “the fruit”, implying that none is without the other and cannot be whole without others. Therefore, everyone who claims to have the Spirit of God must possess “the fruit” in its entirety.

Being the kernel of Christian character and embodiment of all virtues, a thorough analysis of each fruit is here commended: First, love (1 Corinthians 13; Romans 13:10; John 13:34; 1 John 4:7-12). It is interesting to note that the first of these fruits is love.

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

In reality, love is the very basic essential life of the living Christ which expresses itself in all the nine fruits. A Christian writer once wrote how the eight other fruits of the Spirit are anchored in love. He said: “Joy is love exulting; peace is love reposing; longsuffering is love enduring; gentleness is love refined; meekness is love with a bowed head; goodness is love in action; temperance is true self-love; and faith is love confiding; so that the whole sum of Christian living is just loving.” Second, joy (Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 15:16;
John 16:22; Acts 8:8; 1 Peter 1:8). Joy is more than happiness. It comes from the Lord and is anchored in Him. Jesus is the source of joy. The way into this joy is repentance and practical confession of faith in Christ. Money, mansions, might or material wealth never gives this joy. They all give transient happiness which is not better than misery. The book of Acts talks about people being filled with joy in the Holy Ghost. After Samaria received salvation, “there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:6). Paul said, “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17).

This joy transcends troubles and challenges of life; it leaps over tough circumstances and abides through problems, pains and even death. It is unspeakable!

Third, peace (Philippians 4:7; Romans 5:1; Psalm 119:165; Isaiah 26:3). Peace is regarded as one of the supreme attainments. It is the state whereby the soul and spirit of man is so imbued with the presence of God’s gracious Spirit that he is not easily provoked. Peace is the selfless, self-giving, self-losing, self-forgetting and self-sacrificing love that is manifest in spite of all adversities of life. Jesus is the source of true peace. He is called the Prince of Peace. If the heart is opened to receive the risen Christ, He comes in, speaking peace – just as He came again and again to His frightful disciples after His resurrection saying, “Peace be unto you”. The peace He imparts is the quiet, potent, gracious attitude of serenity and goodwill that meets the bitterness of others with good cheer and repose. This peace is calm in crisis, untroubled in trial and determined in disaster. The peace of Christ transcends trouble; it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, longsuffering (1 Corinthians 13:4; Colossians 1:11; 3:12; 2 Peter 3:9; Exodus 34:6). Longsuffering is more commonly called endurance or patience. Longsuffering is the powerful capacity of selfless love to bear all things and continue in adverse situations. It is a generous willingness to try
to understand awkward people, disturbing events and unwelcome situations that God allows to come our way. This quality of character was beautifully displayed in Jesus Christ “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame…” (Hebrews 12:2). Longsuffering possesses the benefits of discipline, development and direction.

Fifth, gentleness (1 Thessalonians 2:7,11; 2 Timothy 2:24; Psalm 18:35; James 3:17). Gentleness comes fifth in the package of the “fruit of the Spirit”. When love, joy, peace and longsuffering abound in the Christian’s heart, he is characterized by an unusual but essentially divine gentle lifestyle. Gentleness is God’s enduring quality in the centuries of His dealing with man. The gentleness of God has drawn man to Him with a bond stronger than steel. Gentleness, the fruit of the Spirit, is different from natural gentleness which is exclusively enjoyed by loved ones. Gentleness which grows out of the Spirit is enjoyed by all – our friends as well as our persecutors, revilers, scorners, scoffers and all who speak evil against us. Gentleness is loving, appreciating, caring, tending, accommodating and correcting a friend, child or partner in a firm manner.

Sixth, goodness (Genesis 45:5-8,15; 1 Samuel 24:17; Acts 7:60; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). Goodness is God’s special peculiarity and He puts a great emphasis upon it. When Jesus was physically in the world, it was reported in striking simplicity that He “went about doing good”. Goodness, the peculiar characteristic of Christ, comes from the life that has received of God’s abundant grace. The Christian whose life reflects goodness is one with a noble purpose, strong character, reliable conduct and trustworthy lifestyle. He is kind, good, gracious, generous, gentle, peaceful and joyful and in the business of making others happy. Goodness takes away any sense of pride or patronage.

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

The basis of our faith is love. The Christian who is full of faith, loves to the point of trusting and yielding himself faithfully to the service of the church and fellowmen. Faith, therefore is active. It puts the best construction on every situation. It searches for any hint of honour in others – men, the Church and God. Faith pushes on, perseveres and remains loyal even when there are reverses and disappointments.

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

Ninth, **temperance** (Titus 2:2; Proverbs 16:32; 2 Peter 1:5-7; James 3:2). Temperance is also called self-control, moderation or self-restraint. Temperance seems to be the last and crowning fruit of God’s Spirit. It is the outward sign of a well-disciplined life. Temperance means bringing the whole person – body, soul and spirit – under subjection and to do just what Christ wants him to do. That implies that the believer’s total personality – mind, emotion and will – is at Christ’s command. The entire body’s appetites, drives, desires, instincts are governed by God.

**Question 3:** **Explain the nature of any of the fruit of the Spirit you can remember.**

**CONDITIONS OF FRUIT-BEARING** (John 15:1-8; Psalm 1:1-3; John 12:24; Romans 7:4).
Good as the fruit of the Spirit is, some Christians still find it missing in their lives. Many think it is impossible for someone who has not been baptized in the Holy Spirit to bear the fruit of the Spirit. But this is wrong because the chain of virtues in Galatians 5:22,23 is simply referred to as the “fruit of the Spirit” and not ‘fruit of the baptism in the Holy Spirit’. The fact is that the virtues that are collectively so-called come from the Spirit of Christ that indwells the believer at the point he or she receives Christ as Lord and Saviour. This, therefore, explains that the bearing of the fruit is conditioned upon the possession of the salvation experience. At salvation, the Holy Spirit cultivates the ground of the heart of the saved soul to bring forth His fruit.

**Question 4: Mention some of the conditions for fruit-bearing.**

Mere membership of a church does not qualify anyone to bear the fruit of the Spirit, neither does tithing our income or being involved in church activities guarantee the bearing of the fruit of the Spirit. The journey to possessing the fruit begins with being born again. This means therefore, that everyone that would bear the fruit must first establish a living relationship with Christ, the Vine. He or she must be a branch grafted into the Vine that supplies life and nourishment (John 15:4,5). Second, there is the necessity of abiding in the Vine (verse 4). We must remain and be close to Christ to continue to bear fruit. The power to overcome sin, do good and flourish in the graces of Christ comes from Him. “**Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing**” (John 15:4,5).

Third, we must partake in the divine nature. Every living branch partakes of the nature of the vine and continually does so to remain alive. God’s nature of holiness must manifest in our lives before we can bear fruits unto holiness.
Fourth, we must hold fast to the Vine so as not to be plucked off by the violent efforts of storms and winds. We must walk and hold fast to the Master. Those who follow Him ‘afar’ stand the danger of being removed from the source of their strength and security.

Fifth, believers who wish to bring forth fruits unto righteousness must, as it were, be planted by God’s “brooks of honey and butter” (Job 20:17). For them the glorious Lord will be unto them “a place of broad rivers and streams” (Isaiah 33:21) where they drink consistently to the full.

Sixth, death to the old life (John 12:24). The old life is an impediment to growth in grace and fruitfulness. Sinful appetites and passions inhibit God’s grace so that it does not find full expression. Therefore, those who hope to flourish in God’s grace must put to death the old life of corruption (Colossians 3:5).

Seventh, fellowship and communion (Romans 7:4). It is a natural prerequisite that there cannot be fruitfulness in marriage without the union and fellowship of the couple. In the same breath, believers who wish to bear fruits of grace must be in regular and constant fellowship with Christ, the Bridegroom.

**BENEFITS OF THE FRUIT-BEARING LIFE** (John 15:7,8; Psalm 92:13,14; Ezekiel 47:12)

The fruit-bearing Christian is beautiful in the sight of God. He exudes fragrance that attracts God’s commendation and blessing. Unlike branches that are severed from the vine resulting in withering away, believers who remain with the Lord and consequently bear fruits enjoy abundance of the juice coming from the Vine.

**Question 5: Mention some of the benefits of the fruit-bearing Christian life.**

Christ, in the fifteenth chapter of John, commends fruit-bearing Christians and condemns fruitless ones. Among the many benefits of the fruit-bearing Christian life are, one, answer to prayers. “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask
what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). There is a pledge that heaven would listen to such believers who abide in Christ and are fruitful in Him – His ears are open to the righteous.

Two, God will be glorified in them. What more honour can be earned by a child of God than that His Father should be glorified in Him and he becomes His “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works”?

Three, that the believer bears fruits of grace, righteousness and good works makes him or her like trees (of righteousness) planted by the Lord where the glory of His grace is displayed.

Four, such shall be called disciples of Christ and shall be identified with the Lord – “so shall ye be my disciples”. By bearing fruit in Christ shall men know that we are His followers indeed; for by their fruits “ye shall know them”.

Finally, age shall not be a barrier to their fruitfulness. “Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing” (Psalm 92:13,14). They shall consistently enjoy God’s riches and abundance.
LESSON 676
PERSONAL EVANGELISM

MEMORY VERSE: “He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (John 1:41).

TEXT: John 1:35-51

The thrust of the text is the practical demonstration of an effective, easy and exemplary soul-winning strategy. Beginning with John the Baptist’s concise introduction of the Saviour – “Behold the Lamb of God” – five different souls, who later became apostles and pillars in the early church, were strategically won to become disciples of Jesus Christ. Andrew, one of the first two disciples who heard John’s timely declaration and became followers of Christ, was able to convince his own brother – Peter – to join him in the decision to become a disciple of the great Teacher.

Christ Himself did personal evangelism. After Andrew had brought Peter to Him, He won the heart of Philip almost effortlessly the following day. Filled with a strong conviction and overwhelming joy, Philip also was able to convince Nathaniel who was initially cynical and reluctant to heed the divine call. The uniqueness of this string of conversions lies in the peculiarity, simplicity, effectiveness of personal evangelism. Besides, the quality of the fruit produced is simply unsurpassed. These basic features make personal evangelism a mandatory, vital and indispensable method of soul-winning for every believer today.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM: MEANING AND MANDATE (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; John 15:16; Acts 1:8)

Question 1: What does personal evangelism mean?

Personal evangelism is the person-to-person sharing of the good news of salvation, with the aim of leading
a sinner to repentance and turning him wholly to
God through Jesus Christ. It is the easiest, cheapest
and most effective method of evangelism. It cannot be
easily outlawed by any ban on public preaching and
proclamation that may affect mass form of evangelism.
Through it, the seeker’s personal attention is gained,
doubts are cleared and the decision made becomes
solid and strong. It is the fastest and easiest way of
multiplying disciples and reaching any category of
individuals in the community.

Personal evangelism is Christ’s mandate to every
believer. While on earth, His primary preoccupation,
purpose, passion and focus was to seek and save
those who were lost in sin. “Jesus saith unto them,
My meat is to do the will of him that sent me,
and to finish his work” (John 4:34). Having paid the
greatest price and sacrifice to redeem lost humanity
from the bondage of sin and Satan, His parting charge
and challenge to every believer is: “Go ye into all the
world, and preach the gospel to every creature
(Mark 16:15). The manner and tone of the charge
reveals that it is urgent, compelling and mandatory.
Thus, the disciples who heard Jesus giving this charge
lived to fulfil it (Mark 16:20). The individual members
of the early Church also continued in the discharge
of this responsibility (Acts 8:4,30-36). Today, no
true disciple of Christ will neglect or undermine this
mandatory task. Obedience to the Great Commission
is demonstrated by individual believers reaching out
to sinners with the gospel message on a person-to-
person basis.

NECESSITY AND URGENCY OF PERSONAL
EVANGELISM (John 4:35; 9:4; Ezekiel 3:17-21;
Matthew 24:14).

There is a great and urgent need today for consecrated
Christians to give themselves to the task of personal
evangelism. The pitiable conditions and descriptions
of the sinners’ plight demand that every believer
should have an insatiable desire for the salvation
of souls. The fact and reality of hell as a place of
agonising torment and everlasting punishment in
unquenchable fire demand that soul-winning should be carried out daily, diligently, and seriously too (Mark 9:43-47; Luke 16:23; 2 Corinthians 5:11). The value of a soul surpasses all the riches of the whole world put together (Matthew 16:26). The precious blood of Christ was shed to secure its redemption (1 Peter 1:18,19).

It will be too late to reach out to these people after their death or the rapture. Therefore, each of us must take it upon ourselves as a matter of necessity and urgency to rescue these dying souls while there is time, for “the night cometh, when no man can work”. The time left for this job of eternal consequence is short (1 Corinthians 7:29-31). The human soul is the battleground between God and the devil. Sad enough, Satan seems to be gaining more ground in these last days through the proliferation of false religions and prophets who are speedily and zealously attracting blinded souls into their nets, making them twofold children of hell. Besides, there are millions of sinners and backsliders, who neither attend church nor any Christian programmes. Many of these die daily and go to hell. Unfortunately, some of them reside in our neighbourhoods, while others work in the same offices with us.

If, in a church of a hundred, standing believers can each endeavour to bring a soul to Christ in six months, it means that in one year, there will be four hundred genuine believers in the congregation. The seriousness and great concern of God to save sinners from the wrecking influences of sin and its damning consequences is revealed by His solemn charges (2 Timothy 4:1,2; Mark 16:15; Ezekiel 33:11-19) and His involvement in directing soul-winners to souls (Acts 8:26-29; 10:9-20; 16:9). The Lord Jesus Christ gave time and attention to win Philip, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, the thief on the cross and others. His desire to save souls made Him to die for the sins of the world (John 1:43; 4:7-28; Luke 19:1-10; 23:39-43; John 3:16).
Question 2: How can the church leadership motivate members to be diligently involved in personal evangelism?

The church should aim at raising an army of believers who will be addicted to personal evangelism. To achieve this, the leadership of the local church should take the lead and be an example to the flock in this great task (1 Peter 5:3). It should train the people through specially organized weekend evangelism seminars and workshops at both workers’ and general retreats. Apart from training, deliberate efforts should be made to organize weekend evangelism outreach, pair believers as evangelism partners in the Home Caring Fellowship and use Operation Andrew cards periodically.

Question 3: Enumerate the benefits of involving in personal evangelism.

When a soul is saved, there is joy in heaven; the community is made better, a family has been helped, a life has been transformed and a multitude of sins has been covered (James 5:20). Also, God’s kingdom has been enlarged. There is joy in the soul-winner himself, joy in heaven and a crown of rejoicing awaits him in heaven (1 Thessalonians 2:19,20). The obedient “...shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3). Who would not want to be involved in such a rewarding task!

THE LIFESTYLE OF SOUL-WINNERS (2 Timothy 2:4-6; Matthew 15:14; Isaiah 52:11; John 15:1-7).

Question 4: What should be the lifestyle of the effective soul-winner?

Since the blind cannot lead the blind (Matthew 15:14), genuine conversion from sin is indispensable for everyone who wants to be involved in personal evangelism (2 Timothy 2:6). The soul-winner must be free from spots, blemishes and evil reports so as not to constitute an offence to seekers. As God’s channel of the water of life, he must be clean, not rusted or corroded within. Having been saved and purified,
therefore, the soul-winner must see himself as an ambassador of Christ, with an unshakable conviction that personal evangelism is a debt and not an option (2 Corinthians 5:20; Romans 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:16).

Third, he must be properly connected to the Source of fruitfulness in soul-winning through prayers and fellowship (John 15:1-7).

Fourth, he must be knowledgeable and skilled in the right application of the Scriptures (Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:15; Hosea 4:6). Five, he must have a strong conviction about God, the Bible, the indispensability of salvation, the significance of Christ’s death and His resurrection and the consequences of neglecting the call to salvation. In summary, to be effective, the soul-winner needs the compassion of a doctor, the courtesy of a nurse, the conviction of a communist and the commitment of a miner. In addition, he should be bold, courageous, persevering as a good soldier of the cross and patient as a good ambassador of Jesus Christ.

EFFECTIVE METHODS AND PROCEDURES IN PERSONAL EVANGELISM (1 Corinthians 9:19-23; John 4:7-29; Acts 8:30-35; John 3:1-3)

Question 5: Mention various methods of personal evangelism. As a believer, which of them have you effectively employed?

Methods or approaches employed in personal evangelism differ from one person to the other. There is the direct approach. This is the abrupt introduction of the vital issue of salvation to a sinner. It is generally done when the soul-winner observes he does not have much time to spend with the sinner. The method involves a direct question about the issue of his soul, relationship with God or readiness to meet God. Jesus and Philip used this method (John 3:3; Acts 8:30).

The indirect method focuses on reaching the sinner’s heart by gliding from physical realities into spiritual, eternal truths. It is generally conversational. Jesus did this (John 4:7-29). Friendship method of evangelism involves cultivating a relationship with someone of
the same gender with an aim of winning him/her for Jesus. The price to pay includes sacrificial giving, self-denial, hard work and prayer.

Literature method seeks to reach a sinner through the printed work. A Christian tract, magazine, comic or book given out prayerfully, purposefully and passionately can turn a soul to Christ faster than we think. The after-fellowship approach is most appropriate when we want to lead first-timers in our church or in the Home Caring Fellowship to the Lord. It involves expanding on the message he has just heard, applying it and calling him to decision.


Once the door of soul-winning has been opened, and the most suitable approach decided, the next urgent task of the soul-winner is the presentation of the gospel. He must reach the intellect, affect the will, stir the emotion, arouse the conscience and bring the unsaved man to the point of decision and surrender to Christ.

**Question 6: What steps can a soul-winner take to lead a soul to salvation?**

To be effective in leading a sinner to conviction and conversion, one, ask questions to discover the class he belongs to and how best to deal with him. Two, describe the disease. Sin, as a disease of the soul, must be revealed with the help of the Scriptures and painted vividly enough that the sinner will discover it (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10). Three, prescribe the remedy. Christ is the remedy for sin. Thus, the soul-winner must exalt Christ so high that the sinner will be willing to run to Him for salvation (John 12:32; 1 Timothy 2:5,6; Hebrews 10:19-22). Four, warn him of the danger of delay and rejection of the truth (Isaiah 1:20; 2 Corinthians 6:2; Proverbs 29:1; Hebrews 4:1-6). Five, urge for an immediate decision. If he declares his intention to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, he should be made to pray, confessing his sins and receiving Christ as
Lord and Saviour (1 John 1:9; Romans 10:9,10). Six, anchor his faith in the Word of God for assurance of salvation. Finally, show him how to continue in Christ.
Question 7: What pitfalls must be avoided when leading a soul to the Lord?

However, there are things to avoid in the course of dealing with a soul. Do not exalt self above the sinner or condemn denominations. Avoid acting victorious or proud when you have scored a point (Matthew 11:29) and do not tell sad stories, but point to Christ (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9). Do not multiply texts and illustrations, never be in a hurry, and deal not with more than one at a time. There is need for care when dealing with the opposite sex. Avoid getting into an argument with the seeker. Do not lose your self-control and emotion. Do not tell seekers to think it over; bring him to a decision at once where possible. Do not be discouraged by apparent failure. Often, you are simply another link in the chain of grace that will bring the sinner to Christ (John 4:37,38). As for outlook, do not have bad breath or body odour.

The soul-winner needs to be familiar with Scriptures that deal with various categories of sinners to successfully penetrate their hearts with the gospel. The various categories of sinners and relevant scriptural passages include:

- the careless (Luke 14:16; Ezekiel 33:9; Acts 24:25; Hebrews 2:3; 12:25; Isaiah 47:8,9),
- the deceived (Matthew 24:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 15:33; Galatians 6:7; Ephesians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1John 3:7),
- the religious (Matthew 7:22,26; Romans 3:20; 11:6; Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:5; Luke 18:9-14),
- the confused (John 6:37; 8:36; Jude 24; 1 Peter 1:5; 2 Timothy 1:12; Philippians 1:6),
- the superstitious (Acts 17:22-31; 1 Samuel 4:3-14; 1 Kings 20: 23-30; Jeremiah 10:2-13),
- the ignorant (Hosea 4:6; Acts 17:23; Matthew 15:14; Jeremiah 5:4; Micah 4:12),
• the anxious (Acts 16:30,31; 2:37; Luke 3:9-14),
• the backsliders (Hebrews 10:38; 2 Peter 2:20; Revelation 2:4,5; Hosea 6:1-3; Isaiah 55:7),
• the free thinkers (Psalm 10:4; 14:1; Romans 1:19-26),
• those who object (Romans 2:1-6; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14) and
• the sceptics (Psalms 10:4; 14:1; 1 John 2:22).

Efforts made in soul-winning will not yield much fruit if follow-up is neglected or relegated to the background. The soul-winner must make efforts to take the convert through series of convert studies and integrate him to the fellowship of the local church. He should also help him to be baptized in water and make him go through discipleship training to further establish him in the faith and doctrines of the Christian faith. The young convert also needs to be shielded from and protected through the soul-winner’s constant prayers and visitation. He must be loved and cared for during persecution, difficulty and discouragement so that he does not backslide. Above all, the soul-winner must be willing to sacrifice both his money and material, where necessary, for both the spiritual and physical welfare of the convert (2 Corinthians 12:15; Acts 9:27-30; 10:25,26; 14:21,22).
LESSON 677
REMNANTS OF
BENJAMIN RE-ESTABLISHED

MEMORY VERSE “And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day” (Judges 21:6).

TEXT: Judges 21:1-25

In a bid to remove blood-guiltiness from their midst and deal with the compromise of the Benjamites in supporting the evil committed by the men of Gibeah (Judges 19), the entire Israel went to war against the tribe of Benjamin with extraordinary severity that reduced the whole tribe to 600 men. This was a near state of extermination as there were neither children nor women for their men to marry to propagate their tribe. The severity with which the war was fought seemed not only to punish the recalcitrance of Benjamin in supporting the heinous crime committed by the men of Gibeah, but also to revenge the two-time defeat suffered in their hands (Judges 20). The sudden realization that the civil war was self-destructive led the eleven tribes to rethink their actions in the face of a whole tribe almost being wiped out. According to a Roman saying: “In a civil war, no victories ought to be celebrated with triumphs, because, whichever side gets, the community lose”.

The question was, what was the need for the trumpet sound of triumph when a tribe was cut off in Israel? Knowing full well that without Benjamin the nation would no longer represent the Israel of God’s covenant – comprising twelve tribes as written on the breastplate of the high priest – their thoughts became centred on how to re-establish Benjamin. Unfortunately, in the moment of uncontrolled fury, they had made a rash vow not to give their daughters as wives to Benjamin. The challenge then was to design ways out of the quagmire so that no tribe would be lacking in Israel.
Question 1: What was the consequence for the nation of Israel if Benjamin was totally exterminated?

MOURNING FOR THE REMNANT OF BENJAMIN
(Judges 21:1-7,15; Lamentations 1:1-4,12,15; 1 Corinthians 12:14-27)

The outcome of the war had brought Benjamin to near extinction. This realization generated grievous mourning and lamentations among the other eleven tribes. “And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore” (Judges 21:2). Benjamin was part of the nation which came out of the loins of Abraham and had been promised the land of Canaan. Now it has been severed, nearly cut off. What a breach! In an ideal atmosphere of godliness, a part of the body had been hurt and other parts must feel the pain. When a member of the body of Christ suffers, the whole body is in agony and looks to bear one another’s burden in order to fulfill the law of Christ. It is said that “injury to one, is injury to all”.

The children of Israel were in heaviness and sorrow of heart because a significant part of them was becoming extinct. Therefore they cried, “And said, O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel?” (Judges 21:3). They had gone out with impetuous zeal to render Benjamin desolate, killing all their women and children – a justice carried too far – living only 600 men without wives to propagate the tribe. It was this state of affairs that led the eleven tribes to go before the Lord in repentance to seek redress so that the twelve tribes of Israel would live to enjoy the promise of inheritance given to Abraham. Observe that repentance was a priority; they wept for a day before God and sought direction from Him. They had earlier over-reacted to the problem at hand and were not discerning in judgment as they had destroyed the guilty with the righteous. Moreover, they had considered that the Benjamites, by supporting the action of the men of Gibeah who dealt so lewdly with
the Levite’s concubine could not be considered worthy of marrying their godly daughters.

After repentance, comes a redress of the situation so that the remnant of Benjamin might marry and propagate their tribe. Israel then devised a means to ensure that “his banished be not expelled from him” (2 Samuel 14:14).

MEASURES FOR THE RESTORATION OF BENJAMIN (Judges 21:8-24; Galatians 6:1,2; Romans 15:1-3)

In the heat of anger, Israel made two rash vows without thinking of the consequences. Firstly, they swore that none of the eleven tribes would give their daughters to Benjamin to marry. Secondly, that any tribe or lineage that was not present at the gathering at Mizpeh would be put to death. By making vows not to give their daughters to Benjamin, they treated them as heathen with whom they should not intermarry. The zeal to deal with the evil committed blinded their minds to reason and to the larger consequences of a rash vow (Judges 11:31; 1 Samuel 14:24). Now that frayed nerves had been soothed, their eyes became opened to the grave consequences of their decision. The situation on ground made them realize the extremeness of their action and need to look for solution without directly breaking their oath. The oaths have been uttered before God which they could not violate, yet they had a responsibility towards rehabilitating Benjamin by finding wives for the remnant.

In seeking the face of the Lord and a possible solution to the problem they created, the children of Israel remembered that Jabeshgilead was not present among the congregation at Mizpeh. So, they sent 12,000 valiant men to destroy them after which they saved all the virgins and gave them out as wives to the surviving Benjamites. “And they found among the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male: and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan” (Judges 21:12). It is important to emphasize that this is not a
scripturally acceptable solution. Their actions should be condemned in the light of the Scriptures and cannot be a worthy example or pattern for believers when confronted with a problem. We must recall that all these happened after Israel had gone away from the Lord and there was no king to adjudicate according to the law of Moses (Judges 21:25). That they resorted to killing the men of Jabeshgilead and counseling the surviving Benjamites to kidnap young virgins at Shiloh fall short of any godly standard. The punishment of Jabeshgilead was in response to their refusal to join Israel in the war for the extermination of evil and establishment of righteousness. Their supposed inability to be valiant for the truth earned them the destruction they experienced. The clarion call is for Christians is to “join the battle for the truth”. Their virgins, four hundred of them, were spared and given as wives to the surviving Benjamites. To be able to supply wives for the remaining two hundred men, another plan was hatched that would not contravene the letter of the oath.

Question 2: Explain practical lessons in the steps taken by the eleven tribes towards re-establishing Benjamin.

However, there are some godly lessons from the steps the Israelites took to rehabilitate the Benjamites. First, there was contrition. They all came and cried before the Lord with penitent hearts as they looked at the tragedy that had befallen Benjamin; they did not see it as a mere tribal issue but a national calamity. Therefore, they offered burnt and peace offerings and also repented of their action against Benjamin (verses 2-4,6,15). Second, they showed concern. They were bothered about the precarious future of the tribe of Benjamin and said, “...how shall we do for wives for them that remain...” (verses 7,16). Except something was done, the tribe would be wiped out, thus reducing the number of the tribes contrary to the plan of God. Third, they had compassion on the remnant. They realized that justice must be carried out with
compassion because God does not take delight in destroying people. Though He chastises, it is to bring such transgressor back to Himself. Fourth, they discovered that the situation was dire and required commitment; therefore, they committed 12,000 valiant men to fight against Jabeshgilead from where they preserved 400 virgins for the Benjamites. Fifth, there was conciliation. They made peace with the estranged tribe and sent representatives who spoke peaceably and assured them of safety and acceptance back into the fold (verse 13).

Sixth, they took care of them. At this time, the remaining Benjamites were in distress and holed down in a cave and needed both physical and material care in order to be integrated back into the larger society. Seventh, there was cooperation and all the people pursued the matter to a logical conclusion. No one went back to their inheritance; the entire congregation remained together with the elders until they had found solution to the problem. It was after that that “the children of Israel departed... every man to his tribe and to his family, and... to his inheritance” (verse 24).

When there is a problem in the body, every member is expected to demonstrate needed compassion, commitment, care and cooperation to get solution. These must be sustained till issues are resolved. If it is a challenge that requires prayers, members should be bound by the love of Christ to pray until heaven intervenes (Acts 12:5). We must not stay aloof and be unconcerned in matters that affect the brethren when it is within our power to help. The entire Israel was united and unanimous in ensuring that Benjamin was restored to favour and to their inheritance. They fulfilled the scripture which admonishes us to “Bear... one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

Benjamin was eventually settled in their own inheritance. From this tribe, the first king of Israel, Saul was produced, and Paul, who became the greatest apostle of Christ that ever lived. One would have thought that such a diminished tribe would not
produce a great apostle like Paul who became a mighty instrument in the hand of God to take the gospel to the nations.

