

# October to December 2015

October: “Common Concerns and Practices  
in Christianity”

November: “The Epistle to Titus”

December: “The First Epistle of Peter”

by

Rev Michael Koech

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## About the Author



Rev Michael Koech serves in Kenya, East Africa, as the pastor of Kapkwen Africa Gospel Unity Church, principal of Bomet Bible Institute, and Vice Bishop of the Africa Gospel Unity Church. He was saved in 1974 out of a Roman Catholic background. A graduate of the Bible College of East Africa (Nairobi) in 1978, he went on to obtain his Bachelor of Theology (1987), Master of Divinity (2004) and Master of Theology (2005) degrees from the Far Eastern Bible College (Singapore). Married to Susan Koech, they have one daughter, Martha.

## FAITH IS A PRECURSOR TO GLORY

Glory is the destiny of a Christian's faith. Regardless of where one starts, the ultimate end will be to attain to that eternal bliss that Christ has promised those who come to Him. When the Bible teachers who composed the catechism concluded that “the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever,” they were restating a biblical truth. Apart from everything else that is involved, the eye of a Christian must be focused on that end. A writer has identified four stages of a man to glory: Faith makes a Christian, Life proves a Christian, Trials confirm a Christian, Death crowns a Christian. This will constitute a skeleton for these three days' reading.

### 1. Faith makes a Christian

Faith is the prime mover that leads to the admission into the fold of Christ. Jesus said, “*Whosoever believeth,*” that is, whosoever has faith and this is what makes a Christian. He also declared that He came that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly. A person becomes a Christian when he has faith in Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour. Upon repentance and confession of sin, there is an assurance of forgiveness. The epistle to the Hebrews gives an understanding of faith and examples of faithful saints of the Old Testament. It is equally applicable to believers today. Their faith makes them what they are. God will attend to their needs on the basis of that relationship.

Many today misunderstand and hold the notion that faith means instant answers to prayers, but that is not true, for faith often involves waiting. There are situations that instant answers are given. These may be times when one's life may be in danger and one cries to the Lord for help, and He grants deliverance immediately. However, in ordinary cases, there may be a need to wait and, more often than not, the answer comes later. Faith carries a Christian through the time of waiting with the understanding that God's will is the ultimate answer and not our wishes. It is faith that makes a Christian.

**THOUGHT:** Waiting on the Lord is one of the hallmarks of a Christian's faith.

**PRAYER:** Lord, give me sufficient patience as I wait on Thee.

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## LIFE PROVES A CHRISTIAN

### 2. Life proves a Christian

This is putting faith into action. Abraham had one son and the Lord asked him to offer him for a sacrifice. Abraham did not hesitate in obedience, he did as he was told. We know that life has many trials and temptations and God's expectation is that we must remain faithful to Him at all times. The world today has a standard code of conduct for the general population which is liberal and based on human philosophy rather than the Word of God. This approach allows for the perversion of God's Law in the name of human rights, freedom of expression, academic freedom and other forms of freedom. The acceptance of these humanistic ideologies has had a great influence in determining public opinion; and Christians are sometimes carried away in this tide. It takes a determined effort on the part of a Christian to reject the spirit of the world and embrace the biblical guidelines in directing his conduct. Paul in Romans 12 is against conforming to the worldly standards. He counsels for transformation instead. How a Christian responds to the world proves his faith in the Lord, or a lack of it.

### 3. Trials confirm a Christian

This refers mainly to external persecutions that Christians sometimes have to endure. In the post-Reformation years, the Church of England for example was a state church and all subjects of the kingdom were obliged to become members of the church. Pastors were not allowed by law to run independent churches. However most of them chose to obey their conscience rather than the dictates of the state. They had to face long prison sentences for their non-conformist position. This was their time to confirm their faith in their Lord.

**THOUGHT:** There is a great reward in enduring trials.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always confirm my faith in Thee.

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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3

ROMANS 12:1-3

1 CORINTHIANS 15:54-57

“...O death, where is thy sting?  
O grave, where is thy victory?”

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## DEATH CROWNS A CHRISTIAN

### 4. Death crowns a Christian

Persecutions (even unto death) for Christians come in different forms and sometimes the Lord allows these to come our way to confirm the seriousness of our pledge to walk in His ways. This has been the life of the Church since the days of the Apostles.

The crowning of a Christian comes at his death. The Psalmist prays to the Lord to teach him to number his days, indicating the lifespan of man to be seventy to eighty years only. Moses' observation in the Psalm was true and is witnessed today. When a person has lived up to eighty years, the Lord may grant more years. However, those extra years are years of dependence. One has to rely on others in order to move around. The quality of life goes down. Death is the crowning of a Christian because it is not annihilation but a transition to a much better life.

Salvation is by the grace of God alone, but how a person responds to this gift of God becomes his crowning glory in eternity. It is also necessary to remember that all of us do not deserve God's favour, but God "*commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom 5:8). In so doing, He took away all our transgressions and we are justified as if we had not sinned. The hope of every Christian at his death is Jesus.

**THOUGHT:** Death is the gateway to eternal bliss.

**PRAYER:** Lord, keep me faithful to the end.

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## THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST (I)

The resurrection of Christ is an important landmark in the Christian faith because it gives the greatest hope to every believer. This is the expectation of everlasting life. The observation of Easter is a joy that sees life beyond death. The Lord Jesus Christ was the first to rise from death with the glorified body and now lives in heaven for ever. He declares, *“I am the resurrection, and the life...”* (John 11:25). In Mark 15 and 16, the Apostle chronicles the work of Christ for us in His death and resurrection. It is to be noted that Christ first had to die before He rose. The authentication of His death will determine the fact of His coming back to life. He was legally pronounced dead by the soldiers since they did not break His leg bones after they were satisfied that there was no more life in Him. Then the governor Pilate granted permission to Joseph of Arimathea to take the body for burial. The strict observance of Roman law by the secular rulers ensured that Jesus was really dead before burial, and is evidence enough to prove His death.

Another aspect of the death of Christ is that it was a fulfilment of prophecy. It was foretold as a definite event that also had a purpose. In Luke 24, when Jesus met two disciples on the Emmaus Road after His resurrection, He told them that the prophets told of His death, resurrection and ascension (Luke 24:25-26). In so doing, He was confirming that the whole Old Testament speaks of this supernatural event.

The death of Christ is a very specific prediction which needs no comment. It sums up the whole purpose of the passion of Christ which was fulfilled to the last letter. Sceptics may be convinced by the prophecy, as they may not be able to deny its authenticity, but the purpose of Jesus' suffering may mean nothing to them. However, God's Word is very clear. We have to believe in man's sinful condition and the fact that he cannot save himself. It was necessary for Jesus to go through that painful Roman penalty as an innocent person so as to pay for our sins.

**THOUGHT:** Christ died in the place of sinners.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I appreciate the value of the death of Christ.

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MONDAY, OCTOBER 5

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-20

JOHN 20:1-10

“...he must rise again from the dead.”

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## THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST (II)

The gospels' narrative tells us that Jesus was buried. This was also foretold by the prophets. Yes, He died and He was buried. He had to undergo the whole process which man experiences. It had to be definite and undisputed. This prepares us for the next phase in God's plan of salvation.

Jesus arose from the dead on the third day. Paul devoted the whole of 1 Corinthians 15 to the defence of this milestone in the life of Christ. In the gospels, Thomas, one of the Apostles who had initially refused to believe Jesus' resurrection, came to believe after Jesus told him to touch the scars in His body (John 20:27). This is yet another confirmation of the resurrection. The fact that Jesus could also eat food is another fact to show that He had a real human body. The benefits of the resurrection of Christ are applied by the grace of God; this begins with the acceptance of God's salvation plan through Christ. Since He rose from the dead, all who believe in Him are not only saved from sin, but also have the hope of eternal life because Christ has become the firstfruit of all who have died to come back to life.

There is a peril in the denial of Jesus' resurrection. There will be no solution to sin and eternal death lingers on. Thank God that that is not so, as our hope is in God's eternal promises. Paul says that if *“in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”* (1 Cor 15:19).

The resurrection of Jesus is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith and anyone who believes has the greatest comfort and hope. We need to be careful not to be deceived into denying this truth. As much as we are living in an environment of unbelief, the standard of Christ must be raised high.

**THOUGHT:** He died and rose for me. I must believe in Him and look forward to eternal life.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me look forward to that blessed future life.

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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

2 PETER 1:20-21

*“...no prophecy of the scripture  
is of any private interpretation.”*

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## A BIBLE COMMENTARY IS NOT THE BIBLE (I)

The Bible is the Word of God. It is given by the inspiration of God. The inspiration covers the original writings of the Bible authors. This excludes the division into chapters and verses that have been added for our easy reference and, in some cases, the titles of the books too. Scripture encourages the preaching of the Word. The priests and the prophets in the Old Testament era functioned as teachers of the Law and they caused the people to understand the words of Scripture. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ used the written Word as the basis for His teachings; the Apostles also followed the same pattern. The preaching of the Word or the explanation of its meaning is interpretation. It is sometimes needful to put these interpretations in writing for wider use by audiences at large. These writings came to be known as commentaries. The popular Jewish commentary in the days of Jesus was known as the Talmud. Since then, hundreds of commentaries have been written on the Bible. The use of these works by Christians requires great care.

The majority of commentaries have proven to be useful in the understanding of the Bible. It is, however, advisable for the Christians not to depend on these writings of men in seeking to understand the Scriptures. They are encouraged rather to do original work and only use commentaries to affirm their conclusions. The latest entry into the field of these interpreted references is the Africa Bible Commentary. The secular press has hailed it as a publishing breakthrough in Africa. According to the reports, the intention of the writers was to have a commentary that the Africans can identify with and also to uplift the standard of theological education in Africa. It may appeal to the African mind in terms of smooth communication as the language applied comes in local terms. However, this work contributes little to the explanation of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. It is written in English and a Kiswahili translation is available. Read it with discernment.

**THOUGHT:** The Bible interprets itself.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me study Thy Word with a discerning mind.

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

MATTHEW 15:1-14

*“Why do ye also transgress the  
commandment of God by your tradition?”*

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## A BIBLE COMMENTARY IS NOT THE BIBLE (II)

The association of the editor of the Africa Bible Commentary with certain Christian organizations reveals to us his theological position. These organisations come under the umbrella of the World Evangelical Fellowship. This international movement is no doubt the driving force behind African leaders and, more so, the writers of the Africa Bible Commentary. The groups that the editor has worked for are part of the Neo-Evangelical movement that takes a neutral position between liberalism and orthodoxy. They pledged to uphold the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith but, at the same time, work hand in hand with the liberals. These are those who deny the basic teachings of Christianity, including the possibility of miracles and even the virgin birth of Christ.

The Neo-Evangelical strategy has been one of infiltration, not biblical separation. However, more than fifty years on, history has shown that their approach led to a disastrous end: the liberal wing has won them over. In all probability, this is the position taken by the writers of the Africa Bible Commentary.

Fundamentalism stands for the entire accuracy of the Bible, without error to the last jot and tittle. We cannot fully trust the work of those involved in the writing of the Africa Bible Commentary. At least the editor said that it was not meant to replace the Bible. Nevertheless, the fact that it will be used by pastors in trying to understand the Bible will, in one way or another, water down the truth of Scripture. The idea of producing a commentary by African Christians was a good idea, but it must not flow with the current to undermine the essentials of the Christian faith. The same can be said of any work done by anyone anywhere in the world. This is so because serious issues are at hand, and all believers regardless of their background are called upon to defend the truth of the gospel at any cost.