**MORAL ROT OF BACKSLIDERS** (Judges 21:25; 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 1 Samuel 8:7; Deuteronomy 12:8; Romans 1:21-32; Proverbs 14:12, 14; 29:18)

“**In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes**” (Judges 21:25). The conclusion of this chapter and the entire book of Judges was an indication of the near state of anarchy and lawlessness that prevailed in Israel at that time. Four times, the statement recurred that “in those days there was no king in Israel” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) and twice that “**every man did that which was right in his own eyes**” (17:6; 21:25). This accounted for the many lawless and uncharitable conducts and behaviours in the book of Judges. Consider the idolatry of Micah and the Danites; the barbaric act that led to the death of the Levite’s concubine; the vengeful rigour and severity with which the Israelites treated their brethren, the Benjamites; the slaughter of the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead and the abduction of the daughters of Shiloh! It is unthinkable that the same Israel that failed to exterminate the heathen inhabitants of the land (Judges 1:1-36) as commanded by God through Moses was overzealous to the point of almost eliminating Benjamin who was part of the covenant.

**Question 3: How does the spiritual condition of Israel then compare with the moral situation today?**

We live at a time when a thick moral fog has settled on the society, eclipsing the ancient landmarks of decency, godliness, uprightness, and above all, righteousness. The evils of selfishness, nepotism and greed have resulted in great moral declension. Individuals believe that they own their lives and can do whatever they liked with it. They feel that they have no king, lord, guide or controller they are responsible to, but self. They believe they do not have any moral obligation to be upright.
The situation is worse with backsliders who previously served God but deliberately turned away from Him. Now they justify those things they once condemned and abhorred (2 Peter 2:22). The Lord abhors those who knew the truth and turns back to folly. The truth of Scripture is absolute; it does not vary from nation to nation or from one generation to another. God’s standard remains unchanging and unchangeable.

**Question 4: How can people avoid putting their lives on autopilot and doing whatever they liked?**

Irrespective of modern-day perversions, the lewdness of the corporate world and licentiousness of the society, holiness remains the only panacea to escape the corruption in the world. Those who desire to be partakers of the divine nature must seek the face of God and turn from their sins; people who have backslidden and turned away from the Saviour must return to Him while those sitting on the fence should take a clear and definite stand for the Lord. Those who feel they have no king or lord over their lives and resort to doing what they liked will one day give account of their lives. Christ is King over the whole earth. Those who will escape His judgment must recognize His kingship and lordship, and demonstrate absolute loyalty to Him.
LESSON 678
ELIMELECH’S JOURNEY TO MOAB

MEMORY VERSE: “Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons” (Ruth 1:1).

TEXT: Ruth 1:1-5

The book of Ruth is historical. Written after the reign of the fifteen Judges (Othniel to Samuel) in Israel, the book zooms in on a family – their quest for greener pasture, relocation to a strange land, misfortune, return of the remnant to their country home, and restoration to divine favour. It is encouraging to note that God took interest in this family caught in the eyes of the storm, the marriages of their children, and the care and rehabilitation of their widows who trusted in His mercy and benevolence.

Surely, God is interested in the believer’s family and the affairs of their lives. He is also interested in widows and widowers. We must therefore, be careful the way we live and take decisions to be sure they are in line with His will so as to avoid plunging our families into any misfortune. From the Scripture, we discover that God sometimes permits negative circumstances to bring about His purpose and programme. Famine occurred at different times and affected the people of God in divers ways. Abraham, Isaac, Elijah, the children of Israel and others experienced famine at various times of their lives (Genesis 12:10; 26:1; 41:56,57). There is no doubt that God loved Israel, settled them in a delightsome land flowing with milk and honey and had been faithful to His promises. Famine at the time of the Judges, which was characterised by moral laxity, violence, spiritual inconsistency and lack of faith in God, was indicative of divine displeasure against their infringement of the terms of His covenant. The Scripture records that such cases were in fulfilment of God’s threat of discipline for the
nation’s sins (Leviticus 26:1-5,14-20; 1 Kings 17:1; 18:17,18,21,22). Whenever God punishes people for sinful conduct, He expects contrition, repentance and a humble disposition (2 Chronicles 7:13,14). The sooner people return Him, the earlier He restores them to His favour. Unfortunately, Elimelech’s reaction and subsequent experience was contrary.

REFLECTIONS ON ELIMELECH’S DECISION TO RELOCATE (Ruth 1:1,2; Numbers 22:1-7; 25:1,9; Judges 11:17; Proverbs 3:11,12; Romans 8:5-8)

“Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons” (Ruth 1:1).

Faced with the challenge of a depleting barn, lean purse and a bleak future, Elimelech decided to emigrate to another country. But the journey to Moab was either ill-advised or not well thought through. We are not told he sought God’s guidance. While Abram nearly lost his wife when he made a similar mistake, God had to intercept Isaac from going to Egypt during another incident of famine (Genesis 12:10-20; 26:1-6). By divine arrangement, Joseph became the prime minister of Egypt to preserve the lives of his father and siblings from a seven-year famine. In this instance, Jacob’s migration to Egypt was the will of God (Genesis 46:2-4). The point is, believers need to trust God wholeheartedly to guide them in times of famine or adversity.

Question 1: Why was it wrong for Elimelech to relocate to Moab?

Moab was not a wise choice of destination for a true Israelite. Despite being descendants of Lot, the Moabites were proven enemies of the Hebrews. They were needlessly hostile to Israel in the wilderness and resorted to use diabolical means and seduction to overcome Israel. Through their seduction, twenty-four thousand Israelites died in the wilderness. Besides being haughty and proud, they were welded to
Chemosh, an idol whose worship pattern was similar to Baal. So, residing in Moab was risking exposure to idolatry and the consequent divine displeasure (Genesis 19:33,36,37; Numbers 24:17; Deuteronomy 23:3-5). Whatever the attraction for Elimelech’s move to Moab, it was unjustifiable without divine directive.

Before a believer decides to relocate, he should seek God’s face for proper leading (Proverbs 3:5,6). Moab portrays the contemporary world of sinners. Christians should beware of alluring alternatives in the world. A believer who hobnobs with unbelievers will find it difficult to blend his scriptural conviction with their corrupt practices. He will either suffer avoidable persecution or risk spiritual contamination, compromise, backsliding and perdition. It is wise for a believer to prayerfully consider all relevant factors before taking a decision; spiritual consideration should take precedence over mundane benefits.

**Question 2: What are the implications of Elimelech’s relocation without seeking divine guidance?**

Elimelech’s escape option was neither reasonable nor profitable. The relocation showed that he focussed more on the physical than the spiritual and eternal. Thus, he missed out on God’s purpose for the situation and led his family to serious sorrow and regret.

Though Elimelech and Naomi were righteous, God expected a national repentance from the people. The righteous, no doubt, will suffer when God’s rod of correction comes upon the community he lives. It is a change of heart that brings pardon, restoration and blessings (Proverbs 28:13; Micah 6:8,9).

Adversity is not a proof of God’s weakness or wickedness. Through His guidance, however, it can become an opportunity for promotion and enlargement for the righteous (Genesis 26:1-3,12-14; Romans 8:28). Abiding in the Lord and in the place He has appointed for us will enable us claim His numerous promises of protection, preservation and provision (1 Kings 8:37-40; Job 5:20-27; Psalm 33:18,19; 37:18,19).
Question 3: Why is Elimelech’s story instructive for contemporary believers?

As spiritual relations of Christ, the decisions individual believers make are very important to God. He is interested in what we do, our motives, the steps we take and the direction we face. He takes records of minute details of our lives. Therefore, our reactions to vicissitudes of life should constantly reflect the consciousness of our peculiarities (1 Peter 2:9). We should not allow a downturn in business, finances, physical fortunes, resources or persecution lead us to take any decision contrary to the will of God. Like Elimelech, we may not be in control of the causative agents of a misfortune but are completely responsible for the decision we make regarding it.

RESULT OF ELIMELECH’S WRONG DISPOSITION
(Ruth 1:3,4; Numbers 15:31; Job 5:3,4; 20:4-8; Psalm 73:25-27; 139:7-10; Proverbs 14:12)

Attempt to escape famine resulted in three funerals in a foreign land and left the family with three hapless widows. The event portrayed Elimelech as a failed husband, father and leader who misled his family away from God’s positive influence. Actually, the famine was not the real cause of his woes; after all, the destiny of those who did not migrate and the turn of events in Bethlehemjudah proved that God was in control of the situation.

That Elimelech descended from a godly parentage is evident in the meaning of his name – my God is king. It was meant to dedicate him to a lifelong submission to the Almighty, and to serve as a buffer of confidence in times of despondency. But he did not live up to the name as he acted without seeking divine approval. Believers should live up to the name of the Lord by which they are known and called. They should always commit their ways to the Lord and trust Him who has promised to take care of them (1 Peter 5:7).

Elimelech’s decision later led his children into marrying Moabitish women, a decision that ran contrary to the commandment of God (1 Kings
How one wrong move leads to another! After the death of the husband, Naomi could have headed for home with her children or even directed them to marry from their tribe in Bethlehemjudah. But she stayed at Moab.

**THE SOLITUDE OF WIDOWHOOD** (Ruth 1:5; Isaiah 28:22; Matthew 3:8-10; Luke 13:1-9; Romans 2:4-9; 2 Peter 3:9-11; Isaiah 1:9)

“And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband” (Ruth 1:5).

Within ten years, Naomi lost her husband, Elimelech and her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. She became a widow together with her son’s wives. She was bereft of all life’s joys. Solitude set in as there was no acquaintance, helper or breadwinner for the aging woman. The calamity, bereavement and solitude taught her to do the needful – return home to meet the people of God. Believers who notice the devastating effects of their wrong decision must not wait too long but retrace their steps back to the Lord who is able to help them recover their loss.

**Question 4: What is the significance of the sparing of Naomi’s life?**

We cannot fail to notice the grace of God in sparing Naomi because whatever it was that claimed the lives of her family members could have claimed hers too. Though she was as guilty as others who died in the strange land, God was merciful to spare her in keeping with His sovereign resolve to preserve a remnant. God still shows such grace to the undeserving. Sinners and backsliders who escape punishment or untimely death should not attribute their preservation to sheer luck or smartness. Instead, they should see it as a call to repentance and an opportunity to get right with God. Besides, it presents a new opportunity to make important decisions that would help shape their future and eternity.

Naomi would have to decide to remain in the strange land or return home; the two Moabite widows would
have to decide to cleave to God or remain with their gods. These decisions determined the rest of the events in the entire book.

Whenever an unexpected or unpleasant situation arises, perhaps as a result of a wrong step or decision, we should return to God and His people. We should see such as a test of our character and determine to be steadfast and unmovable, thus giving glory to God. It is wiser to retrace our steps back to the presence of God than remain in a strange assembly. Believers should not abandon the fellowship of brethren or the household of faith just because there is crisis. Those who have left the place of truth and sound doctrine as a result of crises should not be ashamed to return to the company of saints. Our decisions should be faith-based not fear-induced.

For believers who have bungled opportunities and plunged their families into disaster through wrong decisions, there is hope of rebirth, reparation and restoration to greater blessings.
LESSON 679
NAOMI RETURNS WITH RUTH TO BETHLEHEM-JUDAH

MEMORY VERSE: “And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

TEXT: Ruth 1:6-22

The previous study gave insight into the ugly consequence of Elimelech’s sojourn in Moab in an attempt to escape the famine in Bethlehemjudah. The ten-year sojourn witnessed his death and his two sons, leaving Naomi alone with her Moabitish daughters-in-law.

In this study, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehemjudah after hearing that the famine was over. Her two daughters-in-law also decided to return with her, but eventually only Ruth followed through with that decision; Orpah went back to her people and to her idols. This shows that it is not enough to make decisions; we have to follow through against all odds with steadfastness and determination.

Question 1: What is the difference between the decisions made by Ruth and Orpah?

COMMENDABLE ACTION AFTER A CHEERY NEWS (Ruth 1:6,7; Exodus 4:19,20; Genesis 42:1,2; Luke 2:10-15; Mark 16:15-18,20)

After the death of her husband and two sons in Moab, Naomi became desolate and burdened with the care of two younger widows in a foreign land. According to a Bible commentator, “there was almost nothing worse than being a widow in the ancient world. Widows were taken advantage of or ignored. They were almost always poverty stricken”. Her expectation of a better life in Moab turned into a bitter experience but she
did not lose her faith in God. Although she was quite shaken and low in spirit, she still held on to God. “Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread” (Ruth 1:6).

It was famine that prompted Naomi and her family members to relocate from Bethlehemjudah to the land of Moab. But she heard that God had visited His people and the famine had ended. Here, we learn that adversity never lasts forever. Whatever negative circumstances we may be compelled to pass through will certainly come to an end because God will not forsake forever His people who trust Him. The news of God’s good dealings got to Naomi in Moab. “As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country” (Proverbs 25:25). The gospel is the good news for the world, and believers should ensure it gets to all people. They must urgently carry the message of hope to sinners who are already drowning in the ocean of sin.

**Question 2:** In disseminating the news of God’s goodness, what are the essential qualities we should possess?

However, the bringer of good tidings must be sincere, urgent, enthusiastic, explicit and compelling. The good news must be told to all those who have never met the Lord. Also, the likes of Naomi who have left the people of God to a far country need to be told of the goodness of the Lord on His people. Indeed, God has been visiting His children with great blessings. Therefore, we need to be urgent on this task before backsliders die in their condition. We have the mandate from Christ to tell our friends, neighbours and acquaintances that all things are now ready (Luke 14:17). The night is far spent and we cannot afford to delay any further.

Naomi’s promptness in her effort to return to her home country is noteworthy. Although she commenced the journey in company of her daughters-in-law, she later urged them to return to Moab, their country home. Her first plea was premised on the affection that she had for them. She appreciated, prayed and encouraged them to return to Moab, start a new family and feel secure with their people. When this offer could not deter them, she spoke of a bleak future they are likely to have concerning marriage. She was not economical with the truth concerning the cost of following her to Bethlehem.

Naomi’s action may be strange to some believers who expected her to encourage her daughters-in-law to follow her to Israel where they could come to the knowledge of the true God. But it is likely that Naomi wanted them to prove their sincerity to follow her after counting the cost. However, believers are to be careful not to hinder or discourage people who want to join them on the way to heaven. But at the same time, they must make prospective disciples know that following Jesus comes at a cost. Christ Himself taught the importance of counting the cost before embarking on discipleship. After a multitude of His followers had departed from Him, He tested the seriousness of the remaining ones by asking: “will ye also go away?” Surely, the need for personal conviction in following Christ cannot be overstressed.

**Question 3: What lessons do we learn from Orpah’s return to Moab?**

Orpah resisted the initial pressure to return to Moab but could not sustain the decision. Her professed love for her mother-in-law and her people could not stand the test of time. She made a quick decision to follow Naomi but was equally quick in turning back at the slightest hint of the challenges ahead. Some people hastily profess their love for the Lord but when confronted with the challenges of life, they rescind their decision. They are like the people in Christ’s parable of the sower and the seed (Matthew 13:19-21). Orpah’s promise and purpose proceeded
from passion instead of principle. She lacked the grace to persevere to the end. She was also an example of a backslider returning to her gods because of the challenge of walking the unknown path with God.

Ruth had similar challenges as Orpah. She was faced with an idolatrous background and a bleak future. After all, God had said that a Moabite should not come into the congregation of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:3), yet she prevailed over these challenges. She acted like a true heroine of faith that saw the invisible. Her action was consequent on the strong affection and attachment she had towards Naomi and the leaning of her heart towards the God of Israel, rather than on any prospect of temporal benefits.

**Question 4:** *Itemise Ruth’s resolve in her statement to Naomi’s urge.*

Believers who want to remain faithful to the end must be firm in their decision to serve God, keep godly associations and focus their attention on heaven. We are to keep looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. We should also endure the cross, challenges and life’s mishaps while running the race that is set before us.

Meanwhile, the cordial relationship that existed between Naomi and her daughters-in-law is worthy of mention. Orpah and Ruth’s good affection for their mother-in-law was enough proof that Naomi was very kind to them and had won their love. This should serve as an example to contemporary Christian mothers-in-law who are always prone to be at loggerheads with their daughters-in-law or sons-in-law. We must strive to follow peace with everyone. And with the grace of God and godly wisdom, we can live in peace and unity with others and win them to the Lord.

**COUNTING LOSSES AFTER COMPROMISE** *(Ruth 1:19-22; Psalm 57:7; Acts 11:23; Exodus 15:13; Proverbs 21:6, 13:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:17)*

Despite the challenges that Naomi and Ruth had on the way, their resolve strengthened them until they arrived Bethlehem. Their determination encourages us to cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart.
Question 5: **Point out reasons Naomi was wrong in blaming God for her woes.**

When they got to Bethlehem, Naomi requested that she be called Mara, meaning bitterness. She proclaimed that her calamities were caused by God and accused Him of dealing bitterly with her, emptying her of everything and afflicting her. But Naomi was wrong in blaming God for her woes. They were only reaping the negative consequences of their decision and she should not have charged God foolishly for what befell them. Men should learn not to charge God foolishly when they are faced with the consequences of their wrong decisions in life. As believers, God will certainly discipline us when we err, but such chastisements are for our own good. The right attitude would be to examine ourselves and repent of any wrongdoing where necessary. At such a time, our prayer should be that: **“that which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more”** (Job 34:32).

**Question 6: What are the proofs that Naomi did not return empty?**

Despite her physical losses, Naomi had reasons to give thanks to God. Her life was preserved and the timing of her return coincided with the time of harvest when there would be adequate provisions for her. Above all, Ruth came with her. Bringing a heathen woman, who would have perished in idolatry to serve the living God was more than all Naomi had lost. She reckoned that she came back empty because she could not count her blessings well. Like most men, she placed more value on physical gains than the spiritual. Unknown to her, she had been instrumental to snatching out of Moab, a woman who later became a great ancestor of the Messiah. Ruth turned out to be a great asset, not only to Naomi but the entire nation. Like Johnson Oatman rightly admonished in his song:

“Count your blessings, name them one by one, Count your blessings, see what God hath done; Count your blessings, name them one by one, And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.”

We are to give thanks to God in everything.
LESSON 680
RUTH’S PIETY AND HARD WORK

MEMORY VERSE: “The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust” (Ruth 2:12).

TEXT: Ruth 2:1-23

In the first chapter of the book of Ruth, the sad events of the demise of Elimelech, the husband of Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion were recorded. Ruth, the wife of Mahlon had demonstrated uncommon commitment and loyalty to her mother-in-law by doggedly following her from Moab back to Bethlehem-Judah. She had also openly professed her faith in the God of Israel. Eventually, the duo “came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest” (Ruth 1:22).

Upon their return from Moab, Ruth demonstrated again and again those virtues that stood her out, in addition to her faith in the God of Israel. She would not hide under the excuse of being a stranger in a strange land and become a burden to her mother-in-law; she was determined to find sustenance for herself. Like the virtuous woman of king Lemuel’s description, “She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants’ ships; she bringeth her food from afar” (Proverbs 31:13,14). She demonstrated the virtues of industry, piety and hard work. These earned her approbation and favour and paved the way for her integration, not only into the commonwealth of Israel, but a place in the lineage of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ruth’s decision to go and glean in the fields, her industry and piety, the divine favour and connection which attended her efforts and encounter with a near kinsman and future husband, form the thrust of this study.

Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem having lost virtually everything. Indeed, Naomi had lamented: “I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty…” (Ruth 1:21). But Ruth had already made up her mind that though materials and men were lost, the God of Naomi was going to be her sufficiency (Ruth 1:16). She did not exhibit negative character in the face of seemingly excruciating challenges. Such instances as were faced by her were capable of drawing evil speaking, foolishly charging God, discouragement, loss of virtues, or outright backsliding from some people, but she faced her challenges with equanimity, courage and dogged optimism. She demonstrated resilience and unflinching determination based on unshakable convictions (Isaiah 50:7; Psalm 27:3; 56:4).

Ruth further demonstrated respect, obedience to her mother-in-law and rectitude in her interactions. Honesty, loyalty and trustworthiness were her hallmarks in all her undertakings. She received and kept the instructions given to her by her mother-in-law. “And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter” (Ruth 2:2).

Question 1: Mention some reactions that people put up in times of adversity.

The Lord God, through Moses had earlier instituted the rules of kinsmen and communal life expected to guide the people of Israel during harvesting. “And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 23:22). The purpose of this command is the realization that in every society, there are the less privileged, people who may not have access to the good things of life (Deuteronomy 15:11). Such should not count themselves unworthy of life; hence, the Lord made provision for their sustenance.
Moreover, it is to show that the Lord is the God of the poor and cares for them (Exodus 23:11; Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 15:7-9). Taking advantage of this provision, Ruth requested from her mother-in-law that she might go to the fields and glean ears of corn. “And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech” (Ruth 2:3). It was obvious from her experience that the Lord was in the arrangement. That she found herself in the field of Boaz was not a coincidence – it was divine. Besides, the way and manner Boaz took note of her presence underscored divine favour and connection. God is still in the business of guiding the footsteps of the pious, humble, obedient and righteous today (Psalm 37:23; Isaiah 30:25; Psalm 32:8,9).

A RICH MAN’S RESPONSE TO THE LESS PRIVILEGED (Ruth 2:4-16; Deuteronomy 8:12,13,17; 15:7-9; Ephesians 6:9; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Proverbs 31:29)

“And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee” (Ruth 2:4).

Boaz was of the family of Elimelech, Naomi’s late husband. He lived in Bethlehem but had a large farm where Ruth, guided by providence and God’s predetermined counsel, went to glean. He was a noteworthy person. Though a mighty man of wealth, he maintained a cordial relationship with his workers. When he got to them, he said, “The Lord be with you” and they responded, “The LORD bless thee”. How pleasant and productive a workplace when the employer and employee, manager and messenger, director and workers labour in an atmosphere devoid of fear, threat, intimidation and insubordination! Boaz displayed godly character lacking in many men and women of substance. Wealth makes many haughty and conceited, yet the Bible warns against vainglory, pride in uncertain riches (Deuteronomy 8:12,13,17;
Besides his cordial relationship with his workers, Boaz manifested humility, love and care despite his wealth and position. He was quick to spot the ‘stranger’ among his workers and inquired accordingly. No doubt, this man was diligent to know the state of his workers. How often strangers sneak in among workers in many Christian assemblies and they continue unnoticed for a long time.

**Question 2:** *What lessons can be learn from Boaz’s nobility and humility?*

Boaz was not only a diligent employer, he was also benevolent. He instructed his men to deliberately leave behind some grains for Ruth to glean. This would make Ruth enjoy the favour of her benefactor without rubbishing her dignity. Believers who are blessed with material wealth are enjoined to show benevolence to needy brethren; but those who would enjoy such acts of kindness should also be ready to work and not live in idleness.

It was apparent that Boaz had heard so much about Ruth though he had not met her (Ruth 2:11,12). In his remarks, he extolled some of her virtues. He testified of all that she had done to her “mother-in-law since the death of thine husband”. He eulogized her decision to separate from her own people and “come unto a people which thou knowest not heretofore” and to forsake her idols and take refuge under “the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust”. As a result, Boaz decreed blessing on her. He said: “The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel...” He further charged Ruth to keep up her hard work (Ruth 2:8,9) while encouraging her to expect a full reward from the Lord God of Israel.

Ruth remains a worthy example to all women professing faith in Christ. In spite of her adverse condition, “she guideth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms” (Proverbs 31:17). Widows who have become beggars and unnecessarily
dependent on others should have a rethink. If they are not infirm, they should work willingly with their hands and refuse to sit back to eat the “bread of idleness”.

Question 3: Mention some condemnable ways the less privileged are treated in our communities.

The custom of treating widows in unsavoury, wicked ways negates the teachings of the Scriptures. Widows are to be taken into fellowship, cared for, consoled, comforted, supported and encouraged (Deuteronomy 24:17; Job 29:13; Isaiah 10:1,2; Matthew 23:14; Acts 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:3; James 1:27). Accusing a Christian widow, depriving her and her children of the properties of her departed husband, subjecting her to heathen rites and idolatrous mourning practices are wicked, ungodly, inhuman and condemnable.


Ruth demonstrated that her virtues were not as dews that could not withstand the rising sun. She was consistent in her responses, character, hard work and devotion. As soon as she returned from the farm, she reported back to her mother-in-law and showed her what she had gleaned. “And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed” (Ruth 2:18). That she found favour, sustenance and an assurance of further provision from Boaz were not enough to embolden her against Naomi. There was no feeling of independence and self-sufficiency. Ruth brought of the meal she ate after she was satisfied and gave it to her mother-in-law. What an embodiment of virtues! “Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all” (Proverbs 31:29).

Ruth was diligent enough to enquire about the owner of the plantation where she gleaned and his counsel that she should keep fast by the young men; a counsel that Naomi restated. “And Naomi said unto
Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field” (Ruth 2:22). She was instructed not to wander into another field, to abide fast by Boaz’s maidens, to let her eyes be on the field being reaped and to go after the reapers. Interestingly, she kept to this advice and remained steadfast. This was to pave way for a bigger and more glorious future for her in the economy of God.

Steadfastness and consistency are the rule and not the exception if a man is to succeed here and make it to the kingdom of God (Matthew 24:42; Mark 13:33-35; Matthew 26:41; Luke 12:37-39; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Acts 20:31; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Peter 4:7).

Ruth “...dwelt with her mother in law” (Ruth 2:23). Her contact and continued stay with Naomi must have accorded her the privilege to know about the God of Israel and His ways. It must have enabled her to become a proselyte of the faith of Rahab and the religion of Abraham which gave her a place in the commonwealth of Israel (Joshua 6:25; Hebrews 11:31).

Question 4: From Boaz’s and Naomi’s instructions to Ruth, how can a Christian pilgrim remain consistent to the end?

Believers are warned not to depart from the living God, from the faith or wander about (Hebrews 3:12; 1 Timothy 4:1; Jude 11-13); but to look unto Jesus and run with patience the race set before us (Hebrews 12:1,2). There is no room for idleness and indolence in the kingdom of God (Matthew 20:4,6-7, Proverbs 12:24). Christians should be diligent in business and fervent in spirit (Romans 12:11). New converts are to keep fast by proven, mature, steadfast children of God, serving the Lord as we all journey to our heavenly home.
LESSON 681
RUTH FINDS FAVOUR WITH BOAZ
MEMORY VERSE: “And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:11).

TEXT: Ruth 3:1-18

The preceding chapter reveals the piety and industry of Ruth. On arrival at Bethlehemjudah, she displayed virtues of godliness, chastity and hard work as a young widow. Widowhood did not crush her will to survive and live a worthy life. For some young widows, the next step would be to begin to beg, borrow, murmur and bemoan their lot in life; others could become licentious, immoral and dependent. Ruth, like the virtuous woman described in Proverbs 31, went into the fields to labour and fend for herself and mother-in-law. As she ventured out, providence guided her to the field of Boaz, a near kinsman of her late husband.

In this lesson, Naomi expressed concern for her marital status, and God showed favour and prospered her way. Naomi said, “My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?”

Question 1: From the text, what kind of rest was Naomi seeking for Ruth?

The rest Naomi meant is marriage and a settled life. She hinted earlier in her parting remarks to Ruth and Orpah (chapter 1:9) that: “The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband”. There is a measure of rest from acute lack that marriage grants. Apart from rest and provision, the blessedness of marriage includes protection, partnership, procreation and power of joining forces together to overcome the challenges of life. In the New Testament, young widows are instructed to marry to enjoy this rest (1 Timothy 5:9-16).
Question 2: What can believers learn from Naomi’s concern for Ruth’s marital status?

Naomi showed the concern of every true mother for her children. She called her, “my daughter” because Ruth’s affection and care for Naomi was endearing. Since Ruth had consecrated her life to the God of Israel, it was proper for Naomi to desire that she should be settled and blessed in a marriage union. Naomi’s concern for the happiness of Ruth revealed her virtue of selflessness. Her plan for her daughter-in-law was not only commendable, but worthy of emulation by godly parents.

Naomi revealed to Ruth that Boaz was of the same kindred with her late husband. Acting on information that Boaz “winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor”, she gave Ruth a detailed instruction on how to approach the matter. She instructed her to wash and anoint herself, put on her raiment and go to the threshing floor. She told her, “make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking”. She further instructed her to stealthily “uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do”.