**THOUGHT:** (Read 2 Timothy 3:16.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always trust Thy written Word, not man's words.

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8

NEHEMIAH 8:1-9

ACTS 22:3

“...taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers...”

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## EDUCATION IS A MAINSTAY OF THE FAITH (I)

Theological education is as old as the Bible itself. Moses, the prophets and the Apostles did not attend a formal school as we do today. Neither did they have the different disciplines that we have. However, their knowledge of theology was far beyond the highest degree offered by modern education. The continuation of their ministry was delegated to the priests, apostles and pastors of the New Testament era. Ezra as a priest was a teacher of theology. His life sets an example on personal preparation and the delivery of the message. A review of his life and ministry underscores the importance of theological education as a mainstay of the Christian faith.

His preparation as a priest and a scribe is seen in Ezra 7:6: *“This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.”* The description given of him here shows that he was trained for that role and had all the qualities necessary for the fulfilling of his calling. The nature of this office carries with it some requirements. In his case, his calling stems from his priestly line.

Ezra was trained well. Though he was in exile and did not have all the freedom to exercise his religious rights, he qualified well to attain to that distinction of being a ready scribe in the law of Moses. He won recognition in the Persian royalty so that when the king required his services on behalf of the Jews, Ezra was at hand. His readiness to render service to the Lord was exercised with great care so that he did not compromise his faith with the unbelieving Persian officials. He had all along prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord and to do it and to teach (Ezra 7:10), and this was evident to all, even to king Artaxerxes who commissioned him to go to Jerusalem.

**THOUGHT:** Zeal is required in the study of God’s Word.

**PRAYER:** Lord, give me the spirit of the Bereans.

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## EDUCATION IS A MAINSTAY OF THE FAITH (II)

In Nehemiah 8:1-9, the context of the public reading of the Book of the Law was after Nehemiah had completed the great task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. It was now time for rebuilding the people spiritually and Ezra was a handy helper when Nehemiah needed him. Besides his knowledge of the Law, Ezra had other skills.

His delivery of God’s message was directed at the right audience: men, women and all those who could understand (ie. the mature children). All were able to hear God’s Word and the text said that he read it distinctly to ensure that none of them missed what he said. The people also needed to understand the message, thus Ezra assembled the Levites (theologians) as interpreters. His scribal skills were fully utilized in the public reading of God’s precepts. He was conversant with the right approach and he read the book as an experienced public speaker. He apportioned the time so that the Levites had sufficient duration to do their part.

The training we have today is in the same succession. If the church of Christ is to live on, training of the highest level possible is ever needful. Many self-made preachers know nothing about theology, even though they are very professional in the art of raising funds. Their covetousness has attracted much criticism from many quarters; this in turn has neutralized the effectiveness of the gospel. When that happens, the church has failed to serve its purpose.

Theological training comes with God’s calling to serve the Lord as a teacher, pastor or evangelist; and it comes with great responsibility. Paul told of the purpose of that calling when he said, “*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*” (Eph 4:12).

**THOUGHT:** “...a workman that needeth not to be ashamed...” (2 Tim 2:15)

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I depend on the Holy Spirit in learning Thy Word.

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## WHEN FABLES REPLACE THE SCRIPTURE

Whenever any Christian festival takes place, the world is attracted by it. Unfortunately, in many cases, the publicity given does not promote the biblical teaching of that event or festival. Though we do not have an explicit command to keep some of these festivals, the significance of these occasions is not necessarily the time they are observed, but the original meaning of that biblical event and its doctrinal value.

Christmas takes the lead in these. It commemorates the birth of Christ; it lays emphasis on His humanity and the purpose of His suffering and death. However, the world identifies Christmas with Santa Claus and he takes center stage plus all the commercialism that comes with it.

Easter is another festival which is observed to highlight the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ. But every year whenever this season comes, the world comes up with fables which distract from the main purpose of Easter. Its interest is to promote sales and, at the same time, to create doubt in the hearts of those who hold to the Bible as the Word of God. These aims have succeeded to some extent, but things must be put right.

In the publishing world too, profits drive those concerned into publishing something to impress their audiences. Ecclesiastes 12:12 says, *“...of making many books there is no end...”* Thus, some years ago, we were greeted with “The Gospel of Judas.” Reporters interviewed a few clergymen and a university professor (i.e. people in a position to know the truth). But because of their liberal attitude towards the Scriptures, they could not take a stand for God’s truth. Sadly, in the church scene, the average pastor (let alone ordinary Christians) does not know how to defend the book they take to be the Word of God when it is attacked. The contents of the Gospel of Judas are a frontal attack on God’s Word. It must not go unanswered!

**THOUGHT:** Those who care for the defence of the faith must speak.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always stand for the defence of Thy Word.

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## A RESPONSE TO THE FALSE GOSPEL

The authenticity of the manuscript of "The Gospel of Judas" may be correct, and its dating to AD 300 would be accurate, and not AD 150 or earlier as has been suggested. The fact here is that it was written in Egypt in the Coptic language and this is attributed to the Gnostic sect which was popular at that time. This suggests a later date because all the other New Testament writings were written in Greek so that even early translations are not accepted as accurate. Besides, it took time for Christianity to take root in Egypt before they could write theological treatises. This later dating would mean that this book could not be admitted to the biblical canon because the rest of the Scriptures were completed by the first century.

The contents of this gospel raise many questions. It says that Judas was not an enemy of Christ; but when we read the gospel account of John, Judas did not only betray Christ; he was also a thief. This love of money eventually led him to betray Christ for financial gain and not for any other interest.

The article that reported the news of the publication of "The Gospel of Judas" said that while it is true such a gospel once existed, Irenaeus (the bishop of Lyons in the second century) wrote against the sect that came up with that pseudo-gospel. The biblical gospels also do not simply record Judas' betrayal of Jesus but also reveal the divine view of his activities. A "woe" to Judas puts to rest any doubts as to how he should be viewed. This gospel, as one commentator puts it, is simply a heretical forgery. Apart from this gospel there are others like it: the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, the Gospel of Thomas, etc. Sound doctrine is derived from the authentic Scriptures which are universally accepted in the Christian Church. Pseudo gospels can never be the Word of God. The primary responsibility of believers is to know what they believe with clear-cut definition. Do you? Will you speak up and stand for the pure Word of God?

**THOUGHT:** The inspired Word of God has only sixty-six books.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to know Thy pure Word well.

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MONDAY, OCTOBER 12

GENESIS 3:15

GALATIANS 4:4

“...God sent forth his Son,  
made of a woman...”

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### THE PROTO-EVANGEL

The first revelation of the gospel (i.e. “proto-evangel”) was proclaimed immediately after the fall of man. That proclamation opened the first door in publishing the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. God declared the fact of salvation by grace through the atoning work of Christ. The birth of Christ was in God’s eternal plan of redemption. He foretold and fulfilled everything pertaining to the life and work of Christ. His second coming is not fulfilled yet, but the realization of the prophecy of that return will also come very soon.

The birth of Christ took place at a time when the house of Israel had great expectation of it. The angel was sent to announce to Mary that she was going to conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit. She would bear a son and call His name Jesus. This meant that He would be the Saviour. There is a further description given to Jesus: “*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David*” (Luke 1:32).

The virgin birth of Christ was explicitly foretold in Isaiah 7:14. It was told seven hundred years before it happened. The accurate prediction and the supernatural character of the virgin birth are factors that a liberal mind cannot accept. Nevertheless, the whole Bible is God’s revelation of Himself to man. In His providence, God has foreordained all things and they will all come to pass. This will be by ordinary providence or extra-ordinary providence.

Christ fulfilled His mission at the end of His earthly life when He offered Himself as a sacrifice to take away the sins of mankind. When it was first proclaimed, Adam and Eve could not understand the depth of its meaning, but God offered it as a lifeline for all sinners. Without the truth of the “proto-evangel,” all humanity would be left in a state of sin and misery, without any hope of eternal life.

**THOUGHT:** (Read 1 Timothy 1:15.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, I thank Thee for saving my soul.

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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13

GENESIS 49:8-12

MATTHEW 2:1-5

*“...out of thee shall come a Governor,  
that shall rule my people Israel.”*

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## CHRIST CAME FROM THE HOUSE OF JUDAH

The Incarnation of Christ refers to Christ's taking on the human body. He had to become man in order to fulfil His mission. God ordained that He was to be born in the house of Jacob. This was in fulfilment of an earlier promise to Abraham, that in him all nations of the earth would be blessed. Jacob was the grandson of Abraham and the promise had to be fulfilled through his family. Jacob had twelve sons, and in Genesis 49:10, he told of a lawgiver coming from the house of Judah. In the genealogy of Jesus, listed in the gospel of Luke, Judah was listed as one of the ancestors of Jesus (Luke 3:33). Jacob's prophecy told of Christ as King.

The main office that is stressed in Jesus being a descendent of Judah in relation to His first coming is that of a king. When Pilate asked Jesus during His trial if He was the King of the Jews, He replied that to that end He was born. He stressed that His kingdom was not of this world. That Jesus was from the house of Judah stresses the kingly office of Christ.

The prophet Micah foretold that Christ would be born in Bethlehem the city of David (Mic 5:2). This again identified Him with David as King. However, Christ was superior to David. The birth of Christ in Bethlehem was fulfilled by the providence of God, when the angel announced His birth. In Matthew's narrative, a star guided the wise men from the east to the place where Christ was born. Daniel also told of the time of His birth in Daniel 9:25. When God's time came, He sent an angel to announce the birth. It is explicitly clear from the Scriptures that God is able to do all these things in His eternal plan for the world. All things pertaining to His providence do not come as a surprise. The truthfulness of God's declaration and the accurate fulfilment to the smallest detail speak of the omniscience and omnipotence of God. The promise concerning your salvation will also come true. Come to Christ now, and you will be saved!

**THOUGHT:** Rejoice because your Lord is King!

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always remain loyal to Thee.

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14

**PHILIPPIANS 3:7-14**

**MATTHEW 1:21-23**

*“...and thou shalt call his name JESUS:  
for he shall save his people from their sins.”*

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## THE WORK OF CHRIST IN A SINNER

Salvation is the greatest joy to all who find it. This is represented in Paul's testimony in today's reading. Paul repented of his sins (which were driven mainly by pride) and he charted a new path of righteousness yet imperfect.

He began with a declaration that the things that were gain to him, he counted but loss for the sake of Christ. Circumcision was one of the things he was proud to be identified with. He was a pure Jew from the house of Benjamin; he called himself a Hebrew of Hebrews. He also belonged to the sect of the Pharisees which stressed the strict obedience to the Law. He prided himself in persecuting the church for he regarded Christians as transgressors of the Law. If righteousness came by the Law, he was blameless. However, his knowledge of salvation which is in Christ rendered all these things as nothing! He then had a new foresight as a repentant sinner. Every sinner cherishes the truth expressed in John 3:16.

The expression of Paul here describing his all as dung is a fitting description. He said that he forsook his own righteousness (which is according to the Law), and he pursued the righteousness of God by faith in Christ. Paul was now not only willing to be identified with this new faith, but he also became the foremost preacher of the faith. The knowledge of Christ and the merits of His suffering were now the crown of Paul's life. He stressed that resurrection is a fact and that Christ rose from the dead even though some denied this fact. And because Christ rose from the dead, those who die in Christ will also rise again. He said that if only in this life we have hope in Christ, then we are of all men most miserable. To hope in Christ is to hope beyond earthly life.

**THOUGHT:** What have I given up for the sake of Christ?

**PRAYER:** Lord, in following Thee, may I be willing to give up all.

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15

**PHILIPPIANS 3:7-14**

PHILIPPIANS 3:12

*“...I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.”*

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## **PRESSING TOWARDS THE MARK OF THE HIGH CALLING**

We must understand the future in the present. Recognizing the imperfection of the present state led Paul to say, *“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus”* (Phil 3:12). Aiming higher is the way forward. In many occasions, he told his hearers to be his followers because he was a follower of Christ. His testimony here is an example. Satisfaction with the present is not sufficient; it requires striving all the way to the end. Paul had to forget the things that were behind and reach forth to the things which were before.

The Apostle himself was a foremost persecutor of the church before the Lord called him. Assured of his forgiveness, he did not remain with the guilt of sin for ever. He had to forget that past and move forward. The forgiveness of God is illustrated in the story of the prodigal son. Before the son came back to his father, he had formulated a short speech that he was going to make before his father. But when he arrived, his father had already forgiven him and he did not even have time to say what he had intended to say. His past had been forgotten! What was important was the way ahead of him.

Paul said that he was pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ. This is a reference to the main reward of the gospel. One cannot rest until one attains to glorification, which comes after the death and resurrection of the body.

Paul’s testimony is a pattern for every sinner. Satisfaction does not come in the present, but after a lifetime of struggle. What is your testimony as a sinner saved by grace?

**THOUGHT:** Forgiveness of sin is the best gift of God.

**PRAYER:** Lord, I thank Thee for Thy forgiveness. May I always strive for that prize of the high calling of Jesus, my Lord and Saviour.

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16

**1 PETER 2:6-10**

**MATTHEW 16:16-20**

*"...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

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## CHRIST, THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

The Lord Jesus Christ is the mainstay of the Church. His life and His work represent everything that the Church stands to gain. He is called the chief cornerstone. The privilege of believers in Christ is their calling from darkness into His marvellous light.

He is the chief cornerstone laid in Zion. Without Christ the Saviour, the phrase would have no meaning. Thus, He is called the Elect of God. He is a stone rejected by the builders. They saw Him as a stumbling block. Such as reject Christ are liars and are endued with the spirit of the devil. The devil was the originator of separation of man from God; he deceived Eve and facilitated the entrance of sin into the human race.

The three-year ministry of Christ laid the foundation for the existence of His Church here on earth. There is a remnant who are true and faithful to the gospel truths.

The place of believers is that of a chosen generation. This choice was manifested in the call of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. However, God's choosing is shown as part of His eternal plan (Eph 1:4). This is the privilege that believers have in Christ.

They are also called a royal priesthood. The priesthood of Christ is shown in His identification with those He came to save. In His Incarnation, He fulfilled it as the Apostle asserts: *"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb 4:14-16).

**THOUGHT:** There will always be a chosen generation.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always lift high the standard of the gospel.

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## **BELIEVERS ARE A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD**

Jesus is the Son of God and He became man to merit salvation for those who believe. Believers can go to Him directly without the mediation of a human priest. Thus, they are indeed a royal priesthood. They are also referred to as a peculiar people, i.e. they have a special place before the Lord. When Moses delivered his last speech (Deut 7:6-8) prior to his death, he stated the sum of that special place. Peter spoke of the favour of God on all who acknowledged Christ.

Believers are to show forth the praises of Him, ie. Christ. These praises are manifold. One reason to praise God is for Christ's outstanding deed of calling believers out of darkness into His marvellous light. This happens when the sinner's spiritual eyes are open to the light of Christ, and he believes and accepts the truth of Christ and becomes born again.

Every Christian can give a testimony to show there is a distinct boundary between the world of sin and salvation that comes through Christ. Many understand the contrast between light and darkness in everyday life. The wickedness of the human heart is always evident as the Lord Jesus said that light came into the world and the people loved darkness more than light.

The sinner's past condition actually magnifies the privileges in Christ. Christ's assertion is that as many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God. There can be no better privilege. As believers in Christ today, there is a need to build our faith in His love and be a living testimony for Him. He saved us and we are to speak for Him and give Him all the glory!

**THOUGHT:** Live in the light of Christ, and darkness will flee.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may Thy light always shine through me.

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## EXPECTATIONS OF THE CHURCH OF GOD (I)

The message of today's text was delivered to the elders of the church at Ephesus. Paul encouraged them to carry out their God-given duties. The overseeing of the Church of God lies on the faithful preaching and working together of all. In anticipation of danger, the flock is to remain faithful, and walk with their shepherd. The text outlines the steps expected of the Church of God.

Paul said that he was pure of the blood of all men in that he had not shunned to declare unto them the whole counsel of God. His theology shaped the Christian faith in a big way.

Since the days of Constantine, the Roman Emperor who granted freedom to believers in Christ, nominal Christianity has existed within the true faith. This is the state of some members of the visible Church who profess faith in Christ and go through all external formalities to show that they are believers. However, their hearts are far away from Christ. The Apostle outlined in his address that it was needful for the church leaders to make the Word of God known to the flock, just as he had instructed them during the three years that he served in Ephesus. The elders were exhorted to teach the Word of God. The shepherds must be faithful and do their duty to the fullest, for God made them servants and overseers. This was a heavenly appointment showing God's high regard for the Church.

Secondly, the church was purchased by the blood of Christ; no one else could pay that price. Jesus preached the same message that Paul was preaching to the elders. When the flock is neglected, they become vulnerable to the wolves. Teachers of false doctrines will mislead God's people so that God's people may not follow the way of the truth. Satan is behind all the rejection of God. God, however, will not allow His children to be misled and desires that the Church be fed with the Word of truth.

**THOUGHT:** False teaching is poison to the soul.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I feed on Thy Word only.

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## EXPECTATIONS OF THE CHURCH OF GOD (II)

Paul spoke of enemies within who were perverse (Acts 20:30). These are people who have different motives for professing the faith. In his ministry, Paul had witnessed the presence of such people and he could predict that they would also come to Ephesus.

The overseers of the church were then to watch and follow the example of Paul. They were to constantly warn the flock and maintain unity of doctrine. Biblical separation is the positive reaction to such false teachers. Paul reminded these elders that he did not cease to warn them day and night with tears. The church needs to keep out those enemies that are within. There has to be a faithful exercise of discipline to maintain the purity of the church.

God will fulfil His promises in His Church. Paul did what was humanly possible to do, both in speech and action. However, he knew that he could not accomplish anything without power from above. Thus, he committed the Church to the One who is able to perfect her. In the service of the Lord, there is His will and there is also human responsibility. Thus, Paul wound up his message with a personal note. He declared that he had not coveted any man's money but had laboured with his hands to meet his needs and those of his companions. Though in other places he had received gifts from the Church, he did not want the lack of support to stand in his way in the noble ministry of Christ. He wanted to be an example. He quoted Christ who said that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Every church is built upon the foundation of Christ, the Apostles and the prophets (Eph 2:19-20). This new church in Ephesus and her members are asked to stand firm for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. The shepherd is to take heed and feed the flock of God faithfully. Are you a church leader? How are you feeding the flock?

**THOUGHT:** Prayer for church leaders is very needful.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help my church leaders to fulfil their duties.

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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20

LUKE 23:46-24:48

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-15

*"...he rose again the third day  
according to the scriptures."*

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## RESURRECTION IS A KEY DOCTRINE (I)

The narrative of the resurrection of Christ is very clear from the text. All the four gospels recorded the same story. This is a very significant event that is necessary in relation to the redemption of man. This landmark event forms a key doctrine in Christian faith.

Christ did indeed die: The centurion who was part of the crucifying band bore witness to this fact. He commented positively on Christ saying that He was a righteous man. This was shortly after he witnessed Him breathe His last. The fact that Jesus was in the hands of Roman soldiers must mean that they would ensure that He truly died. The women who followed Him from Galilee stood afar off to see what was happening to Him. All the witnesses and official confirmation was sufficient evidence that He died. In the events that followed, it was necessary that His death was a fact.

Jesus rose again on the first day of the week: The day that followed His burial was the Sabbath day and thus no work was permitted on that day. Jesus remained in the tomb that whole day. The Roman guards kept vigil at the tomb as had been requested by the chief priests. The rigidity of the Roman order did not allow any mistake. Pilate knew this when he gave permission to the chief priests to secure the tomb. However, all human laws become null and void when God intervenes.

When the women came to the tomb, they found that the stone was already rolled away and the guards were missing. When they entered in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. Although these women and all the Apostles were faithful disciples of Christ, the possibility of the resurrection of Christ had not registered in their mind. They received the angel's words of Jesus' resurrection, but were still puzzled. Thus far, this is sufficient evidence of Jesus' death and resurrection.

**THOUGHT:** The resurrection of Christ is an undisputed fact.

**PRAYER:** Lord, because Thou liveth, I shall live too.

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## RESURRECTION IS A KEY DOCTRINE (II)

The reaction of the Apostles: The report of the resurrection to the Apostles seemed as idle talk and they did not believe it. This revealed that they were very sure of Jesus' death. Regardless of much evidence, their reaction showed that they were still not convinced of Jesus' resurrection. However, the unfolding events put their doubts to rest.

Christ Himself appeared to the disciples: The first appearance was to Mary Magdalene outside the tomb. Initially she thought that He was a gardener and asked Him if He knew where they had put the body of Jesus. Jesus addressed her by name and she recognized Him. After a brief talk, she went and told His disciples that she had seen the Lord. The Jewish religious leaders also knew it was true that Jesus had risen from the dead, but they conspired with the soldiers to cover it up.

The second witness of the resurrection was that of two disciples on the road to Emmaus, a short distance from Jerusalem. Jesus joined them on the way. They failed to recognize Him but eventually they did. That same evening, He appeared to the eleven when they were gathered in a room. He made the same appearance eight days later and also one morning by the Sea of Galilee. He was with them on the Mount of Olives when He was taken up to heaven. There were multiple witnesses that He died and rose again. The Apostles also taught the meaning of His resurrection. This is Paul's conclusion on the resurrection of Christ: *“And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead”* (1 Cor 15:17-21).

**THOUGHT:** There is no hope without the resurrection of Christ.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I be numbered among the resurrected when the time comes.

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22

**EZRA 1**

NEHEMIAH 2:20

“...we his servants will arise and build...”

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## BUILDING GOD’S HOUSE

Churches are usually identified by their magnificent buildings. Much work was put into the medieval cathedrals such that the complex architecture attracted attention more than the words preached. Without believers, a building is not a church. The real church is the group of believers who have been called to salvation and to the service of God. The main subject of today’s text is the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Jews who were exiled to Babylon were going back to build God’s house in their home city. God had given a command that the house should be built and He spoke to a heathen king. In turn, the king issued a decree saying, “*Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah*” (Ezra 1:2). The decree did not come as a surprise to those who knew the Lord. Many of them were aware of the Lord’s promise.

The king also involved those who were not able to go but could donate money. Those who were ready organised themselves. The leaders were appointed. The house of the Lord that they were going to build was not just a monument; it was a house of worship. The restoration of the house came also with the restoration of worship. The vessels that had been taken were returned.