Some Christian writers have argued on the propriety or otherwise of Naomi’s counsel to Ruth. They alleged that the approach was at best indecent or immodest. But from the perspective of Naomi and Ruth’s virtues of chastity and piety which they had manifested aforetime, it is fair to suggest that their action was meant to draw Boaz’s attention to his duty as a kinsman towards the wife of the dead (Deuteronomy 25:7-9). In the Jewish context, if a man married a wife and died childless, the nearest relation to the dead was required to take her.

The commandment was: “the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband’s brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him
to wife, and perform the duty of an husband’s brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel” (Deuteronomy 25:5,6).

The Scripture also reveals what the wife of the deceased was to do when the near kinsman-redeemer showed unwillingness to comply. “And if the man like not to take his brother’s wife, then let his brother’s wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband’s brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband’s brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; Then shall his brother’s wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face...” (Deuteronomy 25:7-10).

It should be noted however, that it had not been ascertained whether Boaz or the nearest kinsman would perform the part of the kinsman or not. So, uncovering his feet was to serve as a reminder. Though he had been benevolent by giving grains to Ruth and passing complementary comments, the task of kinsman- redeemer, which was equally important, remained unattended. Naomi’s instruction to Ruth was aimed at reminding Boaz of this duty and eliciting his response regarding it. Naomi was sure that if Ruth obeyed her instruction, “he [Boaz] will tell thee what thou shalt do”. New Testament believers know however, that those Old Testament practices require spiritual application today. For example, Abraham’s instruction to his servant to take a wife for his son, Isaac, from among his kindred only serves to remind believers not to marry a nonbeliever (Genesis 24:2-4; Deuteronomy 7:3,4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Having seen the sincerity and affection of Naomi for her welfare and happiness in life, Ruth demonstrated obedience. “And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.” She knew her mother in-
law was godly and God-fearing and would not put her in harm’s way.

**RUTH’S PROPOSAL AND BOAZ’S ADHERENCE TO THE SCRIPTURE** (Ruth 3:6-14; Genesis 39:9; Job 31:1; 1 Timothy 6:11; Titus 2:5; Revelation 14:4; Galatians 5:22,23; 2 Peter 1:5-8)

After receiving instruction from Naomi, Ruth “went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her”. At midnight, Boaz discovered the uninvited guest. To his question, “Who art thou?”, he got the proposal: “I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman”. Being a godly man himself, Boaz realised the import of the proposal and his own responsibility as a near kinsman. He was discerning enough to understand the message that Ruth’s gesture conveyed.

**Question 3:** From the godly example of Boaz and Ruth, how should intending couples relate before wedding?

Boaz’s response was polite and tender. He began by heaping compliments on Ruth. “And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.” Boaz referred to Ruth’s act of kindness in her choice to follow Naomi to become a member of God’s covenant people. The second kindness was her willingness to offer herself as a bride to him even when she could decide to find a young and rich husband outside the law and custom of the people of Israel. Boaz said further, “... For all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:11).

Boaz made a plain and truthful explanation on the rightful order of a near kinsman. Being a just man, he would not outwit the nearest kinsman in the matter, but gave Ruth a comforting assurance that if the nearest kinsman would not redeem her, he would do so. No doubt, Boaz was ready to maintain
his righteousness and integrity in the land. Though nothing went wrong between them, he knew the implication of being seen with a woman on the floor in the night. Believers need to be wise and transparent during courtship. God expects Christian singles and intending couples to be holy in all their dealings.

Boaz was conscious of the presence of God as revealed in his response to Ruth. A Christian writer summed it up this way: “Boaz, instead of touching her as a wanton, blesseth her as a father, encourageth her as a friend, promiseth her as a kinsman, rewards her as a patron, and sends her away laden with hopes and gifts, no less chaste, more happy, than she came. O admirable temperance, worthy the progenitor of him in whose lips and heart there was no guile!”

Note that though Ruth was a mature woman, she followed the instructions of her mother-in-law. The Marriage Committee in the church was set up to guide bachelors and spinsters in their journey to a happy marriage. It is expedient for intending couples to seek the counsel and guidance of the committee so that they can be properly guided in their wedding ceremonies and in their homes.

True Christian believers know that the steps taken by Ruth in approaching Boaz cannot be a precedent or pattern for the church. It should be interpreted in the context of the culture and times in which they lived. Moreover, we now have a better understanding and light concerning knowing God’s will in marriage. We have the Holy Spirit and the word of God to guide us in all things.

**GIFT FROM BOAZ AND HOPE OF REDEMPTION BY A KINSMAN** (Ruth 3:15-18; Hebrews 9:12; John 3:16; Matthew 1:5,6)

**Question 4: Explain the Scripture’s stance on the responsibility of believers towards widows.**

Ruth’s mission was successful as Boaz realised he had failed to fulfil an essential lawful obligation of the near kinsman towards these pious poor widows. In addition to the consolation and assurance he
gave her, Boaz “measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her” saying, “Go not empty unto thy mother in law”. Fair speech and comforting compliments without practical giving to meet the needs of the poor is not an expression of virtue. The New Testament makes this responsibility very clear. It says, “If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed” (1 Timothy 5:16).

Question 5: What should be the believer’s attitude towards God’s promises?

Satisfied with the feedback from Ruth, Naomi encouraged her to “Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day”. She was sure that the promise given by Boaz had set in motion the process towards finding rest for her daughter- in-law; and that it will come to pass. The believer must hold on tenaciously to the unfailing promises of God in every circumstance of life.

Boaz was a type of Christ, our Kinsman-Redeemer. God’s promised redemption is only possible through Jesus who paid the price through His death on the Cross to redeem us from spiritual poverty and weakness. Anyone who humbly repents of sin and exercises faith in this near Kinsman will be saved.
LESSON 682

PAUL DEFENDS HIS APOSTLESHIP

MEMORY VERSE: But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth (2 Corinthians 10:17,18).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 10:7-18

In the preceding verses to the text, Paul the apostle emphasizes that spiritual work involves warfare. He makes it clear that believers’ warfare is not in the physical realm; that it requires the deployment of spiritual weapons which are “mighty through God” to pull down the enemy’s strongholds.

In today’s text, the self-effacing apostle draws another contrast as he defends his apostleship on very sound spiritual grounds. He even alludes to his rather unimpressive personal appearance which contrasts sharply with his unusual influential personality and apostolic credentials, to draw vital lessons and silence, for all ages, proud boasters who use spiritual privileges and positions as avenue for self-glorification.

PROPER APPROACH AND ATTITUDE TO THE USE OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY (2 Corinthians 10:7-11; Micah 3:5,8; Galatians 1:1; Romans 1:5; 2 Corinthians 12:12; 2 Peter 3:15,16; 2 Corinthians 1:12; Acts 26:16-18)

Using himself as a model, Paul the apostle shows a deep appreciation of the divine purpose in the bestowal and use of spiritual authority. “Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ’s, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ’s, even so are we Christ’s” (2 Corinthians 10:7).

The Jews made a great mistake of looking upon the Lord Jesus only from a carnal point of view and thus missed the purpose of His divinely ordained ministry. To them, He was just a carpenter’s son; in spite of
all the signs and wonders He did which ought to have convinced them otherwise. The Corinthians needed to be taught not to commit a similar error with respect to the ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. This was why Paul carefully affirmed and defended his apostleship before the Corinthians who appeared, by their contemptuous attitude, to have been disregarding him and not according him the proper respect due to his office.

However, this did not deter the Apostle from fulfilling his pastoral and apostolic duties to the church in Corinth. He commended their positive points but also rebuked them where necessary.

Question 1: What were the proofs of Paul’s apostolic ministry?

“For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed” (2 Corinthians 10:8).

Paul’s apostolic authority was real for several reasons. In origin, it was given by a direct commission from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Galatians 1:1). Two, in content and purpose, it was received with grace “for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name” (Romans 1:5). His ministry was not a local affair. Three, in manifestation, the signs of an apostle that followed his ministry proved that it was real (2 Corinthians 12:12). Four, even his letters which were “weighty and powerful” demonstrated the reality of the spiritual insight and authority that backed his ministry. Five, his deep understanding of the mysteries of Christ (Ephesians 3:3,4) which Peter also acknowledged (2 Peter 3:15,16). Finally, he had a testimony of conscience that he had led the church in Corinth in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God (2 Corinthians 1:12).

Unlike Paul, many Christian leaders today are more interested in the trappings of office than seeking to have God’s approval demonstrated in their ministry.
Their craze for big titles has become an addiction. Some leaders also demand a cult-like following. Paul was different. He was a leader under authority who had the boldness to counsel his followers to follow him as he followed Christ. He and his associates who ministered to the Corinthians, like Silvanus and Timotheus, did not concentrate on exercising dominion over the Corinthian brethren for their personal gains. Instead, they encouraged them to stand by faith and be their best for God and for ministry.

**Question 2: What should be the believer’s attitude to spiritual authority and leadership privilege?**

From Apostle Paul’s example, we can draw vital lessons in the use of authority and proper attitude to spiritual leadership privileges. First, leaders should not see the privilege of leading God’s people as an avenue for self-aggrandizement and pride but a privilege to serve like Christ. Therefore, they should not relish the privilege as an end in itself or opportunity to lord it over God’s heritage, but for service. Second, leaders should not be too demanding even for the dues of their office. They should learn to be content in every situation, and continue to fulfill their ministry even where standard provisions are not available. This will be in accord with the pattern of Christ who came “not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”. Third, members should respect and trust those vested with spiritual authority and cooperate with them, providing what is necessary to assist them to operate optimally. They should submit to scriptural leadership, take discipline in good faith knowing that the true leader’s aim is the ultimate good of the church and the fulfillment of God’s plan for His people.

**Question 3: What should be the believer’s attitude to his spiritual leader?**

In our contemporary times, there are wolves in sheep’s clothing that masquerade as apostles of Christ and hold multitudes of people in bondage. With their false visions, fake prophecies, commercial prayers and
fraudulent revelations, they strengthen the hands of evildoers. They use their spiritual authority to amass wealth and “he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him” (Micah 3:5). Against this background, Micah set his own ministry in clear perspective: “But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin” (Micah 3:8).

Question 4: How essential is strong doctrinal leadership in the church?

However, care must be taken to ensure that wayward people are not saved by a compromising leadership without strong doctrinal backbone to correct obvious and subtle errors. Spiritual authority, therefore, must be properly utilised to rid the church of defilement and close the door to backsliding. This was what Paul meant when he stated that the apostolic authority he had from the Lord was given to him for the edification and not destruction of the church. “For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed” (2 Corinthians 10:8).

In saying this, Paul was consciously being faithful to his commission (Acts 26:16-18). The church should encourage leaders like Paul who are not fearful to confront false doctrine and false brethren in spite of hatred, opposition or open mockery being cast at them.

TRUE MINISTERS’ CONTEMPT FOR COMPETITION AND COMPARISON (2 Corinthians 10:12-16; 7:16; John 21:20-22)

“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12).

Though a leader and an apostle, Paul clearly sets the bounds of his spiritual authority. In his exhortation,
he attributes the success of his team in the Corinthian church to God’s grace. He also makes it clear that his joy and pleasure depend on whatever spiritual increase and growth in faith he is able to achieve in ministering to the Corinthians (verse 15).

**Question 5: What should be the aim of believers when setting out on church assignment?**

This is a lesson to all Christians, leaders and laity alike. The glory of God must be our primary aim, while the progress of the church, not the applause of men, should be our major preoccupation. We should also be particularly careful not to fall into the trap of Lucifer by overrating ourselves while we berate others through ungodly comparison and class-consciousness. The Apostle used a very strong word in verse 12: “we dare not make ourselves”. The word “make” in that verse is rendered “class” by another translation. Usually, needless carnal comparison happens when a minister begins to compare himself with another minister who either preceded or succeeded him in office or who is engaged in a similar ministry in another part of the Lord’s vineyard.

**Question 6: Why is comparison wrong?**

There is no wisdom, spirituality or benefit in measuring ourselves with others. The reason is because God made each person unique with different character constitution. Two, God is sovereign concerning the grace He bestows on each individual and cannot be questioned. Three, we have different gifts. Four, many times, our circumstances in life and ministry are different. Five, God’s plan is to glorify Himself in the life of each individual believer who willingly surrenders to Him. He has specific plans, programmes and purpose for each person in His overall redemption plan. Six, our comparison tends to be self-centred and myopic. It breeds pride as it tempts us to see ourselves as super-achievers instead of rendering all glory to God. Carnal comparison can dethrone a believer from the joyful life of gratitude and godly living and cause him to fall into the valley of ingratitude and murmuring against God. Finally,
it has the tendency of distracting us from our God-given goals while we are busy poking our nose into other people’s business (John 21:20-22).

Even in secular life, it is said that comparisons are odious. Through unwise comparison, many families have been ruined. In their quest to belong to a particular class, many have soiled their hands with blood or in shady business practices. Many Christians have destroyed their promising dreams through ungodly emulation of unbelievers. We must be wise.


“But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth”.

As the Apostle rounds off his discussion in this chapter, he guides the mind of the church to consider what should be both the motivating strength and ultimate objective of a God-honouring life and ministry. The Lord must be the centre of the believer’s life and ministry. Obeying His commands and exercising faith in His saving grace unto personal salvation is the foundation of the believer’s life and ministry. Also, the believer’s glory does not lie in the possessions and positions attainable in the flesh, but in having the knowledge of His will and doing it. “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 9:23,24).

As the coming of the Lord fast approaches, believers, especially ministers, must ensure that they do not lose touch with eternal purposes. The world and its
trappings have a real tendency to dull our spiritual senses. We must be watchful.

**Question 7: What are the dangers of self-commendation?**

As we receive grace to fulfil our ministry, care must be taken so that we do not enter into the trap of complacency and self-commendation. The Lord Jesus Christ has instructed us on what should be our proper response: “*So likewise ye, 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).

If we adopt this template from the Saviour, we would conquer the canker of pride and have the grace to patiently wait for the rewards, commendations and crowns that Christ promised us (2 Timothy 4:8).
LESSON 683  

PAUL’S CONCERN  
AND SUFFERING FOR THE CHURCH  

MEMORY VERSE: “In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:27,28).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 11:1-33

In his previous epistles, Paul the apostle had declared his apostleship as a true follower of Christ, chosen, ordained and commissioned by God. This he had to do as occasion demanded to drive home salient scriptural lessons and remind those concerned that it was God who gave him the apostolic office. Though he was not the only one approved unto such a noble call and ministry after his encounter with the Lord, he needed to silence some of his critics who were hell-bent on destroying the work God had helped him to establish.

In the text, Paul made himself known to the church at Corinth as an apostle to forestall their doubt. He expressed his concern that they were falling short of Christ’s expectation of a mature church. “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (verse 2). He therefore, ascertained his commitment to serve them without being necessarily provided for, as a minister of the gospel. At the same time, he corrected and warned them of their spiritual insensitivity which could easily lure them back to the world.

In actual fact, the Corinthian church was prone to being deceived by false teachers and agents of the devil who disguised as if they were sent by God. As a true shepherd, Paul gave a list of some adverse situations and challenges he went through both in
the hands of unbelieving men and false brethren, in the course of contending for the faith. His experience, no doubt, portrays the common experiences of all true disciples of Christ. “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). Christ Himself said: “...In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Paul’s concern and suffering as expressed in the text should serve as reference point for the universal church regarding the Great Commission and related activities like church planting, follow-up and maturation of converts. True disciples of Christ and all ministers of God should labour in love and endure hardships in order to present the church “as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

PASTORAL CONCERN FOR THE CHURCH (2 Corinthians 11:1-4; Acts 20:28; Proverbs 27:23; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Galatians 1:1-9; Ephesians 5:27; John 8:7-11; 1 Corinthians 11:1)

In the spirit of humility, Paul the apostle presented himself as an apostle called by God and commitment to the course of the gospel of Christ. Here, he came down in a lowly manner to show his calling to be an apostle. “Would to God ye could bear with me in my little folly”. Not that he was a fool in the sense of being unintelligent or nonentity: it was an expression that portrayed his humility, self-effacement and graceful perception of himself. He decided to play the ‘fool’ in order to bring the church back to the right track. The call to ministry is a privilege and no one should glory in this exalted role. “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 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; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to
nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

Question 1: How can believers remain humble in the light of 1 Corinthians 1:26-29?

In all situations and circumstances, believers must never forget the fact of their salvation as an act of God. No one was born righteous or as a child of God. It was the unmerited favour of God that made us sons and daughters of God and joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ. Any attempt to define our salvation as though we worked for it runs contrary to the revealed word of God (Ephesians 2:8,9).

It is obvious that the ultimate goal of Paul’s ministry was to present the church “as a chaste virgin to Christ”. He declared that his concern as a true shepherd over the flock of Christ was to prevent the Corinthian church from straying due to the false claims of false teachers and apostles who have been preying on them and were in the process of corrupting their minds from the simplicity of the gospel of Christ. As a concerned shepherd of the sheep, the Apostle wasted no time in calling Christians to be wary of the predatory wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Question 2: How can we avoid being deceived by false teachers peddling false doctrines all around us?

These so-called ministers twist the Scriptures with sweet words to deceive weak-minded babes in Christ and unwary mature believers with the sole aim of turning them away from Christ. We are warned in the Scripture that, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (2 John 10). This was reiterated to the Galatians Church: “As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:9).

Paul’s defence of his apostleship (2 Corinthians 11:5-15; 10:7-10; 12:11; 1 Corinthians 15:10)
“For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5). Apostle Paul’s commitment to the whole truth motivated him to join issues with the false apostles who attempted to disparage him. He felt that those laying claims to being ministers of Christ among the Corinthians were no where near the great works the Lord had wrought through him. He believed that they were mere impostors masquerading as servants of Christ. The fruits of his labour were there to testify for him. In comparison, the apostle towers above all and ranked as the chiefest of apostles. First, Paul’s appointment was by the Lord and not men (2 Corinthians 1:1). Whereas many so-called ministers of the gospel arrogate lofty titles to themselves without approval from heaven, he was chosen of God.

Second, Paul embarked on more missionary journeys than any of the early disciples of Christ. The Acts of the Apostles recorded his first, second and third missionary journeys. Third, he stood out from others with his unparalleled suffering for the sake of the gospel. He experienced shipwrecks, endured persecutions, beatings and imprisonments (2 Corinthians 6:4-10; 11:23-27). Fourth, he had wonderful revelations beyond compare (2 Corinthians 12:1-5).

Fifth, he performed great miracles in the name of the Lord which he termed “signs of an apostle” (2 Corinthians 12:12). Last, he wrote almost half of the books of the New Testaments – about fourteen in number. Yet, in his characteristic modesty, he attributed all his achievements to God’s enabling grace. “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Therefore, the Apostle warned the church to beware of Satan and his agents transforming themselves as if they were servants of Christ. “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.
Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:14,15). If there were false teachers and heretics in the time of the Apostles, the tide of events these last days calls for caution and earnestness, with full determination and decision by heaven-bound pilgrims to earnestly contend for the faith. Believers must be fully armed with the truth so as to know when and how to deal with false teachers and their doctrines. We must not accept every minister as a true servant of God, “but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

PAUL’S STEADFASTNESS IN SUFFERING (2 Corinthians 11:16-33; Acts 9:16; John 16:33; Isaiah 43:1,2; Hebrews 2:18; 4:14-16; 10:32-36; 2 Corinthians 12:9,10; 2 Timothy 4:16; 3:12; Romans 8:35-39)

In his self-commendation as an apostle of Christ, Paul returned to his trademark language of modesty by alluding to being a ‘fool’ for Christ. “I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little” (2 Corinthians 11:16). He sought the consent of the Corinthian Christians to showcase his travails for the sake of Christ. Then, he proceeded to give a list of his suffering for the gospel’s sake and his unrelenting efforts to preach by all means. Like other disciples of Christ, he had his own share of persecutions and suffering. Of his travails, he said, “...in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often,
in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). He experienced all these with consummate steadfastness in God’s ability to keep and protect him till he had fulfilled his ministry. It is clear that faithfulness to God does not insulate believers from tribulations, trouble, pain, suffering and trials (Acts 28:16).

**Question 3: Why do believers suffer?**

Although challenges of life may differ, they all have the tendency to depress the spirit of man and cripple him in the discharge of his duties to God. The devil also uses adversities with the aim of weakening our obedience to God and His word. But if believers manage these experiences with grace, they become steppingstones to stronger faith in the Lord. However, suffering must not be as a result of sin or unequal yoke with unbelievers.

True believers may experience suffering for the following reasons: one, because of their faith in Christ (1 Peter 2:21); two, when their lives oppose the activities and dictates of the world (John 17:14); three, Satan and his followers delight in persecuting believers in Christ (Matthew 5:10; 1 Peter 4:12); four, to underscore our need of absolute dependence on God (Psalm 46:1; 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7); five, to confirm our union and relationship with Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13; Revelation 2:9); six, to prune, purify, and perfect us to conform to the image of Christ (Deuteronomy 4:20); seven, to help us learn obedience (Hebrews 5:7-9); eight, to enable us know how to empathize with others (Hebrews 13:3; 2 Corinthians 3:1-10; Matthew 25:36-40); nine, it makes God to demonstrate His power on our behalf and even through us (Acts 12:1-25); ten, to prepare us for higher calling in the service of the Kingdom (Acts 8:1-4,8; Philippians 1:12-14; Genesis 39:1-20).

**Question 4: What should be our disposition as true believers while suffering or being persecuted?**
While we suffer unjustly as believers, we must be sure of our relationship with God (1 Peter 4:15); read and meditate upon the word of God (Psalm 119:9-11; 1 Peter 5:7; Isaiah 43:1,2); pray for divine help (Acts 12:5); seek counsel from spiritually mature believers (Proverbs 11:14); be ready to endure without compromise (2 Corinthians 6:4-10); trust God for deliverance with unwavering faith because He is aware of our tribulation (Exodus 3:7-10; Hebrews 13:4); and, rejoice and give glory to God (Acts 5:40-41; 16:25).

In his suffering, Paul was still focused on his calling. He declared his passion even in the face of persecution. “If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities” (2 Corinthians 11:30). This is the expected attitude of believers while suffering or being persecuted for righteousness sake. The Christian attitude and confession today in whatever situation should be: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).
LESSON 684
SUFFICIENCY OF GOD’S GRACE

MEMORY VERSE: “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 12:1-21

Paul had, in the last chapter, affirmed his apostleship to silence his detractors who took advantage of his self-abasement to despise his apostleship. He listed all he had gone through in ministry to point them to the great act of God in delivering His chosen and anointed ones. As a result of success in ministry and frailty of human nature, it is possible for pride to set in. In order to keep him from falling into pride, God permitted a thorn in his flesh to keep him in line so that he would appreciate and depend absolutely on God’s grace.

Paul informed his audience of the abundant revelations that the Lord gave him, as well as the messenger of Satan to buffet him so as to keep him humble. Although he prayed that the messenger should depart from him, the Lord said that His grace was sufficient for him. Like Paul, the grace of God is sufficient for the believer who is carrying his cross. Today’s lesson clearly instructs the believer on the need to shun self-exaltation, depend on the grace of God at all times, walk and serve in holiness of life to be accounted worthy of inheritance in heaven.


Question 1: What were the spiritual experiences of Paul that predisposed him to pride?

Paul made it clear that it was not expedient for him to glory, but that since this was necessary to answer
his detractors, he would do so. He thereafter delved into his revelations and ministerial experiences as an apostle. He specifically spoke about his being “caught up to the third heaven” and “caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” over fourteen years earlier. Apart from the fact that the Lord personally appeared to him on his way to Damascus, he clarified that the gospel he received and was preaching came not from man but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11,12; 1 Corinthians 15:3). It was to him that God revealed the mysteries of the Kingdom that the Gentiles should partake of the privileges of the gospel with the Jews by faith. Even Peter the apostle recognised that God granted Paul special revelations and wisdom concerning deep truths of the Kingdom (2 Peter 3:15,16).

The temptation that accompanies such manifold revelations is pride. Paul was predisposed to fall into this temptation as an independent-minded, self-reliant and strong-willed personality. Believers should learn that if Paul, who had been to paradise, seen the glory of heaven and heard unspeakable words still stood the chance of falling into spiritual pride, they too need to watch against it. A Christian writer aptly puts it this way: “There is no sin that is more subtle, insinuating, deceptive; none that lurks more constantly around the heart, and that finds a more ready entrance, than pride. He who has been characterized by pride before his conversion, will be in special danger of it afterwards; he who has eminent gifts in prayer, or in conversation, or in preaching, will be in special danger of it; he who is eminently successful will be in danger of it; and he who has any extraordinary spiritual comforts will be in danger of it. Of this sin he who lives nearest to God may be in most special danger; and he who is most eminent in piety should feel that he also occupies a position where the enemy will approach him in a sly and subtle manner, and where he is in peculiar danger of a fall.”

However, God detests self-glorification as it is contrary to the Spirit of our Saviour who “made himself of
no reputation”. Christ wants His followers to imbibe His attribute of lowliness and not the grandstanding of Lucifer. It is unfortunate to find some gospel ministers boasting and blowing the trumpet of their achievements in the world and ministry today (Proverbs 6:17). Pride is part of the evils that will be rampant in the last days, which will be judged by the Lord (2 Timothy 3:1,2; Romans 1:30,32).

**Question 2: State some reasons believers should not engage in self-glorification.**

Believers must not engage in self-glorification as it derives from and promotes pride which leads to destruction (Jeremiah 48:29; Proverbs 18:18). Herod manifested it and was eaten up by worms (Acts 12:20-23). Two, it robs God of the glory due to Him. Whatever the Lord accomplishes through the believer should be attributed to Him and not to self because “we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us”. Power belongs to God; He only delegates it primarily for the expansion of His kingdom. Three, it turns the congregation’s attention on the minister rather than on the Lord. Four, it depletes God’s anointing on the believer and exposes him to Satan’s attacks.

**SUSTAINING GRACE FOR PAUL’S CRUSHING EXPERIENCE** (2 Corinthians 12:8-10; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Timothy 2:11,12; 2 Corinthians 3:5; John 1:16)

**Question 3: What personal efforts did Paul make to remain humble?**

Paul knew the danger of pride and vainglory. He preached on the virtue of humility, pointing to Christ as our Model (Philippians 2:3-8). He made it a principle of personal discipline to “keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Corinthians 9:27). As part of personal discipline, Paul kept his translation to the third heaven a secret for fourteen years so that people
will not look at him as some extraordinary being that may lead to pride. Even when he chose to speak about it, he did not give details of it unlike those who would either produce tapes to sell or rush to publish it in a book.

However, God who granted him those great revelations knew that “knowledge puffeth up”; that beyond his personal efforts at disciplining himself to be humble that the abundant revelations he received could still make his head to swell to his hurt. God knows the tendencies of the righteous and a diligent believer like Paul. He can detect and know how to crush the minutest seed of pride in the heart. In love, He allowed him to be afflicted with a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble.

**Question 4: What was the thorn in Paul’s flesh and the lesson believers can learn from it?**

Paul refers to it as a thorn in the flesh, not in his spirit. This nullifies the idea of any demon possessing him as some people think. Moreover, the Holy Spirit cannot dwell in the same body with a demon. Literally, a thorn is a sharp ‘pointed woody growth projecting from the stem of some trees, bushes, and woody plants’. When it pierces, it is very painful to the flesh. From the Scripture, humans can be thorns in the flesh; that is, instruments of oppression or correction (Hosea 2:6; Ezekiel 28:24; Numbers 33:55; Judges 2:3) or use thorns to tear the flesh of people they discipline as Gideon did in Judges 8:7,16.

Paul calls the thorn by another name: “the messenger of Satan”. What Satan will do is what he delegates his messengers to do. The commission of this messenger of Satan was to buffet and afflict him. Though Paul chose to conceal the exact nature of this thorn in his flesh, this one thing we know: it is such that did cause infirmity. The affliction was very painful and crushing because to buffet is ‘to knock or strike against something heavily or repeatedly; to hit somebody or something sharply with the fist or hand’. The messenger of Satan caused infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, distresses and weakness.
This great suffering drove the Apostle into repeated prayer for its removal. Rather than remove it, God said: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness". God would rather supply the grace for the believer to bear his cross than free him from cross-bearing which is a mark of discipleship. With the crushing experience of the cross, the believer can affirm that "I am crucified with Christ" and now live only by faith in God; that "I die daily" (Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 15:31). If the grace of God was able to sustain Paul in the challenges he faced, it is also able to sustain every Christian in whatever challenges he faces.

Question 5: What can believers learn from Paul’s attitude during this crushing experience?