Building a church today involves raising a large sum of money. Many pastors are tempted to involve the public (i.e. unbelievers). However, God’s work must be done in God’s way. Ezra was conversant with biblical theology and he knew that the assignment before him was very great, yet he did not take any shortcut. Every aspect of church life must involve separation from unbelievers. The duty of building God’s house today belongs to God’s people, not unbelievers. Exercise separation from unbelievers even in church building projects.

**THOUGHT:** (Read 2 Corinthians 6:16.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I do Thy work Thy way.

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23

EPHESIANS 4:11-15

ACTS 6:1-10

*“And Stephen, full of faith  
and power, did great wonders and  
miracles among the people.”*

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## THE MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH (I)

There are two categories of ministers of the church: those who deal with spiritual matters and those who serve tables or physical matters. They are commonly known as elders and deacons. Two other titles are also used for the office of the elder: bishop and pastor. The titles are descriptive of the nature of their work. The term “elder” stresses authority and leadership in teaching and ruling, while “bishop” emphasizes the oversight of the local church. “Shepherd” describes the close oversight and leadership. “Deacons” are support staff and their duty is described at the institution of the office in Acts 6. They can also be spiritual leaders, as Stephen demonstrated.

The ministers of the church are assigned their various duties according to Scriptures (Eph 4:11-13). The offices of the “apostles” and “prophets” have ceased to exist when they completed the writing of the Bible which stands out as God’s permanent revelation. The work of an “evangelist” is still necessary and the “pastor” also occupies that office. All the assigned officers will work towards the assigned goal.

“Pastor” is another name for a shepherd; it was the main occupation in biblical days and was seen as an important employment. The work of the church minister is very much similar to that of a shepherd. While shepherds are appointed to that noble office with God’s direction, there may be hirelings pretending to be shepherds. A true pastor must care for his sheep as a shepherd, not as a hireling.

When Paul wrote to Titus, he instructed him to appoint elders in every city. He gave him the guidelines on how to select the elders, and spelt out the qualifications. An elder must be mature and have the spiritual qualifications to be counted worthy to minister to the body of Christ.

**THOUGHT:** Biblical appointment shuts out hirelings.

**PRAYER:** Lord, please call faithful shepherds to oversee Thy flock.

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## THE MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH (II)

Peter was one of the Apostles of Christ and he became the leader of the Apostles. In his epistle, he exhorted the elders to feed the flock of God which is among them and take oversight. He also called himself an elder (1 Peter 5:1-4). When the chief Shepherd shall be revealed, elders shall receive the crown of glory. The duties of elders are manifold, but the chief is the ministry of word and prayer (Acts 6:4). Honour is bestowed on the elders by ordination. This sets them apart for the holy service, through prayer and fasting (Acts 14:23). As their designation implies, it is required that they be accorded due honour (1 Tim 5:17).

The title of "bishop" as used by the Church of Rome, the Anglican Church and others suggests a very high office in the church. However, the New Testament uses the Greek word "*episkopos*" which means an overseer. It is used in Acts 20:17-28 to refer to the elders of the church in Ephesus. This will also refer to the pastor of a local church. This office is seen as inferior in the above-mentioned church systems. However, this is the highest office in the church because such a pastor ministers directly to the flock. He takes greater responsibility than hierarchical clergy who are just ceremonial leaders out of touch with the flock.

Peter referred to Jesus as Bishop of the souls of believers, stressing His oversight as a Good Shepherd. The sheep going astray will turn to Him. The bishop oversees the church and teaches. Paul said that church officers are appointed for the perfecting of the saints and for the work of the ministry. They must fulfil their responsibility as per the duties of their calling. They must be faithful and true shepherds. The flock is also responsible for the needs of the pastor as the scripture says that the labourer is worthy of his wages (Matt 10:10; 1 Tim 5:18; 1 Cor 9:14). All these are for the sake of eternal glory given in Christ. Let us do all things as unto the Lord.

**THOUGHT:** A true shepherd will always care for the flock.

**PRAYER:** Lord, raise faithful shepherds to feed Thy flock.

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## THE FORERUNNER OF CHRIST (I)

John the Baptist served a very important office in the ministry of Christ. A special prophecy was given concerning his birth and ministry. Specific predictions concerning his birth were given to his father by an angel. All the four gospels tell of his ministry and he became the forerunner of Christ.

The narratives give the details of John's family tree. As a priest, his father Zacharias obviously came from the tribe of Levi. He was appointed to that office and was married to Elisabeth. She also belonged to the house of Aaron. Her husband carried out his duties faithfully as a priest, offering incense and praying in the temple. They were both blameless.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias by the side of the altar. It was an unusual sight, and he was afraid. The angel told him that his prayers had been heard. His wife Elisabeth would bear a son and shall call his name John. The mother learnt of the angel's message and she was prepared for the events that would follow. The same angel also announced the birth of Christ in Luke 1:26-38. He stood in the presence of God as mentioned in Luke 1:19. Zacharias had no doubt that he was a messenger from heaven. However, he was still not convinced that it was possible for them to have a child. God knew better because nothing was impossible with Him. The priest had to be convinced of that truth and so he was struck dumb until the birth of the child.

**THOUGHT:** God is the Creator and He is able to do anything.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me never doubt Thy promises.

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MONDAY, OCTOBER 26

MARK 1:2-10

JOHN 1:6-23

*"The same came for a witness,  
to bear witness of the Light..."*

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## THE FORERUNNER OF CHRIST (II)

The character and ministry of John was foretold. The greatness attributed to him meant that he was going to be a special child. The father was amazed at the words of the angel. Luke said that the child grew and waxed strong in the spirit and was in the deserts till the day of his showing to Israel. The greatness of John is derived from that of Christ. When he began his ministry, the people recognized him as someone who was extraordinary, but they could not tell who he was. Their only conclusive fact was that he was a prophet.

Matthew cited the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3, which was fulfilled by John. Mark cited Malachi 3:1 and identified John as the messenger mentioned there. Nobody can do anything without God's appointment. John introduced Christ the Saviour to the world. When he began to preach, he spoke with great power so that the people did not doubt that his message came from heaven. He spoke with singular authority, preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins. He also baptized those who came to him and thus got his name, the Baptist. Jesus spoke of him as the greatest of all that were born of women. He was also privileged to baptize Jesus.

John had a tragic end (humanly speaking), which came to him by the providence of God. He became a victim of highly charged emotions at a birthday party. Herod's wife took advantage to take revenge on him. God allowed this to happen to him for a reason. As a forerunner, he was also a preacher of righteousness.

**THOUGHT:** (Read 2 Timothy 3:12.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, give me grace to withstand persecution and to testify for Thee.

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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27

JOHN 8:30-36

2 TIMOTHY 3:15-17

*"All scripture...is profitable..."*

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## SCRIPTURE IS THE SOURCE OF KNOWING THE TRUTH

The Apostle Paul says that Scripture is profitable for instruction. Children learn about God in simple questions and answers in the catechism. They accept everything as truth by faith. As they grow up, they will begin to reason and confirm the truths they have learned from the Scriptures. God is the source of all truth and He has revealed Himself to man in His creations. His written word is His full revelation to man.

New believers are also instructed in the basics of the Christian faith through simple portions of the Scriptures. There is no better instructor for a believer than the Word of God. I grew up as a child in the Roman Catholic Church. We were taught true and false doctrines through their catechism. The Bible was never used, for at that time, it was still forbidden for lay people to read it. When we were allowed to read the Bible, I was led to salvation by knowing the truth, without the assistance of any evangelist.

The Scripture also establishes righteousness and true freedom. This will not be based on the ethics advocated by humanistic civil rights groups, but on the perfect Law of God. They shall know the truth and the truth shall make them free. God calls us to come to Him for salvation (Isa 45:22; Matt 11:28-30).

God uses His Word to prepare His children to do good works. The story of the good Samaritan illustrates well the teaching of loving one's neighbour (Luke 10:30-37). Eternal well life is the ultimate gracious reward of our faith. When the Day of Judgment comes, it will be a day of reward for those who have believed in Him.

**THOUGHT:** There is a world of difference between those who trust the Word of God and those who do not believe it at all.

**PRAYER:** Lord, confirm the truth of Thy Word in my heart every day.

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## THE POSITIVE SIDE OF SEPARATION (I)

The talk of separation always carries a negative connotation. In Christian fellowship, it means contention, hatred and magnifying of party spirit. In marriage, it means that the husband and wife fall apart and the home becomes unbearable. In a word, separation is a breakup of unity that gives strength to any institution.

On the other hand, there is a positive side of separation which is clear from the Scriptures. One must separate from darkness to be in the light, or must separate from sin to become righteous. Historically, Israel had to separate and depart from Egypt to inherit the Promised Land. In other words, it is logical to separate from that which is evil and be enjoined to that which is good. This is an instance where the usage of the word has an affirmative effect and this ought to be the order of things if a Christian is to live worthy of the testimony of Jesus Christ.

To be born again means a transformation of the soul and adoption of a new manner of life; this involves leaving an old order and seeking to follow a new direction in Christ. This does not come without separation. There must be a clear line that defines the boundary of a child of God and one who is still entangled with the world.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 gives express commands, and the direction of its obedience is shown in pictures of everyday life. The rhetorical questions posed are meant to be affirmative statements as each question expects the answer “no”. All these affirmations are meant to demonstrate the meaning of an unequal yoke in this context. Without separation, a Christian forfeits his blessings and the unbeliever is driven further away from the truth, thus reducing losing any hope of ever turning to Christ.

**THOUGHT:** Association with unbelievers in spiritual matters means spiritual compromise.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me not follow a multitude to do evil.

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-18

2 CORINTHIANS 7:1

“...perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

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## THE POSITIVE SIDE OF SEPARATION (II)

The holiness of God is brought into prominence in today’s reading as the relationship between the Lord and the believers is stated. As He is holy, those who call upon His name must also follow in the same step. The clear command given here states thus: “*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate.*” As shown earlier, the word separate is positively used to distinguish the children of light and those of darkness. And the only sure safety against any mix-up is to come out of darkness.

The Lord promised to stand by those who take heed to His call and act rightly. The subject of separation runs through every book of the Bible. In Genesis, Abraham was called to come out of his father’s house and go to a land that the Lord would show him. Without that detachment, he would not have become the leader that he was, but by simple obedience he became a great leader. Separation for the right cause comes with great and unexpected results. All the prophets of the Old Testament were also uncompromising when it came to choosing between the true God and idols. They always stood for the Lord. Even at the risk of their own lives, they did not surrender.

The leaders of the returnees from Babylon (Zerubbabel and Jeshua) demonstrated the need to be separate when they refused the offer of help from their adversaries to build the temple with them. Their response naturally manifested separation (Ezra 4:1-3). Jesus spoke of false prophets as wolves in sheep’s clothing and the Apostles also were separatists in word and deed.

If any Christian reading this message is compromising his faith by being unequally yoked with unbelievers, it is now time to come out!

**THOUGHT:** In every spiritual effort, a Christian must seek the glory of the Lord.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me always take a stand for Thy glory.

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30

REVELATION 18:4

MATTHEW 7:15

*“...false prophets...in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”*

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## THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

The Protestant Reformation is a movement that came about after Martin Luther and others successfully challenged the Roman Catholic system and set out to reform the Church. They protested against the Roman Church and thus the followers came to be known as Protestants. Luther started by writing ninety-five proposals and nailed them on the church door for academic debate. This triggered a chain of events that did not stop until there was a complete separation.

Those proposals (commonly known as the Ninety-Five Theses) changed not only the history of the Church but also the history of the world. He nailed them on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1517. This day has been marked ever since as Reformation Day. In the year 2017, it will be its 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary. As much as Roman Catholicism has not changed, the Reformation continues. The celebration of that anniversary will send a strong message in propagating the truths of the Reformation. Luther acted out of conviction from the Scriptures.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation was a spiritual revival that also took place in other nations besides Germany where Luther came from. In Europe where Christianity had taken root for centuries, Rome had dominated all Christian activities and now she was facing a challenge. Switzerland, England and Scotland were other lands that stood against Rome. The false doctrines that had been added by the Roman Church had given the church a false face. It was similar to the idolatry of Israel in Old Testament time. Luther and other reformers acted upon the truth of the Scripture. They rejected the way of salvation as taught by Rome. Christ says that those who believe (i.e. have faith) in Him have eternal life.

**THOUGHT:** All believers have a duty to uphold the ideals of the Protestant Reformation.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may we continue to remember the Reformation and take its stand today.

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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31

ROMANS 3:23-31

ACTS 4:12

*“...there is none other name  
under heaven given among men,  
whereby we must be saved.”*

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## THE REFORMATION BANNER STILL FLIES

The Papacy has not changed her doctrinal position since the Reformation. The Roman Church has only changed her strategy of fighting against the Protestants from that of confrontation to that of diplomacy and infiltration. Since the Vatican Council II (which ended in 1965), the protestant churches are no longer called heretics but are regarded as “separated brethren.” While the Curia (the inner council of the Pope) is mapping out the success of this approach, the Protestant camp has been greatly weakened by liberal theology and, more recently, by the Charismatic Movement. The fruit of this weakness has been manifested in the ecumenical World Council of Churches. In the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this body wielded a strong influence in the church scene. The Charismatic Movement is bringing the separated churches closer to Rome.

The main doctrines that Luther and the reformers stood for were those that had been neglected or denied by the Church of Rome. The reformers laid emphasis on salvation by grace alone, while Rome taught salvation by grace plus works. Most of Luther’s objections in the Theses were against the use of indulgences as merits of salvation. The Bible however teaches that salvation can only be obtained by grace through faith alone. The other false doctrine that the Church of Rome added is the watering down of the authority of Scriptures. Thus, Luther’s other slogan was “Scripture Alone.” Rome says it is Scripture plus tradition. Luther says it is salvation through Christ alone, but Rome adds Mary and the saints as co-redeemers.

Rome has succeeded in wooing the Protestants and has the largest following in Christendom today. The reason for her success is deception. Protestants who are still protesting are more needful today to keep the Reformation banner flying. Are you still protesting? Or have you fallen?

**THOUGHT:** The main doctrines upheld by the Reformation are eternal truths.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may we be bold soldiers of the cross.

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## THE ELEMENTS OF THE GOSPEL (I)

Though the Epistle to Titus comes after the Second Epistle to Timothy, it was written earlier. They are put together with the First Epistle to Timothy because of their subject matter. They are all known as Paul's Pastoral Epistles. The Apostle Paul spoke to Titus and Timothy with authority and showed a pattern for the church. Titus was then the Bishop of Crete, and Paul evidently had been there. He had delegated to this young disciple the responsibility of pastoring the church at Crete. Paul had some solid counsel in uplifting the ministry of the gospel. In the introduction to this letter, Paul cited three elements of the gospel.

First, he cited the faith of God's elect. This referred to the body of doctrines that those who have believed in Christ were to embrace. This served to distinguish the position of Christians from other religions. When Paul fought for the religion of his fathers, he had not been converted. But when it pleased God to save him, he did not hesitate to declare the truth of the gospel. In so saying, he meant to lay emphasis on the fact that the first essential element of faith is the teaching that makes one a Christian. Every believer must be well taught in the basic beliefs of the faith. He should be able to distinguish between true and false doctrines. The background in which Paul wrote to Titus was the prevalence of Judaism and also Judaistic Christians who insisted on circumcision before one could be accepted into the church. There were many other religious ideas as well that were going on then. It was necessary to spell out exactly what the true teachings of the Christian faith were. This was what Paul called the faith of God's elect.

Every church needs to have a statement of faith which outlines her doctrinal position. All new believers are to be taught and persuaded of these teachings before they can be admitted into church membership. As a servant of Jesus Christ, Paul taught nothing outside the standard revelation of the faith.

**THOUGHT:** Biblical doctrine is the foundation of the church.

**PRAYER:** Lord, increase my knowledge of Thy Word.

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## THE ELEMENTS OF THE GOSPEL (II)

The second element that Paul mentioned is the truth which is after godliness. This came to Paul’s mind because telling a lie in Crete was almost an accepted practice. It was counted as one of their “values.” The Apostle indicated this in verse 12 when he said, *“One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars...”* This trend was so common that the phrase “to act the Cretian” became an idiom meaning “to play a liar.” The emphasis on the truth was meant to counter that habit. When a particular vice is a matter of public domain, there is always a tendency that the righteous are also carried away because the element of shame is removed.

The Lord’s commandment is: *“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour”* (Exod 20:16). Acknowledging the truth in all things is a manifestation of godliness. The sinful habit of lying was not limited to the Greeks of ancient times, it is an inherent habit in all the unregenerate. The evangelistic message must include the need to do away with this sin.

The Gospel is the truth of God. Those who acknowledge and believe and accept this truth will be saved, and go on to live a life of godliness. The Gospel will transform the lives of believers.

The third and last element mentioned is the hope of eternal life. The preaching of this hope was committed to Paul. The three Persons of the Godhead (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit) are involved in fulfilling this hope. The children of God can always be happy on earth because of this hope. Christ is right now praying for them and ministering to them.

The acknowledgement of your position in Christ will be a first step towards seeking positive answers. You ought to take the initiative right away to put things right and trust the Lord to grant you the ability to do so. Meditate upon the Scriptures and let them be of assistance.

**THOUGHT:** What are the qualifications of a child of God?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always be assured of an abundant life.

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## THE OFFICE AND QUALITIES OF AN ELDER (I)

The Apostle then addressed Titus. The opening remarks spelt out his relationship with his younger co-worker; and Paul wished him well. He then turned to give instructions on the main duty he had assigned Titus to undertake in Crete. He needed to set in order the things that were needful in the church. The key to this is the appointment of elders, and thus he listed the needed qualities of an elder. That mandate to set things in order and to ordain elders in the church was not limited to the work of Titus in Crete only. It is applicable to every church today. A number of factors are clear in the Apostle’s directives.

First, there is a need for the office of a church elder. Ordaining elders is the commencement of orderliness in the church as the congregation would have a leadership to set things right. The Apostles were the leaders of the early church, and they appointed elders to help oversee and govern the church. The elders were to be set apart by ordination. The important part is the commitment of the person who makes a public pledge to fulfil the duties of his office. Such a person must accept the call of the Lord to serve in this sacred vocation.

Second, as the Apostle asserted, he must have spiritual and ethical qualities. The sum of the qualities is that he must exercise self-control. The expression “*blameless*” (v 7) means that he cannot be accused of any wrongdoing. Drunkenness and fighting are also listed as some of the things that disqualify one from holding the office. The instructions of the Apostle should then serve as a guide in accepting or rejecting such aspirants.

The expression “*not given to filthy lucre*” means a church officer must be a person who can be trusted with money; all his financial dealings must be transparent.

**THOUGHT:** “*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*” (1 Tim 6:6)

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I not yield to the root of all evil.

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**THE OFFICE AND QUALITIES OF AN ELDER (II)**

The next set of qualities has to do with the family life of an elder. He must have a stable family. The word “*blameless*” (v 6) is again used here. This requirement is even more necessary today because of the wide publicity given to problems in marriage by the media. In a home ordinarily, there will be a husband, a wife and children. The husband who aspires to be an elder of the church is therefore required to be a husband of one wife. He must be faithful to his wife and sexually pure.

Also, the prohibition of riot and unruly character infer a common practice of wife-beating or persistent scolding without cause. This is not for the church elder, nor for any Christian for that matter. The relationship between a husband who is an elder and his wife should serve as an example for other Christians. Their children must be guided well unto obedience. An elder should handle his domestic matters soberly before he is able to discharge his spiritual duties well.

The last part of the qualities is that the church officer must relate well with other people. This begins with the home again. He is to be a lover of hospitality. This is also a virtue that runs through all cultural and religious barriers. In this area, Christians must set an example of good things. Such a ministry in some instances has led to the salvation of strangers unto the glory of the Lord. The need to love good men means also that an elder should shun the company of people with questionable morals. Being sober and temperate also lays emphasis on the need for self-control mainly in speech and general conduct. Holiness and justice are also important virtues that ought to be seen in an elder. The Apostle deemed all these as absolutely necessary for the proper appointment of church leaders.

**THOUGHT:** *“A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.”* (Prov 22:1)

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always be a good example to my brethren.

### THE OFFICE AND QUALITIES OF AN ELDER (III)

After the Apostle had stated the moral qualities of a church elder, he then focused on spiritual duties. The sum of these is that he has to be a capable teacher of the Word. In 1 Timothy 3:2, he used the expression *“apt to teach.”* Teaching includes both positive and negative aspects. This can be restated as building and defending. Positively, a church elder has to teach sound doctrines, and negatively he has to defend against false teachings. Both aspects have to be applied to the immediate needs of the church.

The teaching of sound doctrine is indicated in verse 9. A teacher of the Word of God must have a very high regard for it. He should not take for granted its value and its effects on the lives of those who are taught. He should also be familiar with all that the Scripture affirms and hold to every fundamental truth in it. Holding fast the faithful Word is an important requirement that could mean life or death.

The teacher of the Word must engage all the laws of teaching by instruction and persuasion to put across the teachings of the Bible. He must represent the truth as he has received it and teach others with all diligence and conviction. Persuasion implies that he should give reasons for what he teaches and be ready to answer any questions that arise from it. It takes a leader with vision and initiative to come up with ways and means to overcome all these obstacles. When it comes to convincing a person to accept the truth, we as teachers must remember that it is the Holy Spirit who works through our teaching to convince him of the truth. The promise of Christ, when He gave the Great Commission that He would be with His disciples to the end of the world, assures us of His help and empowerment. This ought to be our confidence that we do not give up on anything we are to fulfil. This understanding was an encouragement to Titus and those whom he was asked to appoint to the service.

**THOUGHT:** Sound doctrine is the pillar of the Christian faith.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I be a faithful teacher of Thy Word.

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## THE OFFICE AND QUALITIES OF AN ELDER (IV)

A teacher of the Word also ought to have a natural gift in conveying the message with effectiveness. Different people will differ in this regard, but experience and biblical examples confirm that training helps greatly to perfect this gift. Christ trained the twelve for three years; and Paul trained Timothy, Titus and others. Teaching elders in the church must also have some formal training and, where possible, have it to the highest level. They must also continue in prayer so as to be able to address problems that come up often. In Ephesians 4:11, Paul listed teaching as one of the gifts given to men for the edification of the church. Every teacher must possess a degree of this gift and be able to teach the truth in love.