From God’s answer to his prayers, Paul realised the divine benevolence in allowing the thorn in his flesh. Rather than bemoan his plight, he saw the design of the Lord to keep him humble and preserve him from pride and destruction. The Apostle appreciated the love of God towards him. "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." We need to emulate this grateful attribute of the Apostle. Note that this affliction did not affect his spiritual life: "...though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

The promise of sufficiency of sustaining grace does not contradict Christ’s doctrine of divine healing. God heals, delivers and keeps the believer healthy. Paul’s experience is peculiar and should not be generalised. Christians who are suffering persecution or affliction for Christ should seek the Lord for divine intervention and rely on His promised not to leave or forsake us. We should remain fearless as God has given us the Spirit of power, love and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Besides, we must endure persecution without abandoning the ministry, abide in unbroken communion with the Lord, praise and rejoice in Him.
The Lord’s answer to Paul’s prayer is equally highly instructive. The sinner is morally weak but he can receive God’s grace to be free. Afterwards, he will be empowered to overcome temptations, sin, self and Satan. “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). Our sanctification and Spirit-infilling are also by grace to do what our natural strength or ability cannot do. The Christian life is lived in the strength of the Lord. Every believer needs sufficiency of grace in every area of life.


While affirming the fact that it was foolish to have boasted, he made it clear that he was compelled to do so by his detractors. He reeled out his credentials as the apostle of Christ. He informed the Church at Corinth that though he could be referred to as the greatest apostle, he was nothing. Indeed, Paul was a man mightily used of God. He demonstrated virtually all the gifts of the Spirit, filled with the fullness of the Lord; God did special miracles through him. Crisscrossing the then known world with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, he was brought before kings and governors. He alone wrote epistles that formed about half of the New Testament. The signs of an apostle were clearly seen in Paul’s ministry.

Question 6: What challenge does Paul’s style of preaching have for ministers of the gospel today?

Paul’s ministry is a challenge to ministers of the gospel today. The gospel of our Lord should be preached with power. Men will not believe except they see signs and wonders (John 4:48). While signs and wonders should not be the reason for gospel campaigns, it should not be neglected because it is a means to an end – so that men may have faith in the finished work of Christ on Calvary and get saved.
All believers need to learn commitment from Paul here. He was visiting these Corinthian believers for the third time. How often do we visit our flock? Leaders at all levels in the church should make it a point of duty to regularly visit and pray for their members. Timely and prayerful visit can go a long way to strengthen and encourage the flock to continue in the blessings of the gospel (Acts 14:22). We also learn from Paul’s consecration in carrying out the work of the ministry. His determination was not to be burdensome to the brethren. He did not use his authority to ask them to support his ministry, but he chose the path of consecration. He would rather spend and be spent for the flock. In the same manner, pastors should imbibe the spirit of self-sacrifice rather than making merchandize of the flock. The congregation must recognize and respect the authority of the leader and not despise him, though he does not have a domineering outlook. Honour and reverence should be given to the shepherd so that he can joyfully give account of the sheep. Moreover, the church of God should be holy at all times, without which no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). The Lord is coming back for a spotless and glorious church and every minister and member must be ready.
LESSON 685
EXHORTATION TO GODLY LIVING

MEMORY VERSE: Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you (2 Corinthians 13:11).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 13:1-14

In this study, Apostle Paul continued his exposition on his apostolic ministry. As the last chapter of his two profound epistles to the Corinthians, he used the opportunity to give appropriate exhortations regarding their personal lives: “Be perfect, be of good comfort”; their relationship with others within and outside the church: “be of one mind, live in peace”; and the assurance of divine presence if they take care of the first two aspects: “and the God of love and peace shall be with you”.

This particular chapter shows the depth of love in his pastoral heart as he demonstrated a deep knowledge of the people under his leadership. Adequate knowledge of the personal lives of members is a prerequisite for a profitable ministry. Leaders who are detached from the people under them cannot demonstrate the real pastoral care that God’s people require. Due pastoral care will include timely warnings, adequate edifying exhortations and appropriate blessings in prayer, all delivered in a loving fashion so that God’s children may abide in His blessings. All these are aptly displayed in our text.

Question 1: What are the major ingredients of true pastoral care?

PAUL’S TIMELY WARNING TO ERRING BELIEVERS
(2 Corinthians 13:1-4; Matthew 5:29; Hebrews 12:5-8)

In his first epistle to the Corinthian church, Paul affirmed that Christians are “called to be saints”; as such, they are expected to live above board. In matters
of godliness, truth, sincerity and integrity, they must not be found wanting. In order to achieve this, discipline and self-discipline are unavoidable. Self-discipline remains an important ingredient of godly living. No one can lay claim to godly living without a proper attitude to personal and church discipline. Our Lord Jesus counselled in Matthew 5:29: “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell”. If Samson had spiritually disciplined (plucked out) his lustful eyes for strange women, he would not have had it done for him in a cruel manner by the Philistines. If the believer fails to discipline his affections, passions and lusts, then church discipline becomes inevitable so that the flesh can be subdued and the spirit saved from destruction.

Question 2: Mention some scriptural principles of church discipline.

Paul, in our text, gave a clear warning that he would not spare to discipline erring members of the Corinthian church who refuse to repent from their sins. God disciplines His children so that they can be partakers of His holiness (Hebrews 12:5-8). Therefore, church discipline, proclaimed through God’s servants and leaders, should not be despised, especially when it is based on sound scriptural principles. Leaders and members should take note of the following principles in church discipline.

• One, church discipline should be applied only when there is clear evidence of default. “...In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1).

• Two, church discipline is meant to re-awaken the erring member to God’s demand of holiness and not to demonstrate a leader’s power over the brethren.

• Three, the ultimate aim of church discipline is to lead to repentance and restoration.

• Four, the disciplined member should see the
withdrawal of privileges during the time of discipline as opportunity to pray and seek God’s face, and not to go around courting sympathy.

- Five, those disciplined should take it in good faith, serve the discipline humbly without imputing ulterior motives to the leader.

- Six, members of the church should have the right attitude to those under discipline: they should not be seen as enemies or encouraged to rebel against the leadership.

- Seven, church rebuke and discipline are meant to be a lesson, not only to those at fault, but to others (2 Corinthians 13:2; 1 Timothy 5:20).

- Eight, the church leadership should not abandon or forget to periodically review cases of those under discipline. Such should be forgiven and restored where there are clear signs of repentance “...lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:6-11).

- Nine, even when a particular disciplinary action appears unjust, the New Testament believer is encouraged to bear it and wait patiently for God to justify him, thus following Christ’s example (1 Peter 2:18-23).

In spite of the above principles, there are people in the church who do not profit from warnings, rebukes and discipline. They harden their hearts and recklessly persist in self-will. By rejecting warnings, scorning rebukes and despising discipline, such people expose themselves to avoidable judgment and retribution. “He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Proverbs 29:1). Godly living is incomplete without a contrite spirit that is responsive to warnings, receptive to rebukes and amenable to discipline.

**EDIFYING EXHORTATION TO STEADFAST GODLY LIVING** (2 Corinthians 13:5-10; James 1:22-25; Luke 1:78,79; Psalm 19:7,8,11; Romans 1:28-32)
“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”

The Apostle, without sounding snobbish in the very least, challenged the individual believers in Corinth to self-examination. He assumed that Christ lives in them and unless they had become reprobates (immoral, rejected, damned, backslidden, deceived), are capable of competent self-examination.

This is the beauty of biblical Christianity. There are no secret standards. Everyone in the church has access to the Bible. Unlike a cult, a Bible-believing church has no transcendental, mystic or hidden truths which new initiates are prevented from knowing. Therefore, no true believer in Christ is in darkness about God’s demand unless he is willingly ignorant through lack of personal study of the word of God or failure to receive sound teaching. Therefore, we all can examine ourselves to evaluate our motives and regulate our actions simply by looking into the perfect law of liberty. “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (James 1:22-25).

Question 3: What is the advantage of being a member of a Bible-believing church?

Biblical prescriptions for godly living are deep and profound, but they are not mysterious. “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes... Moreover
by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:7,8,11). A believer can become a reprobate when his judgment on spiritual matters and even that of his own actions and motives are no longer trustworthy. This happens when someone previously enlightened persistently acts contrary to what he knows to be true, either by following wrong examples, imbibing false doctrines or by simply choosing to relapse into sin to meet a felt need like childbearing, prosperity, promotion, employment etc. He therefore, deadens his conscience, deliberately closing his heart to godly impartation. But the Scripture warns: “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” (Romans 1:28-32).

This scriptural truth nullifies the doctrine of eternal security. Our security in Christ depends on our cleaving to the Lord and avoiding whatever will quench the light of God in our hearts. To make this possible, the Corinthians were exhorted not to do evil, “…for everyone that doeth evil hateth the light” (John 3:20); instead, they were to live an honest life since “…he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:21).

Apostle Paul made it clear to the Corinthian brethren that he desired their perfection, and that the power of discipline which the Lord gave him was meant for their edification in the way of godliness, not for their destruction.
"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

In rounding off this epistle, Paul the apostle gave the Corinthian church a loving parting hug. The simple farewell which still contained a summary of the two epistles in very few words was loaded with expressions of love. It is a proof of the Apostle’s statement that love (charity) never fails. We should always remember that the simplest expression of godly affection does lasting wonders in every life. Everyone wants to be loved and cherished, and we can make the difference in a world filled with hatred by choosing to be loving people.

A sincere, cheerful greeting will do more to adorn our spirituality. The courtesy of greeting varies in style from culture to culture. However, from biblical examples, the following are obvious: (a) cheerfulness (b) goodwill (c) respectful conduct and (d) good, appropriate language. “And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee” (Ruth 2:4). The Old Testament priests were specifically told to bless God’s people in edifying language.

The Apostle recommends that brethren should greet one another with a holy kiss. Certainly, it was a reference to the slight embrace that was common among the people of the east; it has nothing to do with the sensual immoral kiss of today or the passionate greeting which is permissible only between two married people. Even in the Bible, greeting by kissing was not recorded between members of the opposite gender. The exception was those who kissed the feet as a sign of submission and worship. Contemporary believers who misapply this portion of the Scripture or see it as a license for sensuality miss the truth.
Those who indulge in such ungodly practice should consider the word, “holy” as opposed to the sensual, carnal kiss of lust.

The apostolic greetings were rounded off by the great benediction of grace for God's people, love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Paul, in recommending the grace of our Lord Jesus was resting on how: (a) transforming grace changed him from an injurious persecutor to an indefatigable and irrepressible preacher; (b) sustaining grace helped him to overcome obstacles and weaknesses; (c) ministering grace opened doors of evangelisation for him with abiding fruits in a large part of the then known world. He further wished that the love of God will be with them.

God's love planned the salvation of man; and, it is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost (Romans 5:5). The communion of the Holy Ghost was added as the ultimate blessing, as no believer can live to enjoy the fullness of redemption blessings without the indwelling presence of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit guides and comforts the believer. The apostolic greeting and benediction teach us to consciously ensure that our greetings, indeed our speech, should always be with grace, seasoned with salt of courtesy so that it can positively impact our neighbours.

**Question 4: Summarise the areas in which the grace from the Lord Jesus impacted Paul's life.**
LEsson 686

Danger of Perverting the Gospel

Memory Verse: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

Text: Galatians 1:1-10

Paul, the apostle wrote the epistle to the churches of Galatia. In his time, the region of Galatia included the cities of Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. The region of Galatia covered the area presently known as Turkey. Paul and his companions had evangelized those cities and, despite intense persecutions, planted vibrant churches there during their first missionary journey (Acts 13:14,51; 14:5-7,21-23). Majority of believers in those churches were Gentiles who were very zealous in their new faith in Christ.

However, news of their conversion eventually reached some Jewish hardliners who believed the rite of circumcision was a prerequisite for salvation. By their attempt to marry the Old Testament rite of circumcision with the New Testament provision of justification by faith in Christ, they inadvertently made God’s simple plan of salvation more difficult and their position actually began to hinder or pervert the true gospel.

The Galatians had believed the true gospel when Paul preached Christ, His death and resurrection as basis for salvation and freedom from sin. Meanwhile, through the influence of the Judaizers, they were led into error. Consequently, Paul had to write this strongly worded epistle to be passed to all the churches in the entire region. The epistle shows the prompt response of the Apostle to the challenge of false doctrine and his determination to maintain sound teaching in the church. All the members and leaders should be diligent to enforce sound doctrine.
and ensure scriptural practices in the church. This would be achieved through constant preaching of the truth, exposure of erroneous teaching and rebuke of false teachers.

**Question 1: What role should members and leaders play in order to maintain sound doctrine in the church?**

**APOSTOLIC GREETING AND AFFIRMATION OF THE GOSPEL** (Galatians 1:1-5; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; 15:10; Ephesians 1:12; Philippians 1:1,2; Colossians 1:1,2)

Paul began this epistle with greetings and the affirmation of the gospel. He acknowledged the death of Jesus Christ and His resurrection by the power of God, the Father, as the basis for salvation from sin and deliverance from the present evil world. From the outset, he reiterated what constitutes the true gospel before he later addressed the issue of its perversion.

It was customary with Paul in his epistles to greet the recipients and pronounce a benediction of grace and peace upon them (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; Ephesians 1:12; Philippians 1:1,2; Colossians 1:1,2). However, it should be noted that this Pauline greetings which was a trademark of his epistles, was not a mere routine; rather, it was a constant solemn reminder that the Christian life can only be sustained by a continuous supply of grace and peace from God. We can neither be all that God wants us to be, nor do all He wants us do except by His grace. Apostle Paul made this clear when he said “But by the grace of God, I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). After being saved from sin through the initial saving grace of God, we need sustaining grace to keep us in the faith.

**Question 2: Point out some notable attributes believers should manifest when correcting those who err in the faith.**

It is very instructive that despite the fact that Paul wrote this epistle with a heavy heart and was quite unhappy with the spiritual state of the Galatians, he
greeted and pronounced a benediction upon them. This teaches us the need to be courteous, have our emotions under check, and not be overbearing whenever we are dealing with erring believers. Paul was courteous in his approach to the Galatians but he was also sincere and did not flatter them. He could not honestly write to them, like he wrote to other churches, “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken throughout the world” (Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:15,16; Philippians 1:3,4; 1 Thessalonians 1:2,3). It is only in the epistle to the Galatians that we see Paul failing to mention any reason for thanksgiving, and that underscores the seriousness of perverting the gospel.

Another key point in the opening verses of the epistle to the Galatians is Paul’s affirmation of the divine origin of his apostleship. He described himself as “an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)” (Galatians 1:1).

It became necessary for Paul to affirm his apostleship to the Galatians because the false teachers who came to contradict the truth which he had preached also questioned his apostolic authority. They claimed that he was inferior to those who saw Jesus face to face, like Peter, James, John, etc. But their chief purpose was to undermine Paul’s influence and belittle him before the Galatians so they could scale down the impact of his message. This is one major strategy of false teachers. They try to discredit or cast aspersions on true ministers of God and their message so that they can prepare the ground to sow their erroneous doctrine. But Paul simply affirmed that he was called to be an apostle by God, and not by any human authority. He had a direct commission by the Lord Jesus Christ himself and, as such, the message he preached was divine in origin. From Paul’s response to the antics of the false teachers, we learn that our greatest weapon against error is an unwavering affirmation of the truth.
Apostle Paul expressed surprise that the Galatians were so soon removed from the gospel of Christ into “another gospel”. He reproved them for being so gullible and unstable. They had believed the true gospel which required genuine repentance and simple faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the condition for salvation; but due to the influence of the Judaizers they were confused and almost surrendered themselves to be circumcised so they could be saved.

The Judaizers were not the only group that perverted the gospel in ancient times. There were other Jewish groups such as the Nicolaianes who believed and taught that the gospel frees Christians from obedience to any law, whether moral, civil or ceremonial. In effect, they held the antinomian belief that a Christian can live anyhow because he is under grace and not under the law. There were also the Ebionites. They were strictly pharisaic and insisted on ceremonial washings and observance of sabbath as evidence of true spirituality. Then the Elkesaites, who rejected the Virgin Birth of Jesus and only regarded Him as a higher or ideal Adam. Apart from the Jewish perversions of the gospel, the Gentiles also paraded the Agnostics and the Gnostics.

Question 3: 

Mention some ancient and modern perversions of the gospel.

In modern times, there are different versions of perverted gospel. First, there are those who teach justification by faith plus law keeping. They insist that before a person can be saved, he must not only believe in Jesus, but also keep some ceremonial laws or sacraments. Second is the gospel of works without faith. The peddlers base salvation on water baptism (whether infant, by proxy, or sinners’ baptism), receiving holy communion, etc. They forget that without faith it is impossible to please God, and the ordinances are only meaningful after a person has been genuinely saved through faith in Christ.
The third kind of perversion is the gospel of good works only. This is the assertion that we shall be saved once we do good works like giving alms, live morally, do religious duties, pray often, fast, and obey the golden rule. But the case of Cornelius exposes the error of this notion. There is the need to repent from sin and believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 10:1-6; 11:14; Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:4-7). Fourth is the gospel of faith without works. They believe that once you pray to receive Jesus by faith, respond to invitation of an evangelist or sign a decision card, then you are saved, even when there is no change of lifestyle (James 2:17,20,24,26). Fifth is the perversion of modernism which rejects definite biblical authority and adopts its own concepts of what is right or wrong. They formulate their own ideas concerning worship, marriage, family life, etc., without conformity to the holy Scriptures. Sixth is the gospel peddled by many pseudo-Christian groups and countless commercial prayer houses or mountains that churn out spurious dreams, visions and tales of angelic visitations which contradict the Scriptures.

**Question 4: What are the major features of the perverted gospel?**

Basically, all perversions of the gospel either adds to or subtracts something from the true gospel, thereby destroying its purity. Perversion may also take the form of overemphasis of some doctrines while undermining others. It has been one chief strategy of Satan to pervert the truth and make people believe a lie. It would be recalled that Eve was deceived in Eden when she believed Satan’s lie that contradicted God’s word. Therefore, believers must ever be on guard and ensure they maintain the purity of biblical doctrine in the midst of prevalent damnable heresies.

Perverted gospel often appear fascinating because it presents something that either appeals to the flesh or fosters human pride; but in actual fact, it is no good news but heresy and does not help its adherents to

**Question 5: Point out some conditions that influence a person to pervert or embrace perverted gospel.**

From the experience of the Galatians, there are certain factors that predispose a person to pervert the gospel. One is secret love for sin and absence of genuine love for the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12). Two, absence of a mature, Spirit-filled teacher of the word of God. Three, a state of protracted spiritual infancy. When believers do not grow in knowledge and grace of Jesus but remain babes many years after conversion, they are liable to being tossed about by false teachers (Ephesians 4:14; 1 Corinthians 3:1,2; Hebrews 5:12-14). Four, ignorance of what constitutes the true gospel. When people are merely religious and not well-informed concerning the truth of salvation, they will not be able to distinguish between counterfeit and genuine gospel. Five, a strong attachment to human traditions. Six, a tendency to please men and be popular, or an attempt to gather crowd at all cost. Ironically, this was one of the accusations the Judaizers levelled against Paul. They suggested that he preached against circumcision because he wanted to make salvation cheap for the Gentiles, thereby making himself a hero of a sort among them. But Paul countered their insinuation by saying he was not a menpleaser.

**GREAT DAMNATION FOR PERVERTING THE GOSPEL**

(Galatians 1:8,9; 5:7-12; Mark 9:42; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 16:22; Titus 3:10,11; 2 John 10,11; Revelation 22:18,19)

Those who preach any other gospel apart from that which is anchored on repentance from sin and faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ stand the danger of God’s terrible judgment. In our text, Apostle Paul pronounced a curse on perverters of the gospel. “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8). This strong imprecation literally means “let him come under the curse of God” and it agrees with Christ’s teaching that there is fearful judgment awaiting those who cause
young believers to stray from the truth (Mark 9:42).

Paul was so confident that the gospel he preached to the Galatians was authentic and anything different from that, regardless of its source, would be a perverted gospel.

**Question 6: Point out the punishment awaiting the perverters of the gospel.**

Perverters of the gospel place themselves under the same curse as those who never knew or loved the Lord Jesus Christ. “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha” (1 Corinthians 16:22). Literally, those who pervert the gospel stand the risk of being excommunicated from Christian fellowship. “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself” (Titus 3:10,11). Also, they would lose their ministry because they should be removed from ministry lest they pollute others in the church. Finally, they would be condemned on the last day if they do not repent. John the apostle said: “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18,19).

What then should be the attitude of believers towards those who pervert the gospel? Paul the apostle said we should avoid them, and John said we should not bid them God speed (Romans 16:17; 2 John 10,11). That means we should not encourage or support them either overtly or covertly. We should correct them, if possible, but if they refuse, we should expose them and withdraw our fellowship from them.
LESSON 686
DAILY CHRISTIAN 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: Romans 12:1-21

Christian service is a natural consequence of being born again. The fact that we are left here after we had given our lives to Christ until we are called home to glory implies that serving the Lord is a direct result of our salvation. Consecration, submission and service are significant hallmarks of serious Christian calling. Submission entails complete yieldedness to God and church leadership. A consecrated and submissive life finds expression in a daily life of committed Christian service.

We need to remind ourselves of the peculiarity of the age we live in as we consider this topic. This is an age when hoards of people are obsessed and taken up in their own selfish inordinate ambition. People are engrossed in a quest that zeros in on self-attainment, education, prosperity, power, popularity, prominence and pride. People, including so-called believers, are more interested in making money than serving the Lord. They would rather give their best time to acquire mundane physical things than render service that has eternal value to others.

In the face of all these, it therefore becomes essential to examine the only selfless cause which transcends life here and is significant enough to enjoy heaven’s attention and reward on the last day.

Question 1: Why is the subject of daily Christian service important?

The striking peculiarity of Christian service in today’s world is its variegated pattern. Our daily life of service as Christians covers divers areas. But broad as it may seem, it can be neatly summed up into four unmistakable areas of service: one, service to God (verses 1,2); two, service to ourselves (verses 3-8); three, service to the brethren or the body of Christ (verses 9-16) and four, service to the world (verses 17-21).

**Question 2:** Mention the four broad areas in which we may categorize Christian service.

In all its varied shapes and forms, the most compelling of our daily service is the preaching of the gospel, otherwise known as evangelism. Simply put, evangelism is the deliberate, purposeful and prayerful effort of sharing the gospel with another with the intent of winning him or her for the Lord. When we evangelize or witness, we are serving God by helping others make the most important decision of their lives. We are helping them to come out of darkness into light and escape eternal damnation in hell. Through this effort, the soul-winner is helping the sinner get on the path to spending eternity with God in heaven.

A former communist who gave a fanatic devotion to communism, George North, later found Christ and in his new zeal, underscored the significance of regular witnessing: “Picture your town, if every believer gave out gospel tracts every evening, if every weekend they held large open air meetings or indoor rallies; told their workmates everyday about Jesus; gave every spare coin to His cause, and invested every spare minute in prayer. If you cannot preach, give. If you cannot give, distribute tracts. If you cannot distribute tracts, talk to your friends.” This is the picturesque expression of our daily life of evangelism. Jesus said: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). “Go thou and preach the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60). “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23). Evangelism therefore, is considered as every believer’s daily service.
Question 3: Mention some forms of service we can daily engage in as Christians.

Involvement in the laity work of the church is another form of Christian service in which we can daily exercise ourselves. The church has many areas of work in which we can get involved and utilize our God-given gifts. The wise Creator has bestowed on us different abilities, gifts and talents which the Apostle Paul refers to as “gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.” Some have the gift of caring, love and leadership. They love to visit and share their material and spiritual blessings with other people. Some can serve as home caring fellowship leaders, zonal leaders and district pastors. Some have the gift of praying: they can be involved in the prayer warriors team of the church. Some Christians are mature and seasoned by reason of their development and exposure: they may be chosen to be missionaries or ministers. Some others can be chosen to sing or play musical instruments. Some are blessed with natural strong physique and may make good ushers. Some have spare time and they could spend it in the church seeing to the cleanliness of the environment. Some have given themselves to the serious study of God’s word and acquisition of wisdom and they make good counsellors and Bible teachers.

Still, others have been blessed of God with material things – money, mansions, means and connections – so that they can support church projects, Christian workers and the needy. “Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality”.

Paul wrote about this multifaceted pattern of Christian service and gifts thus: “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).
THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN SERVANTS
(Romans 12:9-21; Zechariah 3:7; 2 Timothy 2:21; Titus 2:12).

The principle or attitude of Christian servants are worthy of serious consideration. There are conditions we must meet before we can serve. The conditions are as applicable under the New Testament as they were under the Old. In the Old Testament, God said to Zechariah: “Thus saith the Lord of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by” (Zechariah 3:7). The word “if” shows the conditional nature of Christian service. It is therefore, a grave distortion of truth to assume that there are no moral or spiritual conditions for Christian servants.

Question 4: What is the first and most important condition Christian servants must fulfil?

The first condition is that we must “be first partakers of the fruit” (2 Timothy 2:6). We cannot invite a friend to follow the Saviour we have not fully followed. A Christian who professes and possesses a solid relationship with the Lord must follow Him, do the things He says and walk as He walked.

Secondly, servants of the Lord must live holy, unblamable lives. “If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Timothy 2:21). God’s perfect plan is that “we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life” (Luke 1:74,75). This implies that self must be dead for our service to be acceptable and profitable. There must be a holy and sincere courtesy which pushes self back and prefers others.

Third, we should serve with the attitude of sobriety. A sober disposition cancels the air of self-importance or self-conceitedness. Sobriety discourages an overly
good opinion of oneself. Paul, in our text, puts it this way: “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”; “We should live soberly, righteously, an godly, in this present world” (Romans 12:3; Titus 2:12).

Fourth, our daily Christian service must be carried out with fervour and zeal. A lukewarm, halfhearted service is as good as idling. Neither a lackadaisical, grudging disposition, nor a lazy attitude in matters of divine service is encouraged, for it is unprofitable. We must at all times remember that this is the Lord’s service and it requires our utmost best. Paul says, “Not slothful in business; fervent in Spirit; serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11).

Fifth, our daily Christian service must be backed with the principle of love. Love is the motivating factor that is essential and needful for service. It is the greatest constraining power in the world. Christ came down into the world out of love for lost humanity. “Greater love hath no man than these, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). “God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). We must love God, the church and sinners before we can serve them. “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (Romans 12:9).

Sixth, we must saturate our service with supplication. Prayer directs and puts profit on our service. Jesus’ service to the world was backed with constant prayer, supplication and communion with God. Our little effort becomes much when it is bathed in prayer. We must be “continuing instant in prayer” for effectiveness in whatever area we find ourselves serving.

Finally, our service must be done in the power of the Spirit of God. The secret of unceasing, continual successful service is rendering service in His power and abiding in Him. “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide
in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in me” (John 15:4). Much can be done when the Spirit of God has full control of our lives. Jesus knew this and said: “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Question 5: What principles should be upheld by Christian servants?


The promises to Christian servants are rich and noble. Some of these promises are temporal and others transcend the present into eternity.

Question 6: What are the promises for Christian servants?

There is a promise of reward for servants who do enduring work for the Lord. “If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward” (1 Corinthians 3:14). “And ye shall serve the Lord your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee” (Exodus 23:25). “And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29,30). Second, servants of the Lord have the promise of eternal abode with the Master, Jesus Christ. “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour” (John 12:26). Christ is on the right hand of the Father now; there we shall be with Him if we serve Him faithfully till the end. This implies that we shall share in the joy, bliss and glory of heaven. If we follow him to the end, we shall be with Him in the end. Third, servants of God shall be
honoured by Him. His honour is not like earth’s human honour. It is the true, lasting and highest honour that anyone could have. Though a measure of the honour is received here on earth, the greatest and highest would come when we finally get to heaven. An unquantifiable measure of glory and honour will be heaped on God’s servants in heaven. “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).
Lesson 688

Jesus’ Pattern of Soul-Winning

Memory Verse: “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord” (Matthew 10:25).


As Jesus went about fulfilling His ministry of teaching, preaching and healing, Bible scholars note that He covered about 240 cities and villages. His passion for souls not only drew multitudes of sick minds from the valley of despair, His style of evangelism also presented challenges and a pattern to all His disciples in a hitherto uncharted course.

The call of Peter, Andrew, James, John and Matthew presents a platform from which to look at the Lord’s pattern of soul-winning. Here, the authority, greatness, love, compassion of our Chief Shepherd not only shine, the dramatic change of character and conduct of a life exposed to divine love is clearly set forth.