Negatively, a teaching church elder must know how to respond rightly to false teachers. This is because there will always be many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers. Teaching and defending the Word of God are twin responsibilities of every Bible teacher. The need to be apt to teach also goes with the need to defend those truths. Defence of the truth is the key to the doctrinal health of the church.

In teaching sound doctrine and confronting false teachers, a worthy church elder will apply it to the immediate needs. The Creteans' habit of telling lies was an immediate problem. Such habits in the church require sharp rebuke. It may be painful but it needs to be done. This would be geared towards the good of the church that the church may be sound in faith. The teaching duty of an elder is very demanding. He ought to be well taught, willing and able to teach. *“Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers”* (v 9). He should declare the whole counsel of God.

**THOUGHT:** Knowledge of the truth brings salvation to sinners.

**PRAYER:** Lord, please raise up faithful teachers of Thy Word.

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## SUSTAINING SOUND DOCTRINE IN THE CHURCH (I)

The text tells how we can sustain gospel truths in the church. The ultimate end is eternal gain. All who profess Christ stand to be guided and corrected by the Word of Scripture. Here is an outline of how we are to carry out our responsibility to bring this to pass.

First, it is by keeping away from fables. There are different shades of fables and they are common in literature of any language. Jewish fables and commandments of men are mentioned.

Jewish fables are fanciful stories and myths which people used as the basis of a moral or ethical viewpoint to support the commandments of men. Keeping away from fables requires that Christians in their everyday interaction with others should make use of their ordinary conversation to edify one another. Fables of any kind turn God’s people from the truth, but holding on to sound doctrine magnifies God and His Word.

Second, keeping a pure conscience is also a means of sustaining the certainty of heavenly revelation in the church. This comes by adhering to scriptural moral absolutes. The trend in our generation is that there are no moral absolutes. Everything is relative. Thus a particular situation will determine one’s course of action and the result justifies the action. This proposition is a popular philosophy of the day and many disciplines of higher learning are for it. This is particularly manifested in the study of psychology. When one adheres to this “new” learning, the Law of God is cast aside and human wisdom takes over.

**THOUGHT:** I must keep close to God’s Word every day.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to hold to sound doctrine all the time.

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## SUSTAINING SOUND DOCTRINE IN THE CHURCH (II)

A regenerated person is endowed with the Holy Spirit and will not easily fall victim to Satan's deceptions, but will always maintain a good conscience guided by moral truths. It is sad that the reality in the lives of many Christians is not encouraging; few of them read their Bibles daily. Such a state will not contribute to a pure conscience but rather a constant feeling of doubt. A right relationship with God comes by a right use of His revealed truth.

A child of God ought to shun anything immoral and strive to follow God's guidelines in decision making and in daily living. The reading serves to point us to the direction that we should follow and manifest in our manner of life. Pure conscience only comes by obedience.

Third, the sustaining of sound doctrine comes by knowing God and His will. Our first knowledge of God comes by the experience of our second birth. That which is in the heart is manifested outwardly. This also points the way to embracing sound doctrine, and the believer will have a place in both the visible and the invisible church. Though the visible church is important for fellowship and edification of our faith, the ultimate reward comes as a believer is admitted to the eternal kingdom of Christ, His invisible Church. Knowing God and His will is also evident in the demonstration of good works as God's elect. All these come by holding to God's revelation.

A meaningful knowledge of biblically set guidelines will enable one to live for God. He will hold to the faith, being directed by the principles set forth in the Word of God.

**THOUGHT:** “... and the truth shall make you free.”

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I have my place in Thy redemptive plan.

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MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9

TITUS 2:1-8

GALATIANS 5:22-23

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith...”*

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## TEACHING SOUND DOCTRINE (I)

This is the duty of every Christian. The Church of Christ will stand and show an image worthy of her name, when all members are involved and determined in teaching and learning sound doctrine. Here the Apostle told the younger pastor how to be a true shepherd of the lambs and sheep. He instructed and gave him a message for each class of people that can be found in a regular congregation.

In his message to the pastor, he told him to teach meaningful truths, that is the understanding of sound doctrine. He needed to have some significant substance in his sermons or any Bible lesson. Paul spoke in this manner because there were already false teachers, and, to some extent, a slothful attitude among the pastors was beginning to manifest itself. This became one of the sources which diluted the presentation of the gospel message. A lesson will become meaningful when it is seen in the life of the teacher. Other qualities mentioned include incorruption, honesty and sincerity. Who will listen to a pastor who does not have these qualities?

In the message for the aged men, Paul appealed to them to be of a humble character by acting sensibly, by being honest and temperate. They must hold to the true doctrines as they become more knowledgeable in the fundamentals of the faith they profess. Charity will include not only loving affection for others, but also a demonstration of good works towards them. This is directed to the aged men because they are mature and can relate well to the needs of others. Usually in any community of people, the aged men have a say in matters affecting all people. Thus they are well placed in the forefront to be of assistance to others who are in need. The virtue of patience also must be manifested in their conduct. As much as the rest of the people look to them for counsel and direction, they need to exercise common sense in all things. This is also why Paul did not say much to them.

**THOUGHT:** Godly wisdom is a guide to a responsible person.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me always show a good example to my brethren.

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10

TITUS 2:1-8

PROVERBS 31:10-22

*“She stretcheth out her hand  
to the poor; yea, she reacheth  
forth her hands to the needy.”*

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## TEACHING SOUND DOCTRINE (II)

The message to the aged women is also similar to that of their male counterparts. A duty is also placed on their shoulders to maintain a good testimony and to teach the younger women. They are asked to behave in a manner worthy of holiness. “It means appropriate to a sacred place or person, or becoming to religion. Their conduct should be such as the gospel requires.” (Barnes)

The Apostle stressed this because without holiness it is impossible to see God. When a person is stained with sin, then holiness is lost. They ought to speak the truth and not become false accusers. It is possible that the infamous character of Cretians in telling lies was most prevalent among women; Christian women ought not to jump to the bandwagon of the majority. Much wine is also another prohibition; anyone will understand what Paul is saying when you witness the disgrace manifested in a drunkard woman. While mature Christian women may not go that far astray from God, their own children may not be spared the vanity of the world around them. Their position in the church has an influence on the rest of the faithful. Thus they are told to be teachers of good things. It may be because the women have a limited forum of expressing themselves in the church that there is always an inclination to the weaknesses mentioned by Paul. However, they ought to remember that they have a duty before God to promote holiness rather than deal with petty issues.

**THOUGHT:** The price of a virtuous woman is far above rubies.

**PRAYER:** Lord, raise godly women in Thy church.

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### TEACHING SOUND DOCTRINE (III)

Having addressed the aged women, the Apostle moved on to the younger women. They are to learn to fulfil their duties in the home and to love their husbands and children. They are to be sober, i.e. they are to exercise wisdom in their behaviour. While Paul spoke to a generation that was two thousand years ago, it is evident that the Bible is always ahead of its time because it is a timeless book. What is said here is an answer to many family problems today. The class of women addressed here are, in today's world, the ones who are vulnerable to many social ills, including those who profess faith in Christ. Any counsel outside the biblical guidelines is sure to bring more misery. Even in wedding liturgy, the pledge by the bride to obey the husband (although a biblical injunction) has been removed in some churches. The men too have a part to play in this kind of rejection as they do not understand nor exercise the biblical requirement on their part to love their wives. The solution to all this is still a return to obedience to God's Word. This will save many women and their families from the disaster of having their homes torn apart. The value of obeying God's Word will be seen when all concerned know that what they are asked to do is a duty to God.

The last message here is to the young men, whether married or not. Paul's message to them is only a short sentence, but he meant to say that the things he had said earlier on to the other groups also apply to them. They are to be sober minded and self-controlled. (The other best prescription for youths is found in the first ten chapters of the book of Proverbs.)

All believers are to join hands in obedience to the Word of God, and they will honour the Lord.

**THOUGHT:** A true shepherd will heed God's message.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let every shepherd prove his calling.

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## LESSONS FROM SERVANTS (I)

The mention of “*servants*” gives us the idea of humility. Paul’s fifth message to Titus was directed to those who serve under masters. In those days, a servant was more of a property of the master than an employee. The story of Philemon and Onesimus illustrates this.

The Apostle gave positive instructions to servants that go in line with the duties of their calling. The main instruction is obedience in the Lord. If everyone wants to be a master and to give instructions, then who will get things done?

It is needful that a servant must be humble and take instructions from a superior in order to get things done in an orderly way. Obedience is a virtue, not a vice. If all people would see themselves in the position of a servant, then every duty will be attended to with diligence. Paul added that servants ought to please their masters well in all things. This can be done only if the servant does satisfactory work. The guiding principle that Paul mentioned in his other writings is that every responsibility that is before us must be done not as unto men but as unto God. A whole-hearted desire to engage oneself in profitable employment will directly bring joy to you, and at the same time please the master who assigned that duty.

Apart from duty, there is also a need for a good relationship between believing servants and their masters. This comes when servants recognize their line of duty and seek to fulfil it without question. The instruction says, “*not answering again*” (Titus 2:9). This example has been adopted today in the armed forces. This is a biblical instruction that can be applied in all relations and work will be done with evident efficiency.

**THOUGHT:** Loving service gives glory to God.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always be Thy humble servant.

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## LESSONS FROM SERVANTS (II)

Courtesy on the part of a servant towards the master is needful as a show of honour the master deserves. Masters know that they have their own master as well and they ought to treat their servants well. The key to this mutual relationship as shown in the text is an attitude of humility.

When humility is absent, there will be disorder. In the end, nothing will be done and there will be a breakdown in relations. This will not profit the servant nor the master. Paul in his travels had witnessed such scenes, so when he wrote, he wanted to give guidance to Christians so that there would be harmony in their conduct. This would render their testimony for Christ effective. The Epistle to Philemon (as mentioned earlier) contains an example of this involvement.

All institutions cannot function without orderliness beginning from the family, and the Lord has given ways and means to make them work. The message of the gospel of Christ, apart from the promise of eternal life, is also meant to guide God's people as to how they ought to relate one to another. Thus, apart from Paul, Christ Himself taught of the need for humility and love among His disciples. This is echoed by the Apostle again in his letter to the Philippian Christians: *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name”* (Phil 2:5-9). This assertion sums up what servants ought to be before their masters.

**THOUGHT:** Humility is a virtue of life.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me learn humility before my brethren.

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### LESSONS FROM SERVANTS (III)

A demonstration of humility that comes from the heart must be evident in the actions of a servant. The expression "*not purloining*" (Titus 2:10) means not to set apart or keep back for oneself, i.e. not to steal or embezzle. There is no better example here than the servant of Abraham. He managed Abraham's wealth faithfully. Abraham trusted him and made him swear that he would take a wife for his son Isaac from the house of Abraham's father. The servant did not fail to keep his oath even when his master was out of sight. Genesis 24 tells how he faithfully followed the Lord's directions and secured a bride for the master's son. Joseph who was in Egypt as a slave and as a prisoner also set a good example. He was faithful in all his dealings and the Lord rewarded him beyond his expectations. Their pattern is what Paul says, "*showing all good fidelity*" (Titus 2:10). The relationship develops to the extent that the servants become part of the family. They will attend to their duties as their own.