“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23).

The two words, “preaching” and “healing”, provide the clue to the outstanding success experienced by Jesus in the business of soul-winning. In preaching and teaching, He demonstrated astonishing authority and mastery of the Scriptures; in healing, miracles, signs and wonders, He manifested awesome power.

Question 1: Why do we need the demonstration of healing, miracles, signs and wonders in the business of soul-winning today?

Actually, His success in soul-winning was derived from these two sources: vast knowledge of the Scriptures and
dynamic power evangelism informed by a consistent prayer life (Mark 1:35; Luke 4:1-14; 6:12; 10:21; 22:39-44; John 17:1-26). Together, they presented a model through which to look at His pattern of soul-winning. In teaching, He taught with authority and wisdom. And He did because He was a man of prayer and a man of the Scriptures. It is doubtful whether anyone who is not given to much prayer and deep study of the Scripture could make much progress. The biblical injunctions, “men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1), “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), “study to shew yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15) perhaps hold true in soul-winning than anywhere else. No one hopes to make a success of the job when he is not a student of prayer and the Scriptures; not only prayer but one coupled with fasting (Matthew 17:21).

Jesus shows by His approach that a result-oriented soul-winning venture must of necessity be accompanied by demonstration of the power in healing the diseased, the sick and the demon-oppressed. The society, as presently structured, with rampant outbreak of diseases and demonic afflictions needs that the gospel be presented with demonstration of God’s power.

**Question 2: How can a soul-winner acquire the power to minister to the sick, the diseased and the oppressed?**

As demonstrated by the exploits of the Lord in the field of soul-winning, consistent prayer life and holy living are the two cables through which a soul-winning strategy can tap into the vast divine power for miracles, signs and wonders. Here the truth sticks out. With all thine getting, get power. Actually, there is a limit to what we can do without the backing of God’s power. Notice that more souls were won to the Lord through healing, miracles, signs and wonders than through hard-core preaching. For instance, “In Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did” (John 2:23). In another instance, “many resorted unto
him, and said, John did no miracles: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there” (John 10:41,42).


The Lord’s approach differed from person to person. Situation and wisdom dictated His method of approach. In Matthew’s case, for instance, He not only ate with him, His disarming comment silenced, even if momentarily, the bitter criticism of religious bigots. In Christ’s time, prejudice evidently trudged the land of Palestine. The scribes and Pharisees versus the publicans and the Gentiles. The Sadducees versus Pharisees. The Samaritans versus the Jews. Deep-seated animosities ruled and guided interactions among these sets. These animosities ensured that none paid attention to the inner yearnings of their hearts. Christ’s pattern of soul-winning was to change all that. Wisdom dictates that He varies His approach then, according to the level of His audience’s understanding. He was sensitive to the man-made barrier as He was determined to break the middle wall of partition existing among them. Successful soul-winning demands diverse approach since understanding and temperaments differ from person to person.

**Question 3: Why do we need wisdom in soul-winning?**

People, place and circumstances determined the slant of Jesus’ message. Parables, conversations, questions, comment on current happenings all came in handy as a means of driving home a point. They were thought-provoking as they were witty. He wielded them like a rapier. With them, feelings were gauged, motives unmasked, thus leaving the sinner with no place to hide from the searching glare of God’s word. But in all, wisdom supervised and guided the appropriateness and preferences of the use of each. Soul-winning opportunity can be lost when wisdom is not allowed to decide the appropriateness of the use of words or method!

For instance, to an ordinary eye, it would appear that Jesus has some axe to grind when, in a rare
expression of holy indignation, He pronounced “woes” on the scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, impenitence and unbelief (Matthew 23:13-33). Yet, in one instance, He honoured a dinner invitation from a Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50) and in another praised a scribe for his sincerity (Mark 12:28-34). He was not caught in the prejudice that exists between the Pharisees and the Publicans. He related with them equally. His life was ruled by one maxim: charity towards all, malice towards none. He was swayed by neither the hermitism of John the Baptist (Luke 7:33,34), the hospitality of the Pharisees nor the egocentrism of His disciples (Luke 9:55). He related with His audience with understanding and firmness. Successful soul-winning demands that reason be separated from emotion. Nothing erodes confidence as when preconception is allowed to rule and guide interaction between a soul-winner and his subjects.

Commendation or condemnation should come, as occasion demands it. Notice the tactful use of commendation in the conversation between Jesus and the scribe: “And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34). Tact is also evident in His conversation with the Samaritan woman. “Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband” (John 4:16,17). In dealing with souls, there might be need to commend a kind act done or word said by a seeker. In some cases, this might turn out to be the only means of getting him to accept the gospel.

THE SINNER’S FRIEND (Matthew 9:9-13; John 8:1-11; Luke 7:36-50; Romans 5:8,19; 1 Timothy 1:15).

In associating with Matthew, a certified sinner in the Pharisees’ mind, Jesus showed Himself a true Friend of all spiritual wretch. His condescension that started with His incarnation acquired a new meaning as well as become redefined as He reaches out to sinful men. Criticism, rather than bring about change of behaviour in a sinner, will only harden his heart.
Ordinarily, a publican suffered from a poor public image. He was, on account of his activity as a tax-collector, shunned as a stooge of the Roman empire. Besides, the demand of his duty, an intimate relationship with the Gentiles placed him in bad light among the Jews.

**Question 4: Why were the publicans so despised in the eyes of the Pharisees?**

By interacting with Publicans widely regarded as the sinners and scorn of the society, Jesus set his divine mission on a collision course with the prejudice of His time. It was no wonder therefore that the Pharisees took His disciple to task: “**Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?**”

In asking this question however, the Pharisees betrayed their ignorance of the Messiah’s mission on earth: “**I am not come to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance**” (Matthew 9:13). It is instructive that Jesus answered them out of their own scripture. Christ’s answer must have sounded like a new note in the tradition and religious practice of the day.

The religious people who regarded Jesus’ association with men of “questionable occupation and character” as scandalous, undoubtedly have a wrong assumption of what constitutes acceptable service to God. While they were very particular about religious formality, they neglected the very essence of the Law. The much-despised Publican and the sinner are probably nearer the kingdom of heaven than the self-righteous Pharisee. “**Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you**” (Matthew 21:31).

**Question 5: What do you learn from Jesus’ association with the publicans and sinners of His day?**

Meanwhile, we should not forget the lesson being driven at here: to be a successful soul-winner you will need to show yourself friendly to people whose souls you aim to win for Christ. Your disposition is as important as your message, if not more. In fact, in some cases, it has
sometimes turned out to be the entire message a sinner needs to surrender his life to Christ.

One of the interesting features of Christ’s passion for souls is His practice of taking the gospel to the seekers’ abodes. Homes, towns, cities, streets, roads, seashores, desert, and synagogues – none proved a no-go-area in pursuance of this objective. He condescended to the level of His audience. He identified with their agonies and pains. Doubtless, in the offices, neighbourhood, schools, small circle of acquaintance and relations, larger society, are people who don’t care about the salvation of their souls, about the life hereafter; sometimes they are self-contented and probably snobbish. But any soul-winner who hopes to be like his Master must look beyond the demeanour and character of people. He will need to warm up to the snobbish and cheer up the downcast.

Christ’s passion for souls is not one without some highlights. One, He is as much grieved over the spiritual state of multitude as He was “over one sinner”. Before His encounter with Matthew, He had preached the gospel in Galilee, Capernaum, Nazareth, Bethsaida, Jericho. Yet, He was as excited with one seeker as with a crowd. With both He exuded the same warmth, love, kindness and compassion.

Two, His passion for souls recognised neither place nor time. Every place or time was just alright insofar as people were willing to give audience to His message. People’s homes, places of work, deserts, synagogues, seashores, wilderness all provided a cozy place to address men on the subject of repentance and faith towards God. Three, every situation, circumstance and contact with people became an opportunity not only to experience the wonderful power of God in bodily healing but also the marvellous grace of God in repentance, redemption, and regeneration of life.

Four, only one theme ran through His messages: repentance from sin and faith toward God. Little wonder this evangelistic fervour, tenacity and zeal passed on to His disciples who constitute the nucleus of the early Church. Later, Peter was to reiterate, “we cannot but
speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20) while the early disciples “scattered abroad” by intense persecution went “every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). And through it all, one theme stood out: “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

CONVERSION AND COMMITMENT TO EVANGELISM (Matthew 9:9,19; 10:1-3,5,6; John 4:28,30,39-42; Acts 2:47; 8:1-4; 2 Timothy 2:8,9; 4:1,2)

Matthew honoured the Lord and His disciples not only to commemorate his spiritual rebirth but also to create opportunity for seekers to meet with the Saviour. Of course, being young in the faith, he could not preach to the people. He left the job for Jesus. Therein lies an unforgettable lesson for new converts: you can share your testimonies with and invite your acquaintances and intimate friends to fellowship and church services. You can organise a forum where a minister of God or a more experienced church leader can minister to them. This was the same principle applied in the disciples meeting with “certain Greeks” who came to Jerusalem to worship at the feast of the Passover (John 12:20-22).

Question 6: In fishing for souls, how may we employ Matthew’s method?

An unfamiliar face sitting by our side during worship or fellowship session could be a visitor waiting to be won for Christ. Striking up conversation with the person after service might prove to be the ideal thing to do. Every believer is called to be a soul-winner. What an excellent pattern the Lord has left for us to follow!

One, avoid popularity-seeking and see in every man or woman you meet a unique creature whose soul is as important as any other in the sight of God. Two, let seekers see in you the love, compassion and understanding which the society around them seemed to have denied them: let them know through your conduct and character that he that comes to God, He will, in no wise cast out. Three, give no respite to your passion for soul-winning but recognise in every contact with people an opportunity to reach out to them with
the gospel; to suffer some inconveniences and to share in their pains and agony if need be. Lastly, keep to the message that can save the soul from eternal damnation: repentance from sin and faith toward Christ.

Our willingness to be commissioned into the task of soul-winning is the true test of our conversion, either by deeds or by words. Conversion and evangelism go together. Where there is real conversion, there must arise, of necessity, zeal to take the gospel to the unreached by all possible means.
Marriage is one of the most sacred institutions in life. Otherwise referred to as the joining together of a man and a woman in holy matrimony, it signals or flags off the family life. In response to a question from the Pharisees, Jesus “answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?” (Matthew 19:4,5).

Christian teaching on marriage is expected to be accepted and practised like other doctrines or teachings of the Bible. Our marriages must be directed and guided by God’s word so as to achieve the purpose for which the wise God set it up. Wherever the teaching of God’s word on marriage is neglected or rejected, much trouble results. It is sad that the guiding scriptural principles on marriage are deliberately being ignored by many so-called Christians today, resulting in incalculable spiritual loss, frustration, disappointment, unfaithfulness, sorrow and, at times, painful separation for couples that were joined together in a Bible-believing Church.

Though it is not unexpected to see unbelievers abuse this sacred institution, heaven is very sad at the sight of multitude of Christians going contrary to the will, purpose and plan of God in their choice of life partners. Life goals have been aborted, ministries cut short, joy ruined and life destroyed because people turned aside from God’s command on marriage and family life. Scores of young men and women who should be on fire for God
groan under the painful consequences of wrong choice in marriage. This is why a clear teaching on marriage and family life is very significant to enhance the health and spiritual wholeness of the Church today.

**Question 1: Give scriptural reasons why God instituted marriage and family life.**

We establish from the Scripture that marriage is, first, God’s plan and programme from the beginning (Genesis 2:18,20,22-24; Ephesians 5:31). Second, it is a divinely ordained necessity (Genesis 2:18; Psalm 68:6). Third, it makes for preservation of purity and holiness in the church and society (1 Corinthians 7:2,9-11; 1 Timothy 5:9-15). Fourth, it works for the completeness and fulfillment of true living (Ecclesiastes 4:9-11). It provides needed fellowship, comfort, companionship and partnership. Finally, marriage complements God’s work of procreation (Genesis 1:27,28; Psalm 128:3). With very few exceptions, most people should marry. These few exceptions should be guided by God (Matthew 19:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7:7,8,32,34) and must not be the product of selfish, immature decisions, misguided imitation, faithless conclusion or religious compulsion. And, as the believer takes the journey into marriage, he or she should pray, study and meditate on God’s word sufficiently in order to avoid being misled by ‘concerned’ counsellors (in or outside the church), friends, family members and family planning clinics in the world.

**Question 2: Mention some wrong motivations that compel some people not to marry.**

**COMENCEMENT OF THE JOURNEY OF MARRIAGE** (Ecclesiastes 3:1,11; Psalm 32:8,9; Joshua 3:4; Isaiah 30:18-21)

Marriage journey begins with a desire or a sense of need in an individual for a life partner with whom to share life in an intimate way. God has created every man with this innate feeling and it manifests naturally through maturity, inner urge or a compelling feeling for a life partner when the time comes. A believer’s response to this urge is to approach God in prayer for guidance. As we pray earnestly and sincerely, God communicates with
our hearts in a way as to lead us to His perfect choice of partner. It may be through a still small voice in the heart (Proverbs 20:27; John 10:4,5,27; Acts 10:17-21) or a strong mind-dominating affection for a particular person. Such affection is God-given and it cannot be quenched by temporary or contrary circumstances (Song of Solomon 8:6,7). Still, in other cases, it may be through dreams or a definite impression in the heart. For others, God can speak through His Word or make a definite impression in the heart in the course of listening to a message or sermon. Whatever channel He chooses to use – revelation, dream, vision or impression – God will not contradict His written word. If any revelation we receive contradicts the Scripture, it must be rejected. It should also be subjected to peace test, contrary to fear and hurry.

Question 3: **Mention some ways through which God reveals His will in marriage to us.**

**COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID** (1 Corinthians 10:6-12; Proverbs 31:30; Judges 14:1-3; Ezekiel 14:1-6)

The path to the married life is strewn with dangers which the believer must avoid in order to remain in the will of God and enjoy a healthy relationship.

Question 4: **Mention some pitfalls to avoid in the choice of a life partner.**

As we seek to know the will of God, we should not walk by sight. To determine the suitability of an intending partner through his or her material possession and secular position is to walk by sight. The possession of a good brain and a good hand to make money does not guarantee the possession of a good heart which makes a good home. Second, we should not preempt God. In other words, a heavy dependence, for example, on dreams and dreams alone makes it easier to be deceived. Rather, the sincere seeker should be open to whatever channel God decides to use to speak. Preempting God leads to confusion.

Third, every ‘idol’ should be removed from the heart. That is to say that we should not pre-fix our minds on a particular person asking only that God should
rubber-stamp him or her for us. That idol may not be God’s will. He or she may not even be a child of God. We should remember that only God knows the heart of men. Some who appear like Christians outwardly may be something else within. Samson made his choice by sight and suffered greatly for it. Several others are still ensnared in this trap today.

Fourth, under no circumstance should a true believer marry a nonbelievers. It does not matter whether the person attends church or not. God prohibits unequal yoke in marriage (2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 6:15,16; Deuteronomy 7:1-4).

Fifth, we should avoid the carnal practice of allowing others to pick partners for us. God is still our perfect Matchmaker. Some people run back to the village to get married to people they know little about. Others resort to dating sites and social media. In doing so, they feel that they are smart and cutting short what they consider to be a long procedure by the church. They avoid serious praying and close scrutiny of spiritual leaders whom God has set over them. In time, they reap the bitter fruits of unhappy and burdensome marriage.

CHRISTIAN COURTSHIP (Genesis 24:49-52; Proverbs 24:27; Luke 14:28-32; 1:26,27; Matthew 1:18; 1 Corinthians 10:31)

After knowing the will of God, the intending brother or sister, as the case may be, is expected to inform the pastor of the church or appointed leaders who carry out the oversight function of guiding young believers in marriage. The pastor or committee then counsels them on simple but basic regulatory procedures to follow. The first is to secure their parents’ consent. Parental consent gives the church authority to allow the intending couple to begin courtship.

The period between knowing the will of God in marriage and the wedding is known as courtship. It is a period of learning and getting to know one another through regular praying and discussions tailored towards the future of their dream home. This period also affords them the opportunity to talk about important issues like
money management in the home, career after marriage, bearing and rearing children, type of accommodation, and so on.

Some virtues are essential during courtship. One, openness must be made a mutual principle. Truth about one another’s past and present that have the potential to affect them in future should be discussed. Second, holiness should be central as the intending couples are not expected to engage in actions that are meant only for married people. Third, prayer should not be relegated to the background. Problems are solved, doubts dissolved, mountains moved and oppositions are turned to opportunities through prayers. Prayer brings down heaven’s provisions. Fourth, neither of the two should impose his or her ideas on the other. Fifth, if they are unable to resolve a particular issue, such should be brought to the attention of the supervising committee or the pastor. Should there be some grave or shocking discoveries, for example, that either of the party is a sinner, has demonic problems, irreconcilable conviction on Christian marriage, doubts over doctrines, etc. recourse must be made to the marriage committee. We should always remember that a broken courtship is better than a broken marriage.

**Question 5: Mention some helpful guiding principles during courtship.**

**CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT AND WEDDING** (John 2:1-3; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 4:5; 1 Timothy 4:12,16)

Both engagement and wedding are common to the world and the church. These two occasions should be done bearing scriptural injunctions in mind. Neither should there be a forum to feed the flesh, display carnality and worldliness nor water down sound conviction that had been upheld for years.

During engagement especially, all forms of deception should be discouraged. Deceits couched in jokes in the name of tradition should be avoided. Believers must steer clear of all such jokes and feigned lies. We must also avoid compromise in the areas of what we do or give
as part of the engagement requirement. Anything that has to do with idolatry, alcoholic beverages, cowries, kola nuts, etc. must be avoided. Generally, engagement and wedding become problematic when an intending couple live inconsistent lives. Costly provisions for the pride of life should be left out. Worldly adornments, practices and dressing should be avoided. The following questions could provide a gauge for engagements and weddings: how godly or worldly is my dressing and spending? How watchful or wasteful am I? Who will be glorified at my wedding – Christ, self or the flesh? Will I be sad or happy should Christ come on my wedding day?

**Question 6: What should be the focus of a Christian during the engagement and marriage ceremonies?**

**CHRISTIAN FAMILY LIFE** (Psalm 128:1-4; Proverbs 5:15-23; 31:10-31; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5,10; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-8)

Family life after wedding is a learning experience that can only be terminated by death. The bottom-line is the need to carefully but excitedly study one another. There is always the need for adjustments by both husband and wife. The areas of adjustments are numerous. These initial adjustments will work well only in an environment of humility, love, patience and temperance.

**Question 7: What causes problems in Christian families and what are the solutions?**

As the couple relate together from day to day, offences will certainly come. These offences have some of their causes rooted in finance, food pattern, time management, work life, non-availability of one of the partners, house helps, sharp differences in tribal practices, exaggerated expectations, wrong notions, interference from extended families and so on. The magnitude and nature of the problems differ from family to family. Proper attitude in handling these problems is a vital issue. When problems are poorly-handled, they snowball into bigger, more complex proportions and, at times, result in separation. There are homes where, though the couples live together, they are indeed separated at heart.
Divorce, separation, strained, stressful or dead relationship amongst couples is not the will of God. The word of God has solutions to all family problems. God instituted marriage and He has adequately provided for happiness in our families.

**CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN THE HOME** (1 Samuel 8:4,5,7; John 15:12-14; Genesis 25:20-23; Ephesians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-7)

Problems in Christian families begin when the couple gives the devil a place in their hearts. This is done unwittingly as one or both partners entertain insinuation of in-laws, gossips of maids and neighbours or suspicion. This has caused much harm (Philippians 4:8; 1 John 4:1). Another source of problem is the failure of either of the partners to “leave and cleave” (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9; Genesis 2:24). God expects the man to leave (though not to abandon) his parents and cleave to his wife.

The third cause of problems in the family is worldliness, extravagance and carnal comparison of one’s family or spouse with others (1 Samuel 8:4,5,7). Comparing one’s family with others is unwise (2 Corinthians 10:12). Instead, we should endeavour to live by God’s standard. Fourth, lack of love and affection for one another (Titus 2:4; John 15:12-14). Both spouses must have the will to love. Impatience, strife, malice, nagging, and bitterness should not be named in Christian families. A real sanctification experience in the lives of the couple keeps all these vices out of the family and keeps the family in unity, harmony and love. Fifth, pride. The wife need not challenge the husband’s headship and authority but respond in godly submission. When she feels marginalized or trampled under, the husband should apologize. Inability to apologize and failure to always go to the Lord in prayer strain relationships, create communication gaps, and reduce mutual trust and respect for one another.

Sixth, problems of childlessness may bring emotional stress and conflict in the family. Where this occurs, the couple should take it to the Lord in prayer (Genesis 25:20-23). The Lord can make “the barren to be
mother of seven” (1 Samuel 2:5). Any decision suggested by unbelief is wrong and sinful because “whatever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

Seventh, lack of submission on the part of the wife. The Bible commands the wife to be submissive to her husband (Ephesians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-7). The wife’s submission provokes the husband to much love. He will labour to provide the needs of the family. He will cherish her as the Lord does the Church. On the other hand, lack of love from the husband can affect the wife negatively.

While each partner tries to meet the needs of one another at home, there might be noticeable shortcomings. No matter how pronounced these might be, there must be mutual appreciation of one another’s effort. Lack of appreciation creates conflicts.

Eight, conflicts also come through money management, business and spending habits (Luke 16:10 -12 ). Secretiveness in financial matters or projects makes room for suspicion and tension. Ninth, conflicts may also come through demonic infiltration through house helps, third parties or relations. Tenth, where infidelity or unfaithfulness creeps in, confusion will surely ensue. Immorality destroys the fabrics of the family and should be avoided by all means. Sin should not once be seen among Christians.

God’s will for every family is that they live the days of heaven here on earth (Deuteronomy 11:21). This is attainable if we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and prayerfully build the walls of our home with our commitment to work towards a happy, healthy and holy home.
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“And they continued stedfastly 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. [44] And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 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 favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:42-47).

This simple Scripture certainly covers a lot of ground if we look at it closely. It especially becomes clearer when we consider the italicized words. What percentage of the body of Christ can confidently say they are living up to the light of this Scripture? The church, especially in Africa, is to provide the opportunity of a forum in which the entire Church membership will fulfil these New Testament distinctive of caring, loving, helping, exhorting, edifying and building up one another. Almost every Church on the continent is noted for her bigness (though relative)... the big meetings ... the big crusade ... the big programmes and even the big Bible study classes. The danger is that members, especially new ones or first timers get lost in the “big Church” and fizzle out without notice. This without doubt, is not the will of God for the Church.

The booklet you now hold is the long sought solution to this problem in the Church. Building the Body is a bi-annual publication prepared with a broad view for use in the Home Caring Fellowship or in Churches all over the continent. The Home “Church” is a...

1. CARING FELLOWSHIP

“And all that believed were together, and had all things 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 is a body that will stick to you through anything, accept you when the world turns against you, and hold anything you say in strict confidence. The Home “Church” has people who will call at any hour of the day when your whole world appears to be caving-in on you and you have no one to call on.
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 favour 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 with other believers to live a holy, lovely and wholesome life.

4. **TOTAL EMANCIPATION FOR THE INDIVIDUAL**

   In the Home Caring Fellowship, every believing member, is free from falsehood of fake teachers. The apostles doctrines, Christian fellowship and apostolic prayer stifle false doctrines and practices. Thus, you are emancipated (set free) to worship in spirit and in truth.

5. **EVANGELISATION**

   “Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

   The Home Caring Fellowship is made up of “going” Christians. And invitation to a neighbour to the Fellowship should ultimately lead to the salvation of a soul. The salvation of a new comer is the focus of every saved member of the Home Caring Fellowship.

6. **PRESERVATION OF FRUITS**

   “And they, continuing daily with accord ...” (Acts 2:40).

   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 2:41).
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 labour”. In the Home Caring Fellowship, there is a healthy cross-fertilization of knowledge, experience, victories, joys and, of course, disappointments. The aim is to build up every member.

BELIEVERS’ FELLOWSHIP COVENANT

Before you begin this series you need to realise and agree on some common goals and disciplines with other members of the fellowship. The strength of your Home Caring Fellowship is in your adherence to the common disciplines. Towards this end, you covenant on:

1. **ATTENDANCE:**
   
   To give great priority to the Home Caring Fellowship meeting. Thus you will leave the time the Church has set for the Fellowship free except in case of emergency.

2. **CONFIDENTIALITY:**
   
   To keep personal matters that are shared in the Fellowship in strict confidence.

3. **EVANGELISATION:**
   
   To tell of God’s love and mercy to your neighbours and show them how they could enjoy it and willingly accept new members to the Home Caring Fellowship.

4. **ACCOUNTABILITY:**
   
   To set goals for your life at the end of the fellowship and ask others in the fellowship to “support” you in these goals. Then you give permission to the Fellowship members to “hold you accountable.”

5. **VISITATION:**
   
   To weekly go out and see other members of the Fellowship in their homes and share the love of Christ with them.
COVENANT STATEMENT

I ________________________________________________________________

__________ will meet on ____________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

(Full name)

_________________________ (Day of the week), at__________________

(Time of day) with other brethren in my Home Caring Fellowship. I will, with God’s help, 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 mins.
A covenant is an agreement between two sets of people usually for the benefit of both groups. When you post a letter you are agreeing or covenanting with the post office that if you write the name and address of the addressee correctly, they will deliver the letter to the person for you. The N10 stamp is the sign of the covenant.

What covenant did you make at the beginning of this series?
(i)_______________________ (ii)_______________________
(iii)_____________________ (iv)_______________________

Covenants attract great blessings. God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. He stood by that covenant and kept his own part. God, in return, blessed Abraham above all his kinsmen. We must do what Abraham did in Genesis 15:11 when the devil comes to disturb us.

In what ways can the devil disturb us from keeping the covenant we made today.
(a)_____________________ (b)_______________________
(c)_____________________ (d)_______________________

The devil does not want us to keep our covenants with God, because he knows that joy, salvation, deliverance, prosperity, miracles, answers to prayers, power and wisdom will follow if we make and keep our covenant with God. So he tries to disturb or pollute our covenant with God.

Read 1 Peter 5:7-9 and note how you can resist the devil.
(a)_____________________ (b)_______________________
(c)_____________________ (d)_______________________

Unfortunately, some people (may be our friends, neighbors, relatives and colleagues) try to make covenant with idols. But because idols cannot fulfil promises, they fail. Idols cannot see, hear, talk, think or feel. Others covenant with the devil who only deceives them, destroys their lives and wastes their property. Candle and incense burning, water, white, red or green garments, rolling on the ground
are neither acceptable covenants nor the true worship of God. God is so faithful, loving and caring to require torture or spending as conditions for His blessing. Why not come out of this and step into a new covenant relationship with God.

If you will make a covenant with God today and keep it ever fresh and remain ever faithful, God will never fail to answer you when you need His miracles in your lives.

ACTIVITY

Our activity today is on two levels, namely:

(a) **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY** and **GOD’S RE-ASSURANCE**.

**YOUR RESPONSIBILITY**

Read Proverbs 28:13 and note your responsibility or role in the covenant of prosperity.

(i) _______________ (ii) _______________ (iii) _______________

**GOD’S REASSURANCE**

Read Proverbs 28:13; Psalm 1:3 and note God’s reassurance in the covenant of fruitfulness, refreshing and prosperity.

(i) _______________ (ii) _______________ (iii) _______________

Write down your covenant with the Lord, and take CAREFUL note of what you want GOD to do and what YOU must do. Please, do your part and watch what follows. Do not hesitate to share your observations with the House Fellowship as time goes on.
The role of the House Fellowship in the life of the Church and every individual member is vital. Today, we want to see the responsibilities we have towards one another.

The basis of the House Caring Fellowship is to bring the children of God into closer communication, Christian Communion and committed companionship. The House Caring Fellowship is a burden-sharing human relationship which is missing in several Churches and nonfunctional in many others. Where the House Fellowship is diligently, bibliically and prayerfully conducted like Deeper Life Bible Church, precious and priceless fruits - love, harmony, unity, happiness, Christian growth, miracles and joy abound.

**DISCUSSION**

Beginning with the House Fellowship leader, two brethren should tell others how the House Fellowship has helped to share their burden.

The Keynote or hinge of the House Fellowship is the twenty-fifth verse of 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul teaches that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.” The New Testament concept of the Church is that we are all members of the same family. In Christ, we belong to one another and make tremendous spiritual advances as we help one another. Such help may be spiritual, material, social or emotional. And when we do this, we are fulfilling our responsibilities in the House Fellowship.

Other Biblical helps you can give to others in the House Fellowship are to minister (serve and act as deacon) one to another, fellowship (have in common and share) one with another, be kindly affectioned (cherish, comfort and be friendly) one with another and bear one another’s burden.
DISCUSSION

How best can you help to bear one another’s burden in the House Fellowship?

Brethren in the House Fellowship must also be likeminded towards one another by having one mind - the mind of Christ. We must admonish and greet one another.

The Bible highlights, at least twenty-five areas in which you can exercise your privileges and responsibilities in the House Fellowship.

By way of practical discussion, examine the following scriptures and pinpoint the responsibilities each shows you as a member of the House Fellowship

(a) Hebrews 10:25
(b) Romans 15:14
(c) Ephesians 4:32
(d) Colossians 3:13
(e) 1 Thessalonians 4:18
(f) Hebrews 10:24
(g) 1 Peter 3:8
The Scriptures give positive relationship that should prevail amongst Christian brethren as members of the Body of Christ. These positive relationships in context of our House Caring Fellowship, Show our responsibilities, privileges and place in the House Fellowship. We have to say here that positive attitudes bring life, peace, love, harmony and joy. The Lord desires that every member of the Body of Christ be a positive expression of His own life, nature and character.

DISCUSSION ONE

Mention some of the positive aspects of Christians relationship which are in Colossians 3: 12-17.

(ii) ________________________
(iv) ________________________
(vi) ________________________

Besides positive relationships, the Scriptures also give negative relationships and quickly warn that these negative relationships bring death, disharmony and division. The Lord wants us to know these negative relationships and watch our hearts so that we will live above them.

The first of these negative relationships is in Paul’s epistle to the Galatians. Paul by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, writes, “If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.” Bitting and devouring (Running down others, defaming, backbiting) should not be found amongst brethren in the House Fellowship. The consequence of this negative relationship is grievous - consumption and destruction one of another.

Second , we must not provoke one another negatively. Negative provocation causes irritation, jealousy and envying. Where negative provocation is allowed , love, peace, joy and healthy relationship will be missing. But there is a kind of positive provocation the Lord enjoins us to do. Hebrews 10: 24 encourages us to “provoke unto love and to good works”.

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Third, we must not hate one another. Solomon, in the Book of Proverbs says” “Hatred stirreth strife ...” Proverbs 10:12. If we say this in modern day English language, it is likely to go like this / Hatred seeks an occasion to breed enmity and delights in noisy quarrels and arguments. On the other hand, love is conciliatory and it removes all occasions for trouble.

Fourth, we must not go to law one with the other. In other words, fellow believers in the House Fellowship should not sue themselves in civil courts. Rather than take your brother or sister in the household of faith to court, the Bible says “Why did ye not rather suffer (allow, let) yourselves to be defrauded?”

Fifth, we must not lie one to another. Deceit or untruthfulness destroys, gives a false impression and leads to eternal death. Revelation 21:8 says “... all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone ...”

Sixth, we must not speak evil of one another. Negative remarks must not be made about others. Discouraging and derogatory comments on the lives of others must be avoided. Put the best construction on every activity of your Brothers and Sisters.

Seventh, we must not grudge or murmur one against another. Murmuring is as serious as rebellion before God. Murmuring causes division and it grieves the Spirit of God. The Bible says murmurers stand to be condemned before God. When all these are kept outside the door of the house fellowship, we will all be able to say “WE ARE MEMBERS ONE OF ANOTHER” (Ephesians 4:25). And as members, we will be loving, kind one to another tender hearted, forgiving one another tender hearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32.
QUESTIONS

Note the don’ts in our text - Ephesians 4:25-32

Note the don’ts in each of the following Scriptures and practically illustrate how it can be lived out in the House Fellowship:

Colossians 3:9 __________________________
1 Corinthians 6:7 ________________________
Titus 3:3 ______________________________
James 5:9 ______________________________
Galatians 5:15 __________________________
James 4:11 _____________________________
VISITATION  
Colossians 4:7-18

Visitation is an integral part of our House Fellowship. And no lasting fruit or encouraging attendance can be expected in the House Fellowship if serious attention is not given to visitation. The House Fellowship is like a train on a two-way track. In an event of any irregularity in wither track, the train would derail (have accident). Often times, the invitational or evangelistic track is always regular whereas there is an irregularity on the visitation track and this frustrates our effort at building a holy, lovely and wholesome family. It affects attendance at the House Fellowship and the central fellowship.

Visitation is the sincere and practical demonstration of your love, concern and care for your brother or sister in the House Fellowship. Visitation is your profession in action. It shows how eager you are to be a channel of God’s blessing joy, encouragement, edification and help - to other people. It also dictates your willingness to keep the body of Christ virile and functioning. Whenever we give adequate attention to follow-up, we would witness an increase in attendance to the House Fellowship.

1. What important lessons can you draw out from the life of Tychichus in verses 7, 8?

2. When one of our House Fellowship members is absent, we can go to him later to do what Tychichus and Onesimus did Verse 9.
   (i)______________________  (ii)______________________

3.
   a. Besides personal visitation, what other thing can we do for other House Fellowship member (verse 12)__________________________

   b. What is our expectation for our brethren when we pray for them? (verse 12)__________________________________________

   c. How often should we pray for them? (verse 13) _________________________________________________________________

   d. Note another habit we should cultivate (verses 15) 
   ________________________________________________________________________________

   e. What are some other reasons why visitation is important?
   ________________________________________________________________________________
**STUDY 5**

**MEMBERS OF ONE BODY**

*I Corinthians 12:14-26; Acts 2:41-47*

We may need to remind ourselves today that the Home Caring Fellowship is a small fellowship of caring, loving and praying people. They have concern for and confidence in one another.

**DISCUSSION**

Mention some of the concerns of your Home Caring Fellowship:

(a) _______________________  (c) _______________________

(b) _______________________  (d) _______________________

The relationship you have just discussed is best likened to the relationship of various parts (members) of the human body. The ear, nose, eyes, fingers, legs etc. All work together to keep the body going. Following the pattern of bodily care we are to:

(a) care with all our ability

(b) be affected the same way the brother/sister is in times of trouble, success or joy;

(c) pray fervently for a brother/sister about what good things we desire for ourselves.

This is bearing one another’s burden. It is the secret of receiving blessings from God. It is the distinctive mark of Christ. No one, in the natural, has ever attained the height of doing good to all men or live a life wholly given to human service and care like Jesus Christ. He carried all our griefs and sorrows; He bore the burden of us all. Could the brethren live one for another like Christ lived for us: what a virile, happy and blessed relationship will exist! Could the brethren attend to one another the way the members of the body attend to themselves: what a glorious relationship we will have!

How do other members of the body react when a member of the body is bruised suddenly?

Following natural care for a defected / afflicted member of the body, mention how we ought to care one for another.
What can we do practically on the following situations, when a brother/sister:

a. is bereaved
b. is promoted at work
c. marries
d. loses his job
e. has a new baby
f. is sick
g. is afflicted
SERVING THE LORD
Acts 20:17-21; 8:4-8.

Serving the Lord extends beyond worshipping Him as God. It also involves our personal participation in the Lord’s work.

In the Lord’s service, our ability does not count as much as our availability; that is, our total yieldedness to His work. Faithfulness and dedication in whatever we are given to do usually pave way for greater responsibilities in His vineyard.

A fact we must continuously remember is that we have been saved to serve. In the church and at the house fellowship, there is much enough for everyone to do. In fact, the harvest is plenteous, but the labourers are few.

In our text, even though there were persecutions, oppositions, temptations, trials, etc, all around, yet these were not sufficient to discourage Paul and Philip in their service for the Lord. Instead, they served the Lord with earnestness, love and humility.

Apart from the joy of being in the service of the Lord, eternal rewards await all the servants of the Lord.

1. From the text, identify 3 areas in which Paul and Philip serve the Lord.
   (i) _______________________  (ii) _______________________  (iii) _______________________

2. List 6 services you could do for the Lord within the House Fellowship and the Church.
   (i) _______________________  (ii) _______________________  (iii) _______________________  (iv) _______________________  (v) _______________________  (vi) _______________________

3. (a) From Acts 20:20, what are our responsibilities towards the new converts?
   (i) _______________________  (ii) _______________________  (iii) _______________________  (iv) _______________________
(b) Mention 4 things that can hinder us from fulfilling the responsibilities mentioned above.

(i) _______________________  (iii) _______________________
(ii) _______________________  (iv) _______________________

4. Why must everyone of us be involved in the Lord’s work?

(i) _______________________  (iii) _______________________
(ii) _______________________  (iv) _______________________

STUDY 7

CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO LIFE
*John 2:12-17; 1 Corinthians. 7:29-31; Philippians. 4:8.*

Every Christian is commanded to shun worldly lusts in order to live a life that pleases God. John, in his writing to different categories of Christians (the babes, the fathers, and the strong young men) says, they should not love the world. As the love of the world enters into a Christian through the door of his heart, the love of God is thrown out.

The love of the world cannot go along with the love for God at the same time in the human heart. Whoever loves the world with its lusts belongs to the devil, the prince of this world, but the believer is God’s property that is to be reserved for the glory of God alone. The believer makes everything in his life to seek the glory of God (I Cor. 10:3). He is not materialistically minded. Even when he possesses anything, he does not abuse it (I Cor. 7:31) because he knows that the world with its lusts will pass away someday.

1. As God’s property, how do you decide on what you will give your body to do? (I Corinthians 6:20; 10:31)

2. What must you do when considering a choice of career and lifestyle? (Psalms 37:4-5)

3. List five things that are of the world which you dropped when you became a Christian. (I John 2:16)
   (a) ____________________ (d) ____________________
   (b) ____________________ (e) ____________________
   (c) ____________________

4. (a) What did the passage command the young strong ones to use their strength to do? (Verses 14,15)
   (b) The old ones to use their knowledge to do? (Verses 13,15)
   c) The little children to do? (Verses 12,15)

5. How are we to use the things of this world? (I Corinthians 7:31)
   (b) Will you accept His plan for you?
THE POWER OF PERSEVERING PRAYER
I Kings 1,15-17,41-46

“A praying church” so goes the saying, “is a powerful church.” Prayerlessness is nothing short of a vicious, sinful damnable curse but fervent persevering prayer is a cure for all ills of body, soul and spirit. The praying Christian does not only have power with God, he prevails over men, and circumstances.

DISCUSSION:

Observe and note the experience of the men in these three Scriptures.

Acts 16:25, 26
James 5:17,18
2 Kings 4:31-35

In our text, we see God’s promises: “I will send rain upon the earth” to Elijah. God wills that it shall rain, but the rain will only come at Elijah’s request. In order that the will of God shall be accomplished, this will must on one side be expressed by a promise and on the other side it must be received and laid hold of by the praying believer.

This does not nullify the prayer of faith for Jesus says “What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mark 11:24). But after the prayer of faith which receives before hand comes the prayer of perseverance which does not lose sight of that which has been asked until God has fulfilled His promise (I Kings 18:43). The believer who prays six times fervently and stops there when he ought to have prayed seven times deprives himself of the answer to his prayer.

Men of old had, through prayer, “hast power with God and with men and hast prevailed” (Gen. 32:28). Jacob prayed, prevailed and became a prince with God. Joseph prayed, prevailed and was exalted from the dungeon to the right hand of the king. Moses prayed and prevailed over Pharaoh. Daniel prayed and prevailed over wild hungry lions; he defeated the enemy of God. Joshua prayed and prevailed and channelled God’s blessings into millions of heart. Peter prayed and prevailed and the anger of God delivered him out of the prison. Paul and Silas prayed and prevailed; the prison
doors flung open. There can be no measuring of the overwhelming power of prayer. Prayer always brings result. Prayer brought result for Elijah, the disciples in Rhoda’s House Fellowship (Acts 12:12-17), and many others. Prayer will bring result for you and other members of the House Fellowship.

PRACTICAL SESSION:

All the brethren in the House Fellowship will go into a session of prayer on the following areas:

1. The Church
2. The Pastor
3. The steadfastness of converts.
4. The growth of the House Fellowship.
5. Salvation of souls in the House Fellowship.
6. More grace for all House Fellowship members to live the Christian life.
7. Growth in the central Church.
STUDY 9

HOW TO GET SAVED


(a) Why was the Bible written? ________________________________

(b) What is Jesus Christ supposed to be to all mankind?

“That ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His Name.” Many believe today who do not have life, the God-kind of life.

2. What other man-made Christ-rejecting systems can you point to, today? Name at least 15 e.g. Candle-burning, White Garment Wearing;

3. Romans 3:9-23 and I John 3:8a. In what spiritual condition are all human beings before they come to Christ?

4. What is the Bible’s verdict about our own efforts (apart from Jesus Christ), of getting saved at least? Ecclesiastes 10:15; Luke 18:11,12.

5. How should a sinner pray? Hosea 14:2,3; Luke 18:13

6. If a person calls God sincerely, confessing his sins and forsaking them, is it possible for him not to be saved? Micah 7:18,19; Romans 10:11,13.
STUDY 10

PEACE AND HOLINESS
John 17:14-17, 20, 21 (9 verses)

SECTION A

Hebrews 12:14a says, “Follow peace with all men.”

1.(a) See Matthew 5:9. Is it possible to follow peace with all men when we have not yet made peace with God? (Remember, all men include the ungrateful as well as the unreasonable; the wicked as well as the foolish).

(b) Romans 5:1. How then do we make peace with God?

2. Can you share with the group, in your own words, how you first of all made peace with God and how, by so doing, God helped you to make peace with all men? “After you are born again, everybody is your friend except the devil.”

SECTION B

Hebrews 12:14 continues, “…And holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.” The Old Testament is full of commandments for us to be holy (Leviticus 20:7). The New Testament also diligently encourages us to be holy (Luke 1:74,75). The heart of God is pleased with us only when its yearning (deep desire) for our holiness is fulfilled. That is why Jesus, with deep emotion and passion prayed for our holiness in John 17. Holiness is sweet, attractive and desirable. It is available; it is also obtainable today. Through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, (Hebrews 13:12, 13) God has provided all that we need to have our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. All we need do is draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.

1.(a) What is holiness? (Matthew 22:37)

(b) Give some other words that the Bible uses or it. (John 17:17, 21; Matthew 5:48; I John 4:18; Acts 15:9).

2. (a) Who is qualified to be made holy? (John 17:14,20,25).

(b) Is sanctification therefore the same thing as salvation? (Hebrews 4:1,9-11; Matthew 11:28b, 29b)

Let us not forget: After salvation then comes sanctification.
3. “Without holiness no man shall see God (Hebrews 12:14)
(a) Does God want people to see Him on the last day? (John 3:16; John 17:19).
(b) Will He sanctify as many as call on Him in faith today?

4. What three things must be present before God will sanctify? (I John 2:15, Romans 12:1, 2a, Hebrews 4:3).

Holiness makes us say with the Psalmist “I delight to do thy will O God; yea thy law is within my heart.” Like all of God’s gifts, holiness is not by works, it is by grace. It removes from our heart all that defile - all anger, lust, bitterness, grudge and malice. It makes us wonderfully submissive and loving. To all who seek today, God says, “I WILL sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you.” Remember God will - if you believe.
After we become saved from sin and eternal hell-fire by repentance and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, we discover that the people in the streets, markets, buses, offices and houses around us are different from us. The Bible says we are children of God, and they are children of the devil. We are children of light; they are children of darkness.

God in Exodus 23:2,3 warns us that because they are much greater than us in number we should take care not to follow them in their evil ways. We are not to allow them to lead or invite us to evil, rather we are to be led of God (Proverbs 1:10). When we have problems, may be because we have sinned, we are to repent and seek God; not herbalists, juju worshippers, witches and wizards necromancers, astrologers or the people who burn incense and candle. To do so is to invite more disease, demons and death to inflict us (Isaiah 8:19; Deuteronomy 18:9-12; 1 Samuel 28:7,8; 1 Chronicles 10:13,14; 2 Kings 1:2-4).

The loud parties and celebrations of the world are not for us (Matthew 4:3-12). We are not to be showy in our homes, dressing, marriage plans, burials and naming ceremonies (Esther 1:3-8). We should not plunge into debt to show the world that we are celebrating. If we want our children to be successful in life, we will not begin their lives for them with debt, drinks, revelry and smoking. Let us be different from the world in everything we do. Jesus is our only example (Hebrews 7:26).

1. What practices can you find in the following passages that sinners today can lead or invite us into?
   (a) Isaiah 8:19 ______________________
   (b) Deuteronomy 18:9-12 ________________

2. Examine the following passages and point out the behaviour of the people of the world from them.
   (i) Romans 3:10-18 ______________________
   (ii) 1 Corinthians 15:33_________________
   (iii) Exodus 23:2,3 ______________________
LIFE IN THE TONGUE


The tongue is a little member in the body of a man and yet it boasteth itself of great things. Man has been able to tame animals of the woods but not the seemingly simple and harmless tongue. People's life-course are either changed for the better or for the worse all through the tongue. Evil reporters of Canaan in Numbers 14 incurred the wrath of God upon them. The righteous man’s tongue knows what is acceptable (Proverbs 10:32). No wonder his lips feed a multitude with life-giving materials.

Proverbs 10 has well put it that the mouth of a righteous man is a well of life. It is choice silver and brings forth wisdom. What a great lesson to learn! To use our tongues talking about Christ the wisdom of God to all people is a great prize.

The woman in our text used her tongue with wisdom and it led to the salvation of many in Samaria. Start using your tongue today in the will of God, shun off and shut up all old women's fables, tell tales and hearsays but speak out for inner righteousness words of wisdom. What a great difference it will make! What a glory at the end!!

1. (a) What did the woman do on listening to Jesus? (Verse 28)
   (b) Practically relate what happened to you immediately after you met Christ.

2. What was the woman’s central theme in her speech? (Verses 29,39).

3. List all the places you can use your tongue to the benefits of others.
   (a) _____________________  (e) _____________________
   (b) _____________________  (f) _____________________
   (c) _____________________  (g) _____________________
   (d) _____________________  (h) _____________________

4. Why did the Samaritans ask of Jesus to stay longer with them? (Verses 40-41).
5. When you tell others about Christ what happens to them? (Verses 41-42).

6. If we must convince people to listen to us talk about Christ, with what attitude must we tell them?
The type of religion God approves is this: first, keeping ourselves pure through faith in Christ’s blood; second, looking into the perfect law of liberty continually and consistently; third, keeping our brother or our sister by meeting his/her spiritual and materials needs as we pay him/her visits especially at the hour of need; fourth, not being a forgetful hearer of the word but a doer of the word. Fifth, visiting the fatherless and widows or widowers in their affliction. Sixth, keeping himself unspotted from the world; and seventh, having “charity, love out of a pure heart and of a good conscience and of faith unfeigned” (1 Timothy 1:5; James 1:25-27).

We need to understand that the hour of need of a brother or a sister cannot be known if only occasional visits are made. To be familiar, or close to the heart of a brother or sister (brothers familiar with brothers; sisters familiar with sisters) we must make ourselves available at all times possible to develop confidence in each other. This is the principle of pure religion. The results of such a principle are obvious: establishment of the brethren in the faith; spiritual strength and joy of fulfilment for the visitor; upliftment of the faith of the brethren; multiplication of believers in and around the local community; expansion in the primary work of the Church - edification and joy of companionship. Above all, there is commendation from God and a super-abundant multiplication of His grace.

1. What word suggests to you that Paul had got in touch with the brethren before (verse 36)?

2. Mention the purpose of Paul’s visitation (verse 36).

3. Why is it a good practice to visit along with a partner (verse 40)?
   (a) _____________________ (b) _____________________
   (c) _____________________

4. Before we can be of any help to people in our visitation, list out at least three qualities we must possess (Acts 16:12).
   (a) _____________________ (b) _____________________
   (c) _____________________
5. List out the main objectives in our mind as we visit a brother or a sister.

(a) _____________________  (b) _____________________
(c) _____________________  (d) _____________________

6. What are the benefits we derive from visitation?

(a) _____________________  (b) _____________________
(c) _____________________  (d) _____________________
(e) _____________________  (f) _____________________
PEACE BE STILL

Mark 4:35-41.

The physical world we live in is associated with divers kinds of dangers, uncertainties and failures. These circumstances often look very unpleasant to very many people. Some go through life with sorrows and regrets, others would even dare to curse their date of birth.

But it is grace to know a few who at the face of a tempestuous or cloudy world around can still remember that like the old song writer has put it “The raging storms may round us beat, Jesus is the rock in a weary land, A shelter in the time of storm”.

You may have many times asked this question “Master, carest thou not that we perish, how can thou lie asleep when each moment so madly is threatening, a grave in the angry deep?”

But Jesus replies you “The winds and the waves shall obey my will, whether the wrath of the tempest world, or demons, or men, or whatever it be, No water can swallow the ship where ever lies the Master of ocean, and earth and skies”.

The scripture says, “No weapon that is fashioned against thee shall prosper and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 54:17).

1. What physical hardship did the disciples encounter before they called on Jesus, the Master? (Verse 37).

2. Before this incidence, were the disciples acting on their own self direction or were they acting on the words of Jesus? (Verses 35,36).

3. What question did the disciples ask him during this difficulty? (Verse 38).

4. Mention many other situations where and when we ask the same kind of question.

5. What makes one to be fearful in times of difficulties, dangers or austerity? (Verse 40).
6. How did Jesus master the tempestuous or windy situation? (Verse 39).

7. Is it possible for any other man to speak to mountains of problems like Jesus? Look up these references:

(a) Exodus 14:16. _______________________
(b) Joshua 10:12. _______________________
(c) 1 Samuel 7:9-12. _____________________
(d) 2 Kings 8:1,2. _______________________
(e) James 5:17. _________________________
Worry and anxiety are common in the world. This fact is easily seen in people as they plan for their future security. Some in their greed have become notorious in criminal activities. The cause for the many vices of today is uncertainty about the future.

Looking around, it will not take you time to see how many seek refuge in vain things - pleasure, horoscope, idolatry and the occult, to mention just a few. None of all these can match the wondrous treasure in Christ Jesus.

He is our Saviour, Guard and Provider. As a new man (a believer) in as much as you are still alive in this world of woe and uncertainty, you are bound to be needy but “all your anxiety, all your care, bring to the mercy seat, leave it there never a burden he cannot bear, never a friend like Jesus” (1 Peter 5:7; Matthew 11:28-30).

1. Why are we not to be fearful?
   Give three (3) reasons from verse 1.
   (a) The Lord is my _____________________
   (b) The Lord is my _____________________
   (c) The Lord is my _____________________

2. Verses 2 and 3 talk about enemies and war. Believers’ enemies are s _____________________, s _____________________ and s _____________________. With what do we wage war against them? _____________________.

3. What secret underlies our being hidden in God’s pavilion? find them out in verses 4 and 5.
   (a) ____________________
   (b) ____________________
   (c) ____________________

4. What promise do we have for our benefits in times of distress and trouble? (Verse 5). (Write it down in your daily notebook and commit it to memory).
Many believers today live in penury and material inadequacy as a result of their ignorance of God’s plan for their material and financial supply.

God has made the principles that underlies the believer’s prosperity very clear. The Bible is very vocal on the fact that the believer is meant to enjoy financial and material prosperity. Paul, writing to the Philippians said “But my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus”. But what is the secret of enjoying this promise? Jesus Christ revealed this in his teachings. He said “It is more blessed to give than to receive”. Abraham knew this secret. He gave a tenth of his spoils to Melchizedek and he was blessed with much riches. In contemporary time, Colgate, a U.S. citizen was said to have practised this principle even in his business. Today, Colgate has become a house hold name in the commercial world.

A man from the Eastern bloc whose business was crumbling decided to give to the Lord even in his lack. The result? He later became a very successful businessman. David in his old age said, “I have been young but now I am old I have not seen the righteous forsaken nor his children begging bread”.

1. What principle underlies God’s abundant supply from our passages? ________________________________

2. What deeds of kindness did the Philippians do for Paul? ________________________________

3. What is the result of not fulfilling our obligation to God in this aspect from Malachi? ________________________________

4. Explain in what practical ways we can witness a curse on us materially and financially. ________________________________

5. From our text what are the promises of God for us when we practise this principle regularly? ________________________________

6. What is the proof of God’s sincerity?

“And ____________________ now herewith saith the LORD
OF HOSTS IF I WILL not_________________the ________________
and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room for it”.

ACTIVITY

Start this practice as from today by giving your small but sincere possessions to the Lord and write out all your needs thereafter, believe the Lord, and prove Him.
One has said an opportunity once lost cannot be regained. This is supported by the Scriptures The Hebrews -

“And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: For he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears” (Hebrews 12:13,15-17).

There is a time in season. There is another out of season. We have opportunity to repent in season. But it becomes too late out of season. An adage says make hay while the sun shines. Whatever opportunity is open to us to set our lives in the path of righteousness, we must make use of. It became too late for Judas. Dare to be a Judas, what a regret!

1. What were the considerations of Judas in betraying Jesus?
   (i) _____________________  (ii) _____________________
   (iii) _____________________

2. Write out a serious warning of God on love of money (1 Timothy 6:10). ________________________________

3. For how much was Jesus sold? (Matthew 27:3).

4. Did Judas have the opportunity to reject the temptations of the devil? (Luke 22:3-4; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

5. Was Judas convicted of his sin? (Matthew 27:5; Proverbs 29:1).

7. What time is most suitable for repentance or obeying God’s Word? (2 Corinthians 6:2b).
THE PATH TO PREVAILING PRAYER


God delights to meet His people and prosper them in every sense. The surest means of these blessings is in prayer. The Bible says “Call unto me, and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not” (Jeremiah 33:3). Prayer shows the mighty hand of God as it smashes satan, secures the spirit, stirs the saints, convicts and loves the sinners.

Prayer changes lukewarm hearts to blazing firebrands for the living God. An effective prayer life is the key to a vibrant Christian life.

It is therefore not altogether surprising that the Lord commands “Man ought always to pray and not to faint” (Luke 18:1), Paul exclaims “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The apostles saw the role of prayer in the Ministry of Jesus and walked up to him asking “Master teach us how to pray”. And every believer in the Church today must be found in the praying Ministry. As praying men and women, we grow more and more like the Master so that Jesus can use our hearts to love the world, our hands to help, our eyes to watch, our feet to run errands of mercy, our lips to speak and our ears to hear the cries of lost folks. Having seen the resourcefulness of the praying Christian, we shall consider the path of prevailing prayer or conditions for prevailing prayer.

First, a man found in prevailing prayer must have made all due confessions and restitutions to God and men.

Second, all who desire to be found in a prevailing prayer Ministry must have a forgiving spirit.

Third, a humble life and meek spirit are necessary in preparing for a prevailing prayer Ministry. Fourth, a believer who wants to prevail in prayer must have faith in God as the answer to prayer. Fifth, a pure heart puts you in a position to prevail in prayer. Sixth, fervency in prayer is another signpost on the pathway to a prevailing prayer life. Finally, to prevail in prayer we must pray to the Father, in the name of Jesus with the highest form of expectancy to receive whatever we ask in prayer.
As we fulfil these conditions, there will be a new experience of power, victory, triumph and hope in our individual lives. God’s great promises will be fulfilled and greater signs and wonders and miracles will be experienced. And the Church will become “as fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners” (Song of Solomon 6:10).

1. Check the following scriptures and note the conditions:
   Proverbs 29:13. ___________________
   James 5:15. ______________________
   John 14:13,14. ____________________
   James 4:6. _______________________
   Matthew 6:12. ____________________
   Psalm 66:18. _____________________

2. Mention some of the benefits of the prevailing prayer life:
   (a) ______________________________
   (b) ______________________________
   (c) ______________________________
   (d) ______________________________

3. Note some issues or people you will want to start praying about as:
   (a) ______________________________
   (b) ______________________________
   (c) ______________________________
   (d) ______________________________
   (e) ______________________________
   (f) ______________________________
   (g) ______________________________
   (h) ______________________________
CHORUS:

Lord, send another Elijah, To bring the power down
Send the Fire, Also send the rain
To heal the sick, Raise the dead
And glorify thy name, Lord, I want to be another Elijah here.
Adultery, fornication and every form of sexual perversion are as old as the beginning of the existence of man on earth. Since then, mankind has been plagued with this deadly sin.

Lamech started it by going into polygamy (Genesis 4:19-24). It was this same practice that brought up problems in the lives of some patriarchs of old before they started a perfect walk with God.

Wherever this sin find its way, the end result is guilt, fear, jealousy, envy, murder and every form of evil. The sinful affair with Jacob’s daughter, Dinah (Genesis 34), the evil and cunning passion of Amnon with Tamar (2 Samuel 13), David’s self degradation in II Samuel and the ungodly act of I Corinthians 5 to mention but a few, attest to this fact.