The value of humility and obedience according to Paul is that the testimony will adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. This observation is full of meaning and in every way logical. Anything good that is done attracts attention and the spectators would like to take it as their example. Ultimately the master of all is God Himself and we are all sinners before Him. We deserve eternal condemnation. This realization should humble each of us to the dust and we will come to the Lord for salvation. The modern set up of our society may not be the same as that of the New Testament times, but the principles are the same. There is a common local saying: "He who gave me a throne also gave me a stool." Before God, we are all sinners. His teaching that we be humble is needful for proper administration of human affairs and application of salvation.

**THOUGHT:** Humility is lowly, but it also rewards us in a big way.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I follow Christ's humility in all my dealings with others.

## MERITS OF THE SAVING GRACE OF GOD (I)

The last message ended with an assertion that the grace of God comes to all people equally, in that masters and servants are both saved and the Lord sees them without distinction. Thus leaving human distinction aside, the text now shows us the merits of that saving grace. It also urges that it be preached. God communicates this to us through His written Word.

The first merit is that it teaches us God's truths. This to a sinner means a personal transformation from the works of the flesh to a Spirit-filled life. The Apostle stated thus in verse 12, *"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."* It has a very broad application, but is descriptive of the general character of a child of God. Thus when Christ told His disciples that they should be the salt and light of the world, He was saying that they should show a silent testimony so that others may see and learn from them. Keeping away from ungodliness will result in this effective, silent witness. When a person takes the step of accepting Christ as Lord and Saviour, the Holy Spirit begins to indwell him.

Ungodliness also goes with worldly lusts. God's Word teaches us to keep away from these as well. John puts them in three categories: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and pride of life (1 John 2:16). This is what Adam and Eve could not resist and, as a result, fell from their original state of innocence to the state of sin. Their appetite for the forbidden fruit, the lust of the flesh, led them to that transgression. Their eyes also added to that desire and they could not control their inner feelings. The pride of life completes the extent of their lusts. Ever since the fall of Adam, mankind has always been inclined to disobey God.

**THOUGHT:** God's grace is amazing!

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I leave the world and follow Jesus.

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## MERITS OF THE SAVING GRACE OF GOD (II)

The text teaches us to live soberly, to make decisions and to act in a reasonable manner. A person who is intoxicated with alcohol cannot act soberly and becomes disorderly. Even for a sober person, when he allows the flesh to reign in his heart, his thoughts and actions will not be different from those of a drunkard. The free gift of God makes it possible for a child of God to live with a sound mind.

In addition, there is a need to exercise righteousness and godliness, not conforming to the world. These expressions are near synonymous and are used here for confirmation and emphasis of what the Apostle was stressing. Living righteously is conformity with the law of God, in that if we love Him, we will love our fellow men wholeheartedly. The mention of *“this present world”* (Titus 2:12) implies the evils that are in the world and the need for Christians to be distinct.

The second merit of the grace of God is that it gives us a blessed hope, the full expression is given thus in the text: *“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:13). The Greek word for *“looking”* in its grammatical setting is a participle and it refers to something anticipated in the future. It is a means of sustaining our faith. This is not the carrot-and-stick type of hope, but a sure hope. No words can express the value and extent of that hope, but it is enough to say that it will be complete, satisfying to the fullest, as well as eternal. In the midst of modern emphasis on temporal prosperity, believers need to focus more on the glorious future. The riches of this world will only last for a time and are uncertain, thus they bring no satisfaction to anyone. It is sad however that many preachers of the prosperity “gospel” have used it as a bait to win a large following and to satisfy their own craving for silver and gold. This is a false hope and is shortsighted. A believer must not be ensnared by this terrestrial gain, but must hope for things of heaven. Celestial gain has eternal value.

**THOUGHT:** The blessed hope here is a glorious future.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I look forward to the blessed hope.

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17

TITUS 2:12-15

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-17

“...the dead in Christ  
shall rise first.”

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### MERITS OF THE SAVING GRACE OF GOD (III)

The expectation of the day of Christ when He will come to receive His own unto Himself is part of the blessed hope. Christ comforted His disciples (prior to His ascension to heaven) that He was going to prepare a place for them and will come again for them. Paul also spoke at length concerning that appearance and outlined the sequence of events. The second coming of Christ is an event that no one has ever experienced, but it is a sure hope. The unspeakable gift of God cannot be exchanged with worldly riches.

Lastly, the grace of God reminds us of Christ’s redeeming love. The expression “*that he might redeem us from all iniquity*” (Titus 2:14) specifies the fact that He paid the price for our sins. This merits our justification as He makes us holy to Himself. This entire sequence of events takes place by the counsel of God’s will. Christ redeemed and purified us, that we might be a people zealous of good works. The zeal for good works flows from the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the redeemed. The unregenerate think that their sins will be forgiven or that they will gain some spiritual merit by doing good works. However, God’s revelation in Scripture shows salvation is by grace alone and good works cannot save anyone from sin. Believers are saved to do good works. They do not do good works in order to be saved!

The experiential knowledge of the grace of God makes us His children. After Paul had demonstrated the merits of the grace of God, he reminded Titus of his duty to put across these truths to the churches he had been called to minister to. Paul wanted Titus to exercise all authority in his ministry. He used three imperatives: “*speak, and exhort, and rebuke*” (Titus 2:15), adding “*with all authority.*” This is the manner of communication the younger pastor had to apply and none should despise him. This ought always to be a means of conveying the merits of God’s free gift for a testimony to the whole world. The Lord Jesus Christ made it possible for those who believe in Him to benefit from God’s grace.

**THOUGHT:** Anyone can benefit from Christ’s saving grace.

**PRAYER:** Lord, grant Thy grace to many that are lost in sin.

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## OBEDIENCE TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT (I)

Obedience to civil government is obedience to God. Christianity spread under the Roman colonial rule over a vast empire including Judea, the cradle of the Christian faith. Every province covered in Paul’s missionary journeys (including Crete) was Roman territory. The laws that the believers had to obey were similar to those applicable to other subjects as well. Paul, as a Roman citizen, was conversant with Caesar’s statutes. He was also aware that the success of the evangelistic ministry lay greatly with the believers’ conformity to the laws of the land. So he wrote thus to Titus: “*Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work*” (Titus 3:1).

Apart from the moral duty for Christians to be law-abiding, any breach of the civil order could also be used by enemies to point an accusing finger at them. This would mar their testimony, and their labour for the Lord will not be fruitful. The Jewish community in Judea was not only a religious movement, but also political. Paul did not want believers to join in to oppose the political leadership. He believed in the divine appointment of ruling authorities and those who live under these ought to obey the laws of the land. The need to obey the civil government is thus not alien to Christianity. In this text, Paul did not give much explanation as regards this requirement, but elsewhere in his epistles he wrote more on this need. He assumed that Titus knew what he was talking about at the mention of obedience to the magistrate. Since Titus had been Paul’s companion in the ministry, he must have heard Paul talk of this Christian duty and it was needful for him to transmit this teaching to new believers. Note the opening words of Paul’s message to the Roman believers on this subject, “*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God*” (Rom 13:1).

**THOUGHT:** Law and order is guaranteed when there is a good government.

**PRAYER:** Lord, grant us freedom to serve Thee in our nation.

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## OBEDIENCE TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT (II)

In our modern context, the authority of civil government may be blemished by cheap politics or unjust laws, but despite these, God’s law of obedience stands. It is on the basis of scriptural guidelines that the Church today is obliged to declare officially the biblical position towards civil government. The church is also exhorted to pray for the government.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself set an example in this obedience by paying taxes when He asked Peter to go to the sea, and the first fish he would catch would have a coin in its mouth. The coin was sufficient for Him and Peter to pay their taxes. Also, when Jesus was asked if it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, His reply was that they must give to Caesar what was his and give to God what was His. Obedience to authority thus includes paying lawful taxes.

Generally, a Christian community (as a testimony of their faith) ought to play a bigger part in contributing to the orderliness of the society. Peter had this counsel for Christians, *“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation”* (1 Pet 2:12). Nothing will stop those with negative thoughts from criticising believers, but God will vindicate believers by their good works. There is a need to pay great attention to scriptural imperatives because it is always very easy to be carried away by irrational political agitation or to conform to common disregard for the law. In Kenya, it is not unusual for public transport drivers to collude with traffic law enforcement officers to flout the traffic guidelines through bribery. A Christian must not be part of these vices and think that he can escape the judgment of God. Obedience to civil authority is obedience to God for our own good and the good of our neighbours.

**THOUGHT:** It is imperative to pray for the government.

**PRAYER:** Lord, restore and maintain righteousness in our nation.

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### OBEDIENCE TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT (III)

When God's people live according to the law of the land, they are not simply passively obeying. On the contrary, it is the exercise of their civil rights. This is so because laws were not meant to enslave people, but to serve people. In this, it will be realised that the law of obedience is of divine ordination. It is enshrined in the fifth (Exod 20:12) of the Ten Commandments. "*Father*" and "*mother*" extends to every authority. In submitting to the powers above, one must cherish their worth. Peter said that in the believer's well doing the ignorance of foolish men will be put to silence. The fact that a civil government has been instituted to render services to the citizens is a manifestation of God's order. It translates into benefits for the citizens. In the exercise of lawful rights, the citizens are spared of wrongdoing by the lawless.

Those who are on the receiving end must also be on the giving end, thus part of the believer's contribution (when they have peace and stability out of good governance) is to do good to others. Paul said that they were to be ready for every good work. This will include their support for civil righteousness by every means opened to them. When believers are able, they can also contribute to the welfare of the community by providing material support for the disadvantaged. In this connection, it is to be mentioned that the success of missionary activities in many African countries was largely due to the good works of the missionaries. They set a good example to this end. It is to be repeated that these works do not save souls but they provide a good testimony as they testify for Christ and keeping the Gospel as the main focus. As the Apostle said, "*by all means save some*" (1 Cor 9:22), this is one possible means.

Christians are to be the light and salt of the society, as Jesus said. Submission to civil authority is submission to Him who ordained it.

**THOUGHT:** "*Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.*" (1 Pet 2:17)

**PRAYER:** Lord, bless my land and nation.

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## THE FRUIT OF REGENERATION (I)

The life of a believer outside the church, as seen in the previous message, ought to be a law-abiding one. This is a testimony to the world around him. In the church and in everyday life there must be a demonstration in his character of a changed life. This will show the grace of God which is working in the believer. Paul told Titus to put this to the mind of the Cretian Christians (Titus 3:1). He would have said the same to every believer since the words of Scripture have universal application.

Believers are to manifest an upright manner of life in relating to others. Paul said, with regard to their verbal communication, *“To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men”* (Titus 3:2). This means that they are to be careful with their words. Even secular professionals know the power of kind speech in creating harmony in an organisation. The lips of a Christian are to be anointed by the Holy Spirit and edifying language ought to flow from his tongue. The ability to speak well of others at all times is the fruit of the grace of God bestowed upon His children in regeneration.

The second factor that the Apostle mentioned in the manifestation of an upright manner is to have a gentle and humble attitude. A brawler is a person who cannot resist any provocation, and if such people are brought together, they will have no peace among themselves. However, God’s people are not to be such. They must demonstrate a positive disposition. Their lives are to testify of what God has done for them. Only through the experience of the second birth will one be able to exercise self-control. This is what Paul was driving home. Reacting gently to provocation is godly and goes a long way in speaking for Christ in the lives of those whom He has redeemed and made children of God. Showing meekness to all men is the Apostle’s exhortation.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Matthew 5:5.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always be a good testimony for Thee.