Shall we therefore excuse ourselves because such things are written in the Bible? Should we also fall victim to this deadly plague? Of course not. For the Scripture tells us that these are written for our learning “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted” (I Corinthians 10:6).

God is calling us to a separated walk.

1. When we walk to please God, it has a positive effect in our lives span. How?_______________________________________

2. What is the will of God for you as a believer in verse 3?___________________________________________________

3. What does it mean to possess one’s vessel in sanctification and honour as it affects a bachelor, spinster and couples. Verse 4.

4. How can this be done? (Psalm 119:9) Write it down in your daily devotional note or diary and practise it.

5. When we fail to conform ourselves to the commandments of God who are we despising (rejecting)?Verse 8.

6. To refrain oneself from this evil practice, what must one possess in one’s heart? Verse 9.
At home or at work, a Christian behaves like Christ. He does behave this way whether or not one is around to praise or condemn. He owes his loyalty to Christ the Lord who is Lord over his life and by so doing, he is totally unimpressively responsive to the dictates of the world around him.

This exclusive attribute or conduct spots him out amidst friends and relations and as a whole, in the local community which he identifies with. He is guided by a compelling motive, guarded by an eternal but divine might in the inner man and spurred to action by his incessant gaze upon the rock of his salvation as he calls to mind from what terrible circumstances he has been lifted up.

He sticks to that old decision of non-conformity with the world and its amazement as he in deep thoughts echoes “Jesus calls us from the worship of the vain world’s golden store, from each idol that would keep us saying, “Christian, love Me more”. Whether in our house or central fellowships, in our residences or in our work, we should let our life glorify God while our personal principle should be “let them say”.

1. Verses 9-10: There is but only one thing that one needs to do in order to keep within the midst of the children of God and fellowship with God.

2. Verses 11-13: There is a vital principle of good health which the individual is expected to have for his own good.

3. How can we spot out our identity on this wise in:
   a. Our residence?
   b. Our office?
   c. Our central or house fellowship?

4. Verse 14: It is unclean to dress up loosely. How must we comport ourselves to allow God into the midst of our Camp, Fellowships. Give practical examples.

5. Mention the things we should put on to show our new conversation/conduct. (Read each verse from Ephesians 4:21-32 to bring out this)
Every believer has the potential to build because once you are called by God, born again, power is put in your hands to build (Jere 1:10).

There are different types of houses but not all are built by wise master builders. Some houses fall when the wind blows, some leak when rain falls, yet some others are built with the right materials but not being wisely put together they last just a short time. Others have the right design and materials but not being wise builders they waste so much of the materials, expend so much energy and time yet with sub-standard output.

As with the physical so is it with spiritual. Many Christians are not achieving desired fruitfulness though they have sound teaching. We ought now to examine our works for the Lord so that we can get the best results and have the desired rewards. We must build upon rock as in Matthew 7:24-25.

1. Who does a wise builder depend on for increase (Verses 6,9)?

2. List five qualities of the wise builder.
   Verses 7, 9______________________________________________
   Verse 8_______________________________________________
   Verses 10; Mt 7:24______________________________________
   Verses 12,15___________________________________________
   Verse 9_______________________________________________

3. Does a wise builder expect contributions of labour and efforts from others? If yes how does it apply to you?

4. What are the benefits of appreciating and accepting other people’s works? (Verses 6,7).____________________________

5. What happens to one who builds wisely? (Verses 12-14)_____

_______________________________________________________
6. Why should one be serious about building? (Verses 10-15)

7. What are the different offices of spiritual builders in Romans 12:4-8? Find out your own office, prayerfully and dedicatedly promise God to operate so that the body of Christ will be built up.

FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITY:
Tell the class how you intend to co-operate with God in building up the body of Christ, the Church, in your Zone/Area/HouseFellowship in particular.
STUDY 22

YOUR PRIMARY AND ULTIMATE OBLIGATION

Proverbs 24:11,12; Ezekiel 33:8

We must say that you - the Christian - are under an inescapable compelling obligation. God has made you His mouthpiece and you will be commended or condemned for your faithfulness or lack of faith in discharging it.

Our emphasis this week is that this obligation should not be confused with that of serving your friend and caring for him or her; providing medical or first aid care, offering to help and literally living a life of love have their importance and place but your ultimate and primary obligation is the gospel preached, your friend converted and discipled.

What then is your responsibility to your friend?

Like Noah’s it is to warn your loved one of the impending judgement, to point out the way of escape and really help him or her to escape. This is the heaven-given responsibility to you and you are to be true to this high calling.

God’s children have been called ambassadors, priests, epistles, light, witnesses and co-workers and their responsibility has been made so plain ‘make disciples of all nations’. This is the essence of our evangelism and discipline programme.

Christ gave the command five notable times.

DISCUSSION:

Check the following references and note the command therein.

1. Matthew 28:16-20
2. Mark 16:14-16
4. John 20:21-23
5. Acts 1:3-8

Stay close to this command as you lead your loved one on into the kingdom. His greatest need at anytime is CHRIST. Your own expectation is his or her salvation. Don’t be satisfied with your friend’s moral lifestyle. Do not be carried away with your own charitable
actions. For neither relief from pain or poverty nor an upliftment from ignorance and degradation exceeds that need. Nothing short of Christ and Him crucified is your message. And your primary obligation is Christ preached and presented.

Check Deuteronomy 4:1 and note the blessings that follow when God’s commandment is obeyed. __________________________

____________________________________________________

CHORUS:

Let’s talk about Jesus, Let all the world proclaim
The Power and Majesty Of such a wondrous name,
The Babe of Bethlehem, The Bright and Morning Star,
Let’s talk about Jesus near and far.
STUDY 23

PRAYER AND FAITH


The Scripture emphasizes the role of faith in the life of the Christian, and this is said in varied but unmistakable ways. Paul, through the Holy Spirit says “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin”; “without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Romans 14:23; Hebrews 11:6). John the beloved says, “This is the victory that overcometh . . . even our faith”. And Christ authoritatively says “According to your faith so be it unto you”. All these show the central place of faith in our prayer and daily Christian life.

Faith exercised in prayer yields positive results. To walk by faith brings glory to God. Faith in God is the most practical thing in the world. The man of faith is standing on the most solid ground in the universe. Faith stirs God to do wonders.

In our text, we see God’s wondrous works on behalf of those who have faith in Him and His word. From the times of the earliest of saints (justified souls), Abel, to the time of the martyrs of the New Testament, we see the effectual power of the prayer and life of faith.

However, there are some principles we should be mindful of when considering the subject of the prayer of faith. First, while exercising faith in prayer, we must carefully, quietly and deliberately examine and see whether what you are trusting God for is in accordance with His promise in the written word. Second, use the faith you have now because great faith comes by first using what you have. Third, go forward after praying as though there were no obstacles. Learn from Joshua. Fourth, believe you will have whatever you are believing God for. Don’t think anything too great or improbable. Many people are willing to believe regarding those things that seem probable to them. That is wrong. The work of faith begins where probabilities cease and where sense and sight fail. Often times, to look is to fail.

Violent faith, prayer and determination to conquer are needed. “With God all things are possible” is Jesus’ clear statement in Mark 11:23. Take the shield of faith and with it quench all the fiery darts, doubts and questions of the enemy and move forward to possess your possessions.
QUESTIONS:
Check the following Scriptures and note the faith principles they teach.

a. John 14:13,14
b. I John 3:22
c. Joshua 3:15-17

PRACTICAL SESSION:
All the brethren in the House Fellowship will go into a session of prayer on:

(a) Praises and worship
(b) The Pastor
(c) Personal needs
(d) The harvest of more souls in the Church’s programme
(e) Open doors for the Church in our outreaches
(f.) The government of our country
(g) The families of all members of the House Fellowship.

CHORUS:
Only believe (2ce) All things are possible Only believe
Lord I believe (2ce) All things are possible, Lord I believe.
In our text, we see Nehemiah, a deeply devout prayerful man who prayed down revival upon his nation, restored the true worship of God, taught the law, righted social wrongs and rebuilt walls that were broken down. Nehemiah prayed and worked and accomplished much for God.

The business of praying for the revival of our people, restoration of the true worship of God in the thousands of families in our city, deliverance of the oppressed and miracles for all who need them is ours today. The forth-coming programme is a life-time opportunity to pray for the salvation of others, total edification of the brethren, wholesome maturing of the Church and the development of the God-kind of faith.

Special outpour of God’s blessings like we are expecting begins with PRAYING BROTHERS and SISTERS who see the need for believer’s growth into maturity and the harvest of souls into the kingdom of God. Prayer is the first stage of action. No man can do a great and enduring work for God who will not give himself to prayer. The best and greatest offering you can make to the programme is a DAILY offering of prayer.

Praying implies giving yourself to God. As you pray, you give yourself to God for the revival, restoration and renewal of the hearts off others. Nehemiah could have asked God to send someone else because he had a noble task in the royal palace; but he did not sidestep issues. He gave up his all, time, strength, contacts, materials, mind and everything.

This shows that prayer, work, financial support and consecration of your talents for the programme go together. Prayer and work are close allies; they who work with God delight to pray and they who pray will eventually volunteer for work.

**PRACTICAL SESSION:**

Added to the three prayer points written down, note other issues of prayer about the programme in your zone and pray on them in the
House Fellowship. The House Fellowship leader will coordinate the prayer session.

(a) Salvation of sinners

(b) Edification of the brethren.

(c) Provision for the welfare of the people.

(d) _________________________

(e) _________________________

(f) _________________________

(g) _________________________

(h) _________________________

(i) _________________________

(j) _________________________

PLEDGE

I, _________________________, pledge to DAILY pray on all the above listed prayer points by God’s grace.

DATE: _______________________________

SIGNATURE: _________________________
Great Possibilities of Prayer and Faith


The other week, we learnt that faith is an integral part of prayer. When these two aspects (praise and prayer) of communing with God are combined, there are possibilities ahead of us.

Prayer backed with faith has the possibility of affecting everything that affect us. It did for early believers and it will do for us today.

Hannah prayed and God gave her one of the greatest prophets that ever lived for a child. Eliezer prayed and got God’s will in marriage for Isaac. Daniel prayed God’s blessings down upon a whole nation. Jacob prayed and the fiery hate in Esau’s heart was turned into love. Elisha prayed the miracle of God into the lives of dying, hungry and desperate Israelites. Prayer opened prison doors to Paul and Silas.

And there are even greater possibilities in prayer today. Jesus says “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do” (John 14:13). “Whatsoever” embraces all the concerns of our lives - salvation, children for the barren, protections, provision, God’s will in marriage, wisdom in raising up children, healing, miracles and victorious Christian living.

There are great possibilities in prayer and faith. Pray for everything you desire and even those things you consider humanly impossible. Prayer to God relieves dire situations because God can relieve when no one else can.

The believers in our text “lifted up their voices with one accord” and asked for the seemingly impossible - boldness during persecution, signs and wonders, courage to preach. And they got all these and even more for “the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” - Acts 4:32,33.

These are the great possibilities of prayer and faith. Whatever concerns your welfare, your family and the church is a subject of prayer. Take it to God in prayer and watch God bring it to pass.
1. Examine the following promises:

Jeremiah 33:3. _________________________
Jeremiah 32:27. _________________________
John 14:12-14. _________________________
John 16:24. _________________________

2. List the things you desire of God.

(a) ______________________ (b) ______________________
(c) ______________________ (d) ______________________
(e) ______________________ (f) ______________________
(g) ______________________ (h) ______________________
(i) ______________________ (j) ______________________

The House Fellowship will now go into a session of prayer on the needs of the people.

CHORUS: I believe God answers prayers, I have proved God answers prayers; I am sure God answers prayers, Glory to His Name.
We learnt an important subject - Prayer and Faith - sometime ago. Amongst other lessons, we saw some basic principles on which faith works.

**DISCUSSION ONE:**

Mention two of such faith principles we have learnt.

(a) ______________________ (b) ______________________

We also noted that faith exercised in prayer yields positive results. To walk by faith brings glory to God. The visible sign of our faith is praise praising and worshipping God for what we believe He has done after praying.

And today, we want to see the place of praise in prayer. But we must first understand that praise, worship and adoration cannot be separated from prayer. Praise is an essential part of prayer. Communion with God is largely praise worship and prayer. That is, perhaps, why Paul the Apostle says “I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men” (1 Timothy 2:1). Thus, “giving of thanks” - praise, worship and adoration is a definite part of our worship in prayer.

And when Christ taught His disciples, He made it plain that prayer should begin with praise and adoration. “When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Luke 11:2).

In our text, we see how praise is joined with prayer. In so doing, God’s hand was let loose. Praise released God’s power. Great victories were experienced. A hopeless battle was won, souls were ushered into the Kingdom of God. The unbelievers were put to shame. The children of God were justified.

This should be our experience today. We have to praise God even when we are faced with great difficulties. Praise God in prayer. Praise God in songs - hymns and choruses. Praise God by recalling His goodness and sharing the testimonies. Praise God with clapping of your hands.

Praise removes the greatest of mountains. Praise makes God to
be committed to you. Praise shows your confidence in God and assures God of your hope in Him. And no matter how bad the present situation is there is something to praise God for.

1. Give four reasons why you should praise God in your personal life.
(a) ______________________  (b) ______________________
(c) ______________________  (d) ______________________

2. The House Fellowship Leader will lead the brethren into a session of PRAISE and PRAYER.
(a) Praise God for the Church, her leadership and various projects and programmes.
(b) Praise God for His blessings and grace upon you and the members of your family.
(c) Praise God for the house fellowship.
(d) Pray for more grace and strength for everyone in the house fellowship.
(e) Pray for more anointing, wisdom and grace for the Pastor.
(f) Pray for the growth of your house fellowship.
STUDY 27

THE BIBLE: ITS PURPOSE AND MESSAGE

The supreme and practical purpose of the Bible is to reveal God to Man. This is accomplished through its message from the first verse of the first Book of the Bible. It says: In the beginning God...

This divine assertion denies and destroys several uninspired human philosophies. It discredits atheism with its doctrine of no God and polytheism with its doctrine of many gods. It confounds agnostics who are wilfully ignorant.

The fact that In the beginning God created heaven and earth” debunks pantheism which equates God with nature; materialism which asserts the eternity of matter and evolution with its theory of primitive nebulosity.

The Bible reveals God to Man as the Creator and Governor of the Universe. In revealing God to Man, the Bible stands as the eternal record of God’s redemptive plan for the human race.

1. What is the primary purpose of the Bible?
2. What is the Bible in relation to God’s plan of redemption?
3. Check the following scriptures and validate the primary purpose of the Bible.

(i) Job 11:7 _________________________
(ii) Job 37:23 ________________________
(iii) Isaiah 40:28 ______________________
(iv) Genesis 1:1 ______________________
CONDITIONS FOR BENEFITING FROM THE SCRIPTURES

*Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23.*

The supreme and practical purpose of the scripture is to reveal man’s ignorance of his own needs to him. It reveals God through the law and the prophets; God is revealed to man through Jesus Christ. The scriptures reveal the way of God for men to follow.

The scriptures also reveal the conditions of man’s heart and that man may be perfect. The type of heart that a man has, determines whether or not one can understand and benefit from God’s word.

The discouraged, proud and carnal heart cannot benefit from the study of God’s Word. The heart that lacks faith in God’s written Word cannot benefit from the Scripture. But a heart that loves the truth, loves God, desires to make personal sacrifice for study and totally depends on God and the Holy Spirit will benefit from the study of the Scriptures.

1. What types of hearts are revealed from the following references?
   (i) Matthew 13:3-6. _______________________
   (ii) Hebrews 3:12-15 ______________________
   (iii) Matthew 13:18-21 ____________________
   (iv) II Corinthians 3:14-16 ________________

2. Why will doubting, unstable hearts not benefit from the Word of God? James 1:8

________________________________________________________________________

3. How can a believer personally benefit from the study of the Scriptures?

   (i) Psalm 119:40 _________________________
   (ii) Jeremiah 6:16 ________________________
   (iii) Joshua 1:8 _________________________
   (iv) 1 Peter 2:2 _________________________
**THE NEW MAN**
*Colossians 3: 1-17.*

The account of the creation in Genesis tells us that man was created in the very image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, pure and with perfect heart and knowledge. But when man fell into sin, he lost all the attributes of God - the Creator. The image and likeness of God refer to man's moral, mental and spiritual wholeness.

God is holy, just, wise, good and perfect; so must the soul be that sprang from Him. He was created after the likeness and image of God - true holiness and righteousness (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:12). But when man disobeyed God, he lost the image and likeness of God.

The redemption work of Christ is to bring man back to this state of holiness, righteousness and knowledge. The journey to this perfect state only begins with the new birth. God expects every regenerated soul to seek and desire him until he comes to the measure and stature of Christ.

1. What was the nature of man before his fall? (Ephesians 4:24)

2. What are the marks of the old man?

3. What are the characteristics of the new man?
   (a) Colossians 3:12-17
   (b) Ephesians 4:23,24
   (c) Galatians 5:22-24

4. How can one walk in the newness of life?
   (a) Acts 2:41-47
   (b) Colossians 3:1-3
   (c) 11 Timothy 2:15
   (d) 11 Timothy 3:15-17

5. What is the standard of purity and holiness God expects man to be in his redemption plan?

Luke 1:74,75
Strict observance of religious activities such as giving of alms, prayer and fasting, regular church attendance, tithes and offering etc., without true repentance should not be mistaken for righteousness.

However, righteousness comes when you hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, become convicted of your sins and you make a decision to turn to God and ask for forgiveness of your past sin and wickedness. God has promised to forgive every repentant sinner (1 John 1:9).

If you believe God’s promises, you will receive pardon from God on the merit of Christ’s atonement for your sins. God would surely forgive you. From that moment, you ask Jesus to come and reign in your heart as Saviour and Lord.

You will have the witness in your heart that you are born again, because “the Spirit itself” will bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away behold all things are become new” (II Corinthians 5:17). In this newness of spirit and life, you will love the life of Christ, depend on God, and act in accordance with the revealed will of God by the Scriptures and through the servants of God. Then live your life in the fear and with the love of God in your heart.

1. What are the characteristics of the religious man?
3. What is the reward of the religious but unconverted man?
4. What activities may be performed by the religious or the righteous man?
   a) Isaiah 58:3-9 _______________________
   b) Isaiah 1:12,13,15 ___________________
5. How can you identify the activities of the religious or righteous man?
6. Explain properly how an unconverted man may become righteous. _________________________
STUDY 31

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION
_Ephesians 2:1-18._

Salvation is a definite experience characterised by an unusual love for God, the people of God, the word of God, and fellowship with the congregation of the righteous. The experience follows a personal decision to once-and-for-all repent of all one’s sins, forsake them and receive Jesus Christ as one’s personal Saviour. The experience of salvation is very definite and the Word of God give assurance to as many as are saved.

Jesus says “him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). The Spirit of God, through John the beloved says “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”. God in the Old Testament, declared His counsel through Ezekiel saying “If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath commited, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live”.

The promise and assurance of salvation for all repentant sinners was given on the cross when Jesus declared: “it is finished.” The price of redemption has been fully paid. Through the atonement of Jesus Christ all sinners can call upon God in repentance and receive pardon.

1. How can a sinner make peace with God? (Acts 3:19; Ephesians 2:8).

2. How can one be certain he is now a child of God?
   (a) Romans 8:14-16
   (b) 1 John 1:9

3. How can a new convert ensure his continued salvation?
   (a) Acts 2:41-47
   (b) 1 Thessalonians 5:16-23

4. How can you assist a seeker to repent and be saved?
CONFIDENCE IN GOD


By confidence, we mean firm or strong trust in oneself, another person or an object. The object of our confidence determines whether we will be disappointed or not. In our topic, we are considering the Divine Personality - “God” in whom we repose our trust.

You need to know God’s personality before you can have confidence in Him. You do not trust a person you do not know. That is why a sinner who has not known God through the new birth cannot trust God for help in time of trouble. We see unbelievers trusting in charms of various types. Some are buried, some hung at the door posts leading to their houses, others are seen hung inside buses and cars. Other sinners have confidence in cults because they do not know God but the scripture says “They that know thy name will put their trust in thee’ (Psalm 9:10).

Why should we have confidence in God? The answer is that the scripture commands us to do so. “The Lord shall be thy confidence … “ (Proverbs 3:26). Also, there is great blessings in doing so. “Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust … “ (Psalm 40:4). God cannot fail even when others fail; for we have the confidence that if we ask for cake He will not give stone, neither will He give serpent when we ask for fish. “If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.”

In the Bible days, many who either put their confidence in any other than God had themselves to blame. Today, it is the same. To take our confidence away from God, as a Bible-believing church, is dangerous and disappointing. Paul said in 11 Timothy 2:12 “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day”.

1. Why do we need to know God before we trust or put confidence in Him? 1 Samuel 4:5-11.

2. Read the following passages and share what God has taught you and the House fellowship members from them.

(a) Isaiah 43:2 ____________________________

(b) Hebrews 13:5,6 ________________________

(c) Numbers 23:19-23 __________________________
COMMUNING WITH GOD

Psalm 5:1-3; Joshua 1:6-8.

The secret of a daily victorious Christian life lies in the time spent each day in communing with God. The Psalmist discovered this secret and declared thus “My voice shall thou hear in the morning, O LORD, in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee and will look up” (Psalm 5:3).

Such daily consistent communion with God is called the Quiet Time. It is a time specifically set apart, preferably in the morning, to fellowship with God through the study of His word and prayer. As a child of God, God has something to say to you every day. He speaks to you by the written word. He also hearkens and hears when you have something to tell Him by way of reply through prayer. Sufficient time must therefore be allocated to reading and meditating in the word, listening and praying to Him.

The rising-and-falling ones are those who do not fully and diligently make out time for fellowship with God in their daily schedule. The Christian that maintains a stern, disciplined life and perseveres to keep his Quiet Time grows steadily day by day in the LORD.

1. From the following passages find out the benefits of maintaining a consistent Quiet Time.

(i) Joshua 1:8 _____________________________
(ii) Psalm 1:1-3 ___________________________
(iii) 1 Peter 2:2 ___________________________

2. What Lessons can we learn about Quiet Time from the following passages.

(i) Psalm 5:3 _____________________________
(ii) Genesis 19:27 __________________________
(iii) Mark 1:35 _____________________________

3. What materials do we need for the Quiet Time?

(i) ___________________________ (ii) ___________________________
(iii) ___________________________ (iv) ___________________________
4. (a) Mention the constituents of the *Quiet Time*?

(i) ______________________ (ii) ______________________

(ii) ______________________ (iii) ______________________

(iv) ______________________

(b) How do we hear from God during our *Quiet Time*?

(i) 2 Timothy 2:7 ______________________

(ii) Psalm 46:10 ______________________

(iii) Habakkuk 2:1____________________

5. **DISCUSSION** - Discuss what members have discovered to be the greatest hindrance to maintaining their *Quiet Time*. Find solutions to them.

**Fellowship Song:**

*God is my Father, Jesus is my brother, And the blessed Holy Spirit is my guide, The devil is no relation*

*For I am a new creation*

*And a member of the family of the Lord.*
STUDY 34

THE FAITHFUL IN THE FIERY FURNACE


In our Christian journey, our faith and confidence in God and love for Christ shall be tested, tried and challenged. This will take different forms such as persecution from relations, friends and co-workers; mis-representations by false brethren, opposition by the government, employers and other religious groups. These are not strange happenings in the Christian life for “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus in this world shall suffer persecution” (1 Peter 4:12; 11 Timothy 3:12).

The ultimate aim of those opposed to our faith is to discourage us from following the Lord to the end and consequently lose eternal life with the rewards awaiting those that triumph in trials by their steadfastness and trust in the Lord. Our attitude towards them should be that of love with a great concern for their salvation. At such times of trials, distress and perplexity, we must hold fast our faith in God. It is a priceless treasure which must be held fast.

The Lord has given us the unfailing promises of His abiding presence, deliverance, protection and defence at such trying periods.

When we are therefore reviled and persecuted, we should rejoice and count it a great privilege to suffer for the Lord. Our sufferings are not in vain. There are rewards awaiting those who will endure to the end.

1. What should be our attitude toward those who persecute us? (Matthew 5:44).

2. Find out from the following references how we should react during persecution and trials.

(i) Daniel 3:16-28 ____________________________
(ii) Acts 5:40-42 ____________________________
(iii) Daniel 6:10 ____________________________
(iv) Matthew 5:12 __________________________
(v) 1 Peter 4:13 ____________________________
3. (a) What was the end result of the steadfastness of the three Hebrew children? (Daniel 3:25-29).

verse 25 ______________________
verse 26 ______________________
verse 27 ______________________
verse 28 ______________________
verse 29 ______________________

(b) What lesson do we learn from this? __________________________
______________________________________________________________

Fellowship Song:

Give me that old time Religion (ace) It’s good enough for me
It was good for Paul and Silas (3x) It’s good enough for me
It was good for Mary and Martha
It was good for John and Andrew
It will take us all to Heaven.
Towards the end of His earthly ministry, the Lord declared to the disciples “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you”. The import of this condition of friendship with the Lord needs to be grasped and understood by all.

First, it is not practicable for two to walk together except they agree. So also, it is impossible to obey the Lord’s command when we are still carnal “*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). The carnal mind exalts and promotes self and seeks to satisfy the flesh through lust, lasciviousness, drunkenness, adultery, fornication, corruption, etc. But when all these are confessed and repented of, change comes into our lives and we become new creatures and friends of God.

Second, our friendship with God as Christians demands that we sever our friendship with the world completely. This has to be so because we are not of the world, we have been chosen out of the world. We are by no means to act in the same principles nor pursue our objectives in the same manner as the world does in pursuits of business, marriage, furnishing, dressing, etc. Our principles and practice in all these must be different and distinct from that of the world and regulated by the scriptures. We must not be conformed to the world.


2 How does one become a friend of God?

3. From the following passages what constitutes friendship with the world? 11 Corinthians 6:14

(a) 11 Chronicles 20:35-37 _______________________

(b) Jeremiah 4:30 _______________________________

(c) 1 Corinthians 11:14 ___________________________
(d) Exodus 23:2 __________________________
(e) Deuteronomy 22:5 ____________________
(f) 1 John 2:15-17 ________________________
Christians are a chosen generation and a peculiar people. By our lives, we are to attract and draw out those in darkness unto the marvellous light of the gospel. But when our lives contradict what we profess and preach we become hypocrites, and the hearts of the sinners we are to win for the Lord become more hardened to the gospel.

It is not sufficient to cast out devils and do miracles in the Lord’s name and preach fiery sermons to the sinners. Many who do these will be denied by the Lord on the last day because of the secret sins they indulge in and the evils they harbour in their hearts. Our public and private lives when brought into examination at any time should receive the approval of God. We must not honour God with our lips and make our heart to be far from Him. A double standard life is a life of hypocrisy.

Hypocrites, no matter how much respect they command because of their eloquence or oratory, hospitality or charity and regular observance of Christian ordinances or attendance of church services, will not receive any commendation from the Lord.

On the other hand, there are believers who live like hypocrites. They are ashamed to be identified with the Lord. Such are those who wrap up their Bibles when coming to Church to avoid being “embarrassed” by people around them. Though they have received tremendous blessing from the Lord through the church, they cannot tell others about Christ with confidence and boldness. To such the Lord says “whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32,33).

1. Find out the evidences of a hypocritical life from the following passages.
   (i) Mark 7:6 ________________________________
   (ii) Ezekiel 33:30-33 ________________________
What are the effects of a hypocritical life?

(i) Mark 7:13 ____________________________
(ii) Romans 2:21-24 ______________________

3. Identify from the following verses of our text what dangers we must avoid as members of the house fellowship to ensure we do not become hypocrites.

(i) verse 6 ______________________________
(ii) verse 7 ______________________________
(iii) verse 8,9 ____________________________
(iv) verse 10, 11 _________________________
(v) verse 13 ____________________________

4. Discuss and identify some practical ways Christians can behave like hypocrites.

(i) ________________________________
(ii) ________________________________
(iii) ________________________________
(iv) ________________________________

**Fellowship Song:**

*Follow, follow, I will follow Jesus,*
*Everywhere, anywhere*
*I will follow Him Follow, Follow,*
*I will follow Jesus Anywhere He leads me*
*I will follow Him.*
THE WORTH OF A SOUL

“For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36).

A single soul worths more than all the possessions in the world put together. When all the glamorous buildings, care and other possessions in the world are burnt up with fervent heat, a soul will still be alive in everlasting consciousness - in heaven or in hell.

A soul will never die. Once a person is born, his existence is as eternal as God’s. When this earth has crumbled to dust and has passed away into the forgotten past, a soul will still be in its freshness of youth.

Souls are very precious to God and no wonder the angels in heaven rejoice when a sinner turns to the Saviour. What a great privilege and honour it is therefore to make the Father happy by winning souls for him. There is no trouble too great, no humiliation too inhuman, no suffering too severe, no love too strong, no labour too hard and no expense too large in the effort to save one soul.

Satan hates the soul and can do anything to ruin and destroy it but God loves the soul and has done everything to save it. We should therefore be willing to suffer, sacrifice and spend in order to save souls.

Remember, a soul will never die!

1. Give five reasons from our text why we must witness to all men.

(i) Luke 16:22; Hebrews 9:27 _____________________________
(ii) Luke 16:23; Psalm 9:17 _____________________________
(iii) Luke 16:22; 1 Corinthians 7:29,25 ___________________
(iv) Luke 16:25,26; Hebrews 10:31 _______________________
(v) Luke 16:27,28; John 4:34 ____________________________
2. Find out from the following passages why souls are very precious.

(i) Mark 8:36,37 __________________________

(ii) Psalm 49:6-9 _________________________

(iv) Hebrews 9:27 _________________________

3. From verses 29 and 30 what responsibility is conferred on us as Christians?

4. (a) List below members of your family that are yet to be saved.

(b) If you are concerned about where they will spend eternity, what are you going to do about them?
“I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; and have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy loving kindness and thy truth from the great congregation” (Psalm 40:10). The declaration of the Psalmist is what the Lord expects from everyone that has received his blessings - salvation, protection, healing, sanctification, deliverance and provision.

There are some lessons to learn from the woman in our text. First, she did not conceal the experience she had just had, she made it known to the men in the city. Second, she acted promptly to make known her personal encounter with the Lord and she did it excitingly to the extent that her testimony drew men out of the city unto Christ.

We should also notice that she quoted no scripture, all she did was to tell all that had happened unto her. The new convert without much knowledge of the scripture and the uneducated believer who cannot quote any Bible passage correctly can all share their salvation experiences with others and it will have the same effect as we read in our text. We may not be able to preach but we can all give the testimonies of our salvation in the bus, at the bus stops, market places, on the train, harbours and from house to house.

How glorious it will be to hear from the redeemed Saints when we get to heaven, that the testimonies of our salvation brought them to the Lord.

1. How much of the scriptures should one know before telling others about Jesus? Give examples to support your answer.

2. Is it possible for a new convert and illiterate to win souls for the Lord? If so how?

3. What lessons can we learn from the way the Samaritan woman brought the men of the city unto Christ?

4. (a) How often should one give his testimony of salvation?

   (b) Mention some places where we can share our testimony with others.

   (i) ________________________  (ii) ________________________
5. Are there benefits in sharing our faith with others?

_Fellowship Chorus:_

_When we get to heaven At the marriage supper All the saints shall gather At the last assembly No more sad parting No more heart breaking Farewell to sorrow Victory at last._
STUDY 39

STEPS TO ENTIRE
SANCTIFICATION EXPERIENCE

Luke 1:68-75

It is helpful to know that it is God’s will to sanctify all those He has called. God knows the importance of the experience of entire sanctification and He has made provision for it. There are steps to be known and taken in order to get into the sanctification experience. The steps start with salvation.

Salvation: Just as every house rests on a foundation so also all christian experiences rest on a foundation namely, SALVATION. Jesus said “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine...” (Matthew 7:6). The dogs mentioned here are unbelievers. They are outside the fold. They cannot be called the children of God and therefore cannot understand the doctrine of holiness “for without are dogs...” (Revelation 22:15). The unbelievers are also called swines or pigs.

Put a pearl (gold) round the neck of a swine and off it will go into the mire to wallow. Holiness - the nature of God - when explained to a sinner is not understood. But a miracle happens when God changes the heart of a sinner and gives him the heart of flesh. He becomes born again. Old things are passed away and all things become new.

After Salvation the next step is FAITH. You must believe that God can make you pure; and that Jesus has prayed the Father that you should be sanctified (Luke 1:37,45; John 17:17).

Also, believe that the SACRIFICE of Jesus on Calvary has procured the experience to all who believe. It is necessary to desire the experience. There is also the need to consecrate and yield to God (Matthew 5:6; Romans 12:1,2; Proverbs 23:26). Ask or Pray and receive (Matthew 7: 7-11; John 16:23,24).

1. Give other meanings for Sanctification from the following references.

(i) Deuteronomy 30:6 ______________________

(ii) I John 4:17,18 ________________________

(iii) Psalm 24:4 ________________________
(iv) Luke 1:75 _______________________
(v) Ezekiel 36:26 ___________________

2. Who is the Agent of sanctification in the following references?
   (i) Hebrews 13:12 __________________
   (ii) I Peter 1:2 _____________________
   (iii) Jude 1 _______________________

Practical Discussion:

A member of the House Fellowship should give the testimony of how he/she became born again. Another should testify of his/her sanctification experience. If sinners in the house fellowship today want to be sanctified, what would they do first? Are there believers who have not got this experience in the house fellowship? Such must consecrate, believe and ask now - I Thessalonians 5:23.
A tree is known by the fruits it produces. In the same way, the believer that is daily enjoying the sanctification experience is known by the fruits he produces. You cannot interact with a believer elevated to the wonderful experience of purity without seeing this rare grace of God manifested.

As members of the House Fellowship, we are to consider some fruits of a sanctified life. The unsanctified ones among us must be challenged to consecrate and ask for it while those that have lost the experience should seek God to regain the experience.

1. Point out the fruits of a sanctified life in the following references.

(i) Luke 18:1 ___________________________
(ii) Deuteronomy 30:6 ___________________
(iii) Psalm 32:2 _________________________
(iv) Ephesians 5:19,20 ___________________
(v) Psalm 139:23 _______________________
(vi) Psalm 119:104 _______________________
(vii) I Thessalonians 5:22 ______________
(viii) Proverbs 22:1 _____________________
(ix) I Thessalonians 4:12 _______________
(x) II Corinthians 7:1 ___________________
NECESSITY OF SANCTIFICATION

Ephesians 1:1-6.

As a Bible-believing Church, we want to look closely into this important doctrine of the Bible that has either been neglected by many or disputed by even some preachers. We are not only looking into it but we are going to examine ourselves as individual believers whether we have this experience or not.

The question “Why is it necessary that we should be sanctified?” is answered with these few Bible references.

Ephesians 1:4 “According as he hath chosen us in Him (CHRIST) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” God had called us unto holiness since the foundation of the world. It is natural that the holy God would desire nothing less than holiness from the called. Heaven is clothed with His glory of holiness.

I Thessalonians 4:3 “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.” Again, it is not only 36 God’s choice that we should be holy, it is His will that we should be sanctified. His choice and His will are in perfect harmony with each other.

I Peter 1:15,16 “But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation because it is written Be ye holy, for I am holy.” It is here commanded that believers should be holy. It then becomes necessary that the commandment is carried out. Our Holy God cannot command His children to be unholy.

Hebrews 13:12 “Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate.” It is very necessary to believe and enjoy this doctrine otherwise we reject the shed blood of the Son of God.

Hebrews 2:11 “For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren”. From this passage it is discovered that some believers have had the experience. Therefore it becomes very necessary for those who do not have it to seek God till He rains righteousness upon them.
Hebrews 12:14 “Follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.” It is here clearly stated that without holiness no man shall see God. It is the desire of every man or woman to see God, but God has given us the conditions for seeing Him.

1. Mention 3 other reasons why Sanctification is very necessary.
   (i) Luke 1:74, 75 ________________________________
   (ii) Ephesians 4:24 ________________________________
   (iii) John 17:17 ________________________________

2. Mention 5 members of the church that you know have got this experience.
   (i) ___________________ (ii) ___________________
   (iii) ___________________ (iv) ___________________
   (v) ___________________

3. Explain in your own words - Psalm 93:5 and Titus 2:11, 12 ________________________________

4. Mention 5 people in the Bible you know who lived holy lives.
   (i) ___________________ (ii) ___________________
   (iii) ___________________ (iv) ___________________
   (v) ___________________

5. From Proverbs 22:28, explain how people remove the old landmark of sanctification today.

**ACTIVITY:**

About 4 believers should read Ephesians 1:3-6 using personal pronouns all through and see whether all you read as believers is true of you.
The Christian Family

Genesis 2:21-24; Psalm 127:3-5.

The Christian family consists of the husband, the wife and the children who are united in heart, in aim and in objectives. They share true fellowship in an atmosphere devoid of conflict, strife and division. The husband as the head of the family shares his life with his wife, loves her selflessly, respects, honours, protects and cares for her. He is faithful to her also. He takes care of the needs of the family providing for their physical and spiritual needs - Ephesians 5:25,28,29.

On her part, the Christian wife discharges the God given responsibilities of loving, respecting and obeying her husband and being faithful to him. It is her duty to make the home happy, love and train the children and be an example in speech and in action - Ephesians 5:22,23.

In the Christian family, God commands the children to respect, honour, obey and help their parents and also love, honour and obey God - Ephesians 6:1,2.

When members of the Christian family discharge their God-given duties, the home becomes a place of security, harmony, joy, peace and togetherness.

Many a time, Christian families have to accommodate non-members of the families like parents-in-law, and relations (brothers, sisters or cousins on a permanent or semi permanent basis). Sometimes their coming to stay is inevitable either because of ill-health, loneliness, old age and lack of care, lack of job opportunities, or our need for domestic help. Many a time their presence in the family causes disharmony among members of the family; but not all families have problems with their in-laws.

It must be understood that, however accommodating the older parents are, it is not easy to have three generations under one roof. Long established habits, and patterns are not easily broken or even bent. The older is critical about the management of the home and discipline of children, while the relations because of strong-cultural influences tend to cause disaffection between husbands and wives. When these in-laws are not believers, the problems they pose can be serious.
It is important to keep to God’s standard for the family. We can ensure that we settle our aged parents on their own adequately making provision for their maintenance and welfare. We can also ensure that the visits of our in-laws and relations are short and infrequent. Where their stay will have to be permanent, husbands and wives must not shy away from discussing the roles of such in-laws in the home and earnestly pray for their conversion, for when God transforms their lives, they can be greater sources of blessings to us than problems.

1. What is the composition of a Christian family?
   Ecclesiastes 9:9 ___________________________
   Genesis 2:23,24 ___________________________
   Ephesians 5:22,23; 6:1,2 _____________________

2. What are the duties and responsibilities in the home, of:
   (i) the husband? _________________________
   (ii) the wife? ____________________________
   (iii) the children? ________________________

3. What is the importance of the home to the Christian family?
   _______________________________________

4. Mention ways the presence of in-laws can be a destabilising factor in the home.
   (i) ________________________________ (ii) ________________________________
   (iii) ________________________________ (iv) ________________________________

5. Are all in-laws bad? Yes/No.
   Mention some ways they have been a blessing to you.
   (i) ________________________________ (ii) ________________________________
   (iii) ________________________________

7. What are some genuine reasons why in-laws have to stay with some Christian families?
   _______________________________________


THE FAMILY OF GOD
I John 2:12-14

In the natural realm, one becomes a family member by being born into it. The same is true of the spiritual family. We enter it by being born again. “Like produces like; life produces life.” The “living and powerful” word of God is the means that the Spirit uses to bring about regeneration. Eternal life is the possession of every believer.

Although there may be differing degrees of maturity within the family, the ground of fellowship is the same for all: “Because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake” - I John 2:12.

Earthly families are composed of parents, young people, and little children. The same is true of the family of God. The difference however, is that they do not necessarily vary according to age but in spiritual maturity. In God’s family therefore, there are three distinct stages of spiritual growth. First, the fathers - the believers in Christ who had grown in grace and had begotten children in the gospel. They are spiritually matured and well advanced in all aspects of the Christian faith. It is not the number of years a believer has been with the Lord that distinguishes him as a matured Christian but the growth and maturity he has made in the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.

In the family too are the ‘young men’ who have grown in Christ to the place where they are experiencing victory over the attacks of the wicked one. They have progressed beyond the infant stage in spiritual growth but have not yet attained the status indicated by ‘fathers’. Their lives are characterised by continual communion with God, knowing and meditating upon the truths of the Bible.

The third class of individuals in God’s family is the “little children” - those recently born again. Although they have just come into the family, nevertheless, they have known the Father.

If you are an infant recently born into the family, thank God that you know the Father. Yours is the opportunity for growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. If a ‘young man’, press on towards maturity. If a ‘father’, feed the flock of God.
1. What are the three classes of individuals in the family of God?
(i) _____________________ (ii) _____________________
(iii) _____________________

2. What is their common characteristic in their membership of the family?

3. Read Philippians 3:8-10. What class in the family does the passage refer to?

   If you are not yet a member of God’s family, what can you do to be one?

4. Does length of time or age qualify someone to move from one class to another in God’s family?

   Yes/No _____________________________________________

   If No, what are the qualifications? ______________________

5. Can you identify the class you are in the family?
In every generation all through the centuries, God has always had a faithful remnant of disciples given the evangelistic task of reaching the world with the gospel so that men and women who are converted to Jesus Christ can be brought into a living fellowship of responsible believers and in time become reproductive Christians.

As Christians, we belong to the family of believers and are part of the body of Christ but we must be members of a local assembly where there are opportunities for personal growth, for carrying on the Great Commission, strengthening our faith, and fellowship with its members.

Christian fellowship is an absolute necessity in the life of every believer, and wherever a Christian is isolated from others who have similar relationship with Jesus Christ, there is something missing from his or her life. Even though a person may have fellowship with Christ through the word and prayer, the mutual encouragement and strengthening that comes from association with other believers in the Lord is absent. Christian fellowship must challenge us to grow in Christ, lead us to share Jesus with one another and make plans for outreach to those outside Christ.

Through fellowship with believers, we receive needed encouragement in time of weariness and discouragement. Fellowship provides correction necessary for our spiritual growth. We cannot become the men and women God wants us to be if we are out of fellowship. “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” Proverbs 13:20. When we are in the companionship of others who know the Saviour, and who are committed to His Lordship, then we will grow and increase in the depth of our relationship with Christ Jesus and with one another.

1. Mention some benefits of Christian Fellowship.

   (i) _____________________  (ii) _____________________
   (iii) _____________________(iv) _____________________
   (v) _____________________
2. What do we learn from the following scriptures?

(i) Hebrews 10:25 _______________________
(ii) II Corinthians 1:4 _____________________
(iii) Luke 24:32 __________________________
(iv) I Chronicles 28:20 _____________________

3. What happens when we are out of the fellowship of believers?

____________________________________________________

4. Must we be selective in our choice of fellowship? Yes/No. Why?

____________________________________________________

5. What blessings do we receive from fellowship according to the following verses.

(i) Hebrews 3:12,13 _____________________________
(ii) Ecclesiastes 4:9,10 ___________________________
All believers have a responsibility to fulfill - the function for which the Church has been left in the world. Having accepted the gospel, they must take upon themselves the obligation to pass its blessings on to others. In this way, the work of salvation is extended. God expects every soul reclaimed from sin to join in the same work that lifted him up and placed his feet upon the rock.

The good things of God are not to be selfishly kept to ourselves. We receive to give. "The soul is lost that is saved alone." As love prompted God’s great gift, so His love in our hearts should prompt us to give, to minister, and to engage in loving service in the church for the welfare and the happiness of others. Our commitment to our church will constrain us to evangelise, to invite people into the church in love, warmly receive and care for new comers and cultivate their friendship and pay our tithes and offering for the support of the local church and mission. As committed members of the body of Christ, we must be true and faithful ambassadors of our church by upholding the doctrines and by letting your “light so shine before (them), that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

1. Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; What is the obligation of every member of the church?
   (a) In our locality __________________________
   (b) Outside our locality _____________________

2. Since all members of the church cannot go on missionary journey, how can we support missionary work?
   (a) _____________________
   (b) _____________________

   (i) _____________________ (ii) _____________________
   (iii) _____________________ (iv) _____________________

4. What is our obligation to the leadership of the Church? Hebrews 13:17
5. (a) In what other ways can we put our talents, time and resources into the service of the Church?

(i) _____________________  (ii) _____________________
(iii) _____________________ (iv) _____________________
(v) _____________________

(b) What was the reward of those servants that profitably used their talents for their Lord in our text?

6. How can we be worthy ambassadors of Christ?

(i) _____________________  (ii) _____________________
(iii) _____________________
Communication is a vital means of promoting peace in the family. It consists of simple but powerful rules: talking, listening and understanding. Some talk too much, some too little and many talk with little or no meaning. However, talking with point and purpose is an essential ingredient of effective communication. A happy family life is not possible without communication which reveals with reasonable certainty, how the other feels about a given action or situation. The reason why members of a family fail to talk to one another can be traced to resentment. But, they should speak out in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Problems in the home can be solved with good communication between husband and wife; and there must be a commitment to speak the truth in all things. Such openess and honesty allows your partner to enter an area of your life from which hitherto he/she has been excluded. Truth should prevail in family conversation. All accusations and blames which are unscriptural should be avoided. Speaking the truth in love means a commitment to using only appropriate words. We must choose words that carry a positive and helpful message.

Speaking in love means supplementing the right use of words with the right tone of voice. Experts say the words we use make up just 7% of our message; the tone of the voice 38% and the nonverbal communication (expression on our face, the look in our eyes, etc) 55%.

Speaking the truth in love means using the truth as observation and not as accusation. Listening is a key that opens all the locked doors in relationship. The reasons why we are such poor listeners are because we like to (i) be on the defensive; (ii) be self-centred (iii) pretend a lot during serious conversation.

Understanding is the third component of communication process. If the husband/wife spends as much time trying to understand his/her partner as much in seeking to be understood, there will be fewer problems in marriage.
1. Mention three elements that promote peace in the family.
(i) _____________________  (ii) _____________________
(iii) _____________________

2. Why do husbands and wives fail to talk to each other?
(i) _____________________  (ii) _____________________

3. Explain the significance of these passages.
(i) Proverbs 18:21 _____________________
(ii) Proverbs 29:20 _____________________
(iii) I Peter 3:10 _____________________
(iv) Proverbs 25:11 _____________________
(v) Proverbs 18:13 _____________________
(vi) James 1:19 _____________________
(vii) Ephesians 4:2 _____________________

4. What is the counsel to families in Philippians 2: 2-4?
(i) _____________________   (ii)  _____________________
(iii)  _____________________  (iv) _____________________
The manner in which family worship is conducted is very important. It should be made so pleasant as to be looked forward to with gladness even by the younger children. A few minutes given everyday could do and make it the most pleasant and attractive experience of the day.

As a rule, children will reflect the life and principles manifested in their parents. The reason so many children are irreverent, irreligious and disobedient is that their parents are so. Like parents like child. If parents will see a different state of things, they must themselves change. They must invite God into their homes and make His word their counsellor and guide. God’s word must be taken as the voice of God addressed to them; and it is to be implicitly obeyed.

In many house-holds today, prayer is neglected. If ever there was a time when every house should be a house of prayer it is now. Fathers and mothers should often lift up their hearts to God in humble supplication for themselves and their children. “Let the father, as the priest of the household lay upon the altar of God the morning and evening sacrifice, while the wife and children unite in prayer and praise. In such a house-hold Jesus will love to tarry.”

1. Why did God confide in Abraham and commit sacred trusts to him? Genesis 18:19 ____________________

2. Wherever Abraham went, what was his practice? Genesis 12:8; 13:4; 21:33. _______________________

3. What situations influence children to become wayward?
   (i) ____________________ (ii) ____________________
   (iii) ____________________ (iv) ____________________

4. How can members of the family become more committed to God?
   (ii) ____________________
   (iv) ____________________
5. Suggest ways in which daily family devotion can transform and enrich the lives of members of the family.

(i) _____________________ (ii) _____________________
(iii) _____________________ (iv) _____________________
(v) _____________________
RAISING YOUR CHILDREN FOR CHRIST

Exodus 2:1-10.

Children are a blessing from God rather than a burden and we are to receive them from God as a raw piece of wood and shape them into strong, powerful arrows. As gifts from God, they are entrusted into the care of parents not only to be provided with material things, but also to be appreciated, accepted, loved, cherished and prepared for God’s service.

Children are born in innocence and are simple-hearted, tender, believing and trusting. They therefore, must not be left lost in the confusion of the society. How glorious it will be if our children do not know the sorrow, the guilt and evils of sin, but are helped to know the Lord in their youth!

The role of parents is crucial in the growth and development of the children and they should therefore actively guide the children in the selection of friends, manners, choice of career, in wise use of time and money and engaging in balanced and health recreation. Parents should also instruct the children in their involvement in the ministry of the local church, on the importance of the will of God in life, on leading others to Christ, on how to pray, pay tithes and give offerings, overcome temptations and prepare for eternity. The children too must be protected from drug addiction, immorality, worldliness, rebellion and from the corruptions on television. They must be grounded on what they believe, whom they believe and why they believe.

As we perseveringly discharge our parental responsibilities, our children can be raised up to the glory of God and as tremendous blessing to our families and the nation.

1. How was Moses taught during his early childhood? Hebrews 11:23; Exodus 2:8,9.

2. (i) What should be the prayer of every parent? Judges 13:8.
   (ii) How should all christian parents bring up their children? Ephesians 6:4.
   (iii) How early did Paul say Timothy was instructed? II Timothy 3:15.
3. What are parental obligations for the social development of their children?

(i) ______________________  (ii) _______________________
(iii) ______________________ (iv) _______________________
(v) _________________ (vi) _______________________
(vii) _________________ (viii) _______________________
(ix) _________________ (x) _______________________

4. What are parental responsibilities for the spiritual development of their children?

(i) ______________________  (ii) _______________________
(iii) ______________________ (iv) _______________________
(v) _________________ (vi) _______________________
(vii) _________________

5. What are children to parents? - Psalm 127:3,4; 144:12.

6. What are the potentialities of children?

___________________________________________________
Every believer has his or her own times of crisis. These crises may include persecution, trials, needs, unanswered prayers and financial hardship which tells negatively on our businesses. These crises and many others tend to bring about discouragement.

Our attitudes during crisis is very important to determine whether the crisis will make or mar our relationship with God. Afterall, many of the trials are there to bring us nearer to the Lord and possibly to show the world that the foundation of our faith is on the Lord - the Solid Rock. We should not faint in the face of trials. “If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small” (Proverbs 24:10).

From our text, we read of a serious discouraging condition in which David found himself. He was cast down and disquieted. It appeared he was under a very heavy load that weighed much on him. To this he cried “Why art thou cast down, 0 my soul and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God” Verse 11.

Our hearts may be agitated as David’s was in verse 2 “…when shall I come and appear before God.” When will I give my own testimony? Like David we have gone to the Church to listen to testimonies of the goodness of God, multitudes have given wonderful testimonies of deliverance, provision, peace, healing and other miracles. As a result of these, we might be tempted to become discouraged. At such a time, we should remember that the miracle is just at the door. David retorted “I shall yet praise him….” We too will shout the shout of praises to God as we do not allow the problems to weigh us down.

1. Check the following Bible references and note the crisis which the characters therein passed through.

(i) Numbers 11:15 _______________________
(ii) Joshua 7:7 ________________________
(iii) I Kings 19:4 _______________________
(iv) Job 10:1 ________________________
2. Did any one of the above die during the crisis?
Yes/ No

3. What does your answer tell you about those passing through crisis in the house fellowship?

4. What should our attitude be towards crisis?
(i). Habakkuk 3:17,18
(ii). Psalm 118:17
(iii). Psalm 77:10,11

**ACTIVITY**

*Two members should be asked to count their blessings and name them one by one.*
The Weapons of Our Warfare

2 Corinthians 10:4,5; Ephesians 6:10-18.

There is victory and dominion for every trusting Christian. The Bible makes it clear that there is a war to fight and there are weapons to use.

The devil is the enemy of God’s children. He uses his wiles to wreck the lives, families and businesses of people. The war is a spiritual war and the weapons of warfare are also spiritual.

The Bible says “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds...”

Paul in the New Testament dwelt on these weapons of warfare. These weapons are also called “the whole armour of God.” They consist of “the truth,” “the breastplate of righteousness,” “the gospel of peace,” “the shield of faith,” “the helmet of salvation,” “the sword of the Spirit” and much praying.

1. From the whole armour of God: Mention the one for:-
   (i) the head (verse 17) _____________________
   (ii) the chest (verse 14) _____________________
   (iii) the loin (verse 14) _____________________
   iv) the feet (verse 15) _____________________
   (v) the shield (verse 16) _____________________
   (vi) the sword (verse 17) _____________________
   (vii) the lubricant (prayer) verse 18 _____________

2. Mention the enemies we are combating in the following references:
   (i) James 4:1-4 _______________________________
   (ii) I Peter 4:1-4 _______________________________
   (iii) I Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:12 _____________________

3. As soldiers, what are we to do from the following references.
   (i) II Timothy 2:4 _____________________
   (ii) II Timothy 2:3____________________
WHEN ALL ELSE FAIL

Armed with all helpful information on how to reach a beloved one and get him into the Kingdom of God, you ran forth to reach and win. But experience, at times, has a way of ebbing our excitement.

DISCUSSION ONE:

Beginning with the House Fellowship leader, some brethren should share their experiences in the process of winning their friends.

If we have all carried out Christ’s commission to “go and make disciples” we might not all have the same exciting tales of exploits. But all is not lost.

Maybe we have not maximally used the essential tools that bring success in the business of friendship evangelism.

The first of these two essential tools is LOVE. Real loving sympathy and genuine concern for loved ones always win where everything else had failed. Love will win anyone. There is none that we cannot win if we go after him with the persistent love that will never give up. The love Christ showered on a backslidden Peter, convicted and restored him.

There are two striking verses in our text - verse 13 “the greatest of these is charity (love)” and in verse 8, we learn that “charity never fails.” If everything else failed, try LOVE, for love never fails.

DISCUSSION TWO:

How best can we show love to our loved one and win him at the shortest time possible?

The second essential tool that ensures success in friendship evangelism is UNITED PRAYER. If you have prayed individually and you have not yet obtained the desired result, why not try united prayer this week. Remember that while one chases one thousand, two shall put ten thousand to flight (Deuteronomy 32:30). And in the New Testament, Jesus Christ says “Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19,20). That settles it.
When all else fail, try united or corporate prayer and God will open the heart of your loved one.

**DISCUSSION THREE:**

From personal experiences, some House Fellowship brethren should share how united prayer had opened locked doors.

*Note down the importance of united or corporate prayer in the following Scriptures.*

Acts 12:5-10
Acts 16:25-27
Acts 4:24-33
Saints of God through all ages have learnt that there is victory, blessings and power in praise. Melchisedek blessed (praised) God in his service to God (Genesis 14:19,20). And in heaven the whole Church will, like the “voice of many waters, and the voice of mighty thunderings,” be “saying, al-le-ju-ia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Revelation 19:6). These show that praise is the pleasure of God.

The practice of praising God releases the power of God into set circumstances and enables God to change them if they are His design. The prayer of praise is the highest form of communion with God; it always releases a great deal of power into our lives. We must praise God for so it befits us if we want our needs met and God glorified.

Praise removes the greatest of mountains. Praise wins God’s commitment for us. “In all things give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” (I Thessalonians 5:18). “In all things” must be understood through and through.

Praise God when your expectations appear unfulfilled. Praise God when your business appears dull and unpromising. And praise Him when He blesses you too - “In all things give thanks”.

Praise changes circumstances. Walls of Jericho fell at the shout of praise from the lips of redeemed Israel. A confederate army was defeated when Jehoshaphat led Israel to praise the Lord. The Bible says “When he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord and that should praise the beauty of holiness...praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth forever” (2 Chronicles 20:21). God’s praise from the lips of Paul and Silas caused earthquakes, shook the foundation of the prison, opened all the doors and loosed the bands of the prisoners. God’s praise will give you all you desire. What great victory, success and power we have in praise!
PRACTICAL SESSION

All the brethren will go into praise-prayer and wholeheartedly praise God for:

(i) The Pastor of the Church
(ii) The activities and programmes of the Church
(iii) The work in the zones and districts
(iv) The zonal leaders, co-ordinators, state pastors.
(v) The mercies of God upon you and the members of your family.
(vi) The blessings God has for you this and next month.

CHORUS

Praising the Lord always (2ce)
Praising the Lord with all my heart
Praising the Lord with all my heart always
Halleluyah my Lord is good (ace)
He’s good to me.