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## THE FRUIT OF REGENERATION (II)

The fruit of regeneration does not come from the natural man. A changed life will take a new course and the end product will be evident. Paul himself is a testimony of this when the Lord changed him. He was transformed from a violent persecutor of Christians to a foremost preacher of the gospel. Nothing can explain such alteration other than the grace of God that brings salvation to the worst of sinners.

Few people have such a remarkable shift from a sinner to a saint. Usually, the change takes a natural course over time and gradually the person grows in maturity. However, when the Lord chooses a person (regardless of the method applied in calling), the same will definitely come to Him and will show the obvious fact of the calling. The Scriptures always tell the believers what to do in the form of a command. However, even as they obey God, their ability still stems from the work of God in them and are not wholly of their own doing.

When Nicodemus (who was a ruler of the Jews) came to Jesus to inquire about everlasting life, Jesus told him that he must be born again before he can enter into the kingdom of heaven. This means regeneration, i.e. when one will reject the past evil and start life anew with God. This is true conversion. The Apostle described the kind of life one leads before conversion. He said, *"For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another"* (Titus 3:3). He asserted that this kind of life was foolishness and caused one to lead a life of disobedience. This leads to a chain of other transgressions. In the first place, obedience is not in the interest of the person to be obeyed only, but it is also for the welfare of the person being asked to obey. Thus, a disobedient person brings ruin to himself.

**THOUGHT:** God's grace is all sufficient.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I have a closer walk with Thee.

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### THE FRUIT OF REGENERATION (III)

The unregenerate heart serves divers lusts. Man is totally depraved without the saving grace of God and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. In the flesh, man is given to lust without restraint. However, when a man becomes a Christian, he becomes a new creature. He is then able to yield to the control of the Holy Spirit, and overcome his sinful desires.

Malice and envy arise from the sin of covetousness which also stems from depravity. Hatred and hating one another express the absence of love for one’s neighbour. For example, neighbours may constantly be quarrelling over petty issues, etc. They live in constant conflict.

A converted heart easily recognises the folly of such a manner of life and keeps away from it. This will be in obedience to God’s prescription in the holy precepts. The Apostle explained how it works in verse 4: *“But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared.”* The light of God’s Word causes a yielded heart to resist all sinful, immoral acts. Thus, the believer can bear the fruits of regeneration.

Regeneration takes place when one has responded to the call of God to come out from darkness into light. The whole process of man’s salvation is grace alone from start to finish as the Apostle stated clearly from the text. He said, *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us...”* (Titus 3:5). Here again he reaffirmed this truth in such clear terms that it does not require much explanation. As part of God’s order of salvation, believers are also justified by the same grace and made the children of God. All these are stated in the text as coming from the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The work of grace is also evidenced by its fruit – good works. The Apostle here spoke with emphasis because it is the outward picture. The subject of the second birth is often revisited in Scripture so that the message comes home clearly.

**THOUGHT:** Good works is Christianity in action.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me heed this message and resist all deception.

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## DEALING WITH THE DISCONTENTED (I)

Heretic is the proper reference for a person who is discontented in the church and harbours false doctrines. The mention of this brings to mind sad memories in Church history. When the faithful servants of the Lord wished to restore the Bible and its doctrines to the Church, they were branded heretics and sentenced to death. The Church of Rome did this to John Hus and several others. On the other hand, the heretics the Apostle was referring to here deserved disciplinary action. Such people can be found everywhere. Paul prescribed a course of action for Titus to deal with such persons. This is also applicable to every church in every generation. The directives are hereby outlined.

The Apostle stated how a pastor should respond to them. He said, *“But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain”* (Titus 3:9). Those who raise foolish questions should be ignored or should not be given an opportunity to raise their questions. In those days, there were many, especially of the Jewish community, who were against the Christian faith. They would raise questions about irrelevant issues such as genealogies. The Jews held this as very important as they wanted to verify who qualified to be pure Israelites. Titus was a Greek and he could easily be subjected to prejudice by the professing Jews.

Bringing up foolish questions causes unnecessary debates. It would be a waste of time for a church minister to attend to unending talk instead of teaching the flock. When one gets involved in such contentions, it is easy to be carried away by them to the extent of doing nothing but debating. The interpretation of the Mosaic Law was a big issue in those days and there was confusion about the new faith. This is seen in how the believing Jews responded to Peter when he went to the house of Cornelius to preach and eat with him.

**THOUGHT:** Conversion requires complete transformation.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I grow in the knowledge of Thy Word.

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## DEALING WITH THE DISCONTENTED (II)

Acts 15 records the proceedings of a council that was convened to debate the interpretation of the Law in relation to Gentile believers. The authoritative resolutions of that council became the reference for all churches in handling the non-Jewish converts. As a disciple of Paul, Titus was already conversant with handling all questions relating to the Law. The Apostle was telling him to shun those who were not satisfied with the scriptural explanation. He said that such issues were unprofitable and also vain.

The pastor must not only ignore the people's foolish questions, he also ought to identify the doctrines of such people. Paul spelt out the actions that are to be taken against them if they are false teachers and their doctrine is heresy. It is therefore needful for the church to fully establish their position, and then take corrective measures. The Apostle did not deviate from the directive of the Lord Jesus Christ in dealing with such issues. Admonition is the first step; this will not be done once but twice. Jesus had earlier outlined how this should be done. He said this in Matthew 18:15-17, *“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”*

Teaching false doctrine is a trespass and the steps outlined here must be taken in the process of admonition. Jesus said that anyone who resists will be regarded as a heathen or a publican; while Paul simply said *“reject.”* The final step against a heretic thus is to put him out of the church fellowship.

**THOUGHT:** There is hope of restoration in admonition.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I deal kindly with my offending brethren.

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### **DEALING WITH THE DISCONTENTED (III)**

The Apostle knew that action is not as easy to take as it is said, so he spoke on the same subject to the Galatians and urged restoration. He foresaw the potential danger in dealing with a wayward person. He told them to tread carefully in handling such an issue. This gives the direction in dealing with a contentious person. The bottom line of Paul’s counsel is that heretics must be dealt with in the church firmly, but with patience and willingness to bear with the inconveniences that have to be endured. When no action is taken, the church will be in a state of confusion and a faithful minister will be compromised, but this ought not to be. An action taken against false teachers will not only solve the immediate problem, but it will also keep away potential troublemakers.

The Apostle showed how these people are to be classified. He said that such persons are subverted, i.e. they had turned away from the truth. They are deceiving themselves and deceiving others also. This is taking God’s name in vain. It is a transgression of His commandment. Heresy is a sin because it perverts the truth and goes against the revealed will of God. Today, there is direct deception by those who claim to predict the exact date of the second coming of Christ or of the end of the world. They do this despite the fact that the Scriptures specifically said that no one knows the day except God the Father only. Every false teacher deserves condemnation. The text says that he is condemned of himself. In the administration of justice, every transgressor deserves punishment.

In a Christian community, such people become sowers of discord and spoil the spiritual fellowship. Action must be taken against them. They are to be identified rightly and their sin described. When there is no positive response to remedy the damage in true repentance, these are to be excluded from fellowship.

**THOUGHT:** The church must have an order for responding.

**PRAYER:** Lord, sustain our fellowship in Thee.

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## THE LAST MESSAGE TO TITUS (I)

The last of Paul’s three pastoral epistles comes to an end. According to Titus 3:12, Paul wrote this epistle from an unnamed location, but he intended to be at the city of Nicopolis soon after. He wanted Titus to join him there. This is a city in the province of Macedonia. Some have suggested that the epistle was penned at Corinth. In trying to reconstruct the chronology of Paul’s journeys, the time of writing this epistle will be after Paul’s first Roman imprisonment. This part is not recorded in the book of Acts. But piecing together a number of references, historians have come to the conclusion that the Apostle wrote this letter to Titus about AD 63. It was delivered by Zenas and Apollos who were traveling to Crete on a missionary visit. In his last words, the Apostle’s zeal for the advancement of the gospel is clearly evident.

He first began by expressing his desire to have Titus with him, saying, *“be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for I have determined there to winter”* (Titus 3:12). He did not say why he needed him, but that request shows that there was a particular assignment. Titus may have been gifted in some special way and Paul needed his services. The mention of names of different co-workers by Paul shows his organisational ability and his mastery of Christian public relations. In his efforts, he wanted to make the maximum use of time and manpower to advance the course of the gospel. In asking Titus to be diligent to come to him, he demonstrated a spirit of faithfulness. He definitely had a specific task for Titus. He was also a teacher of his younger disciple. He wanted him to learn from him the lesson of keeping appointments in matters of Christian ministry.

**THOUGHT:** Ministers of the gospel are brothers in Christ.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to value my co-workers in Christ.

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## THE LAST MESSAGE TO TITUS (II)

The example of Paul is a lesson for pastors today. It is always worth remembering that faithfulness in the ministry is necessary for the success of both winning souls for Christ and of sustaining the church. Mature Christians need a shepherd to feed them regularly and facilitate mutual fellowship. This is how the church will grow and be able to meet the spiritual needs of her members. This fulfils the command of Christ for His disciples to be His witnesses in the whole world. Paul was committed in his calling. He used every opportunity available to bring to pass the Lord’s plea. And believers will learn from their pastor’s faithfulness in discharging his duties.

Titus, as a church leader in Crete, was in a position to render assistance to his co-labourers. Their evangelistic travels showed their desire to follow Christ. Paul asked him to assist Zenas and Apollos in their journey. Apollos was an evangelist with great zeal as revealed in the book of Acts. Zenas is mentioned here for the first time. He is said to be a lawyer but now an evangelist and companion of Apollos. It seems also that the recipient was familiar with this name. As a missionary, Paul knew the needs of those who go out with the gospel. He had gone through such experiences several times. He expressed his appreciation of the assistance rendered to him by the Philippian church in meeting his needs.

Paul wanted Titus and the Cretian churches to emulate the example of the Philippians. He had a concern for the welfare of the evangelists and their ministry. It was his desire that nothing should hinder the advancement of the Good News; neither should the messengers suffer need.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Philippians 4:13.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, may Thy servants always have sufficient for their ministry.

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### THE LAST MESSAGE TO TITUS (III)

Modern missionary movement has succeeded because churches have organised themselves and contributed to the needs of missionaries and their ministry. Though there have been manifestations of human weaknesses, the missionaries have done well and continue to press forward proclaiming God's salvation plan. The church today needs the same encouragement to support missionary outreaches. This is fulfilling the commission of Christ. The conditions are far better today than in the days of the pioneers of modern missions. However, there is still a large field of outreaches and many have yet to hear the good news of salvation.

The Apostle in writing these last words stressed the importance of an external testimony. He came back to the subject of good works for the sixth time in this epistle (note the other references on this subject Titus 1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14). He said, *"And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful"* (Titus 3:14). It is possible that the Cretians were negligent in this area since they had a reputation for telling lies at all times. Paul may have heard some evidence that they were slow in making their faith known. Good works must be part of their testimony. He knew the need to build bridges of communication with unbelievers so as to yield spiritual fruits. He saw this as one of the most effective ways which the churches here could witness for Christ. He urged them to maintain these works. This is not to be done once only but the church has to sustain the practice as long as the door is open. This has to be the work of the church at all times. Repeated exhortation to do good is a confirmation of its importance in Christian service. Rendering service of any kind to missionary outreaches is a means of doing good works.

**THOUGHT:** What is done for Christ will last.

**PRAYER:** Lord, open more doors for the gospel outreach.

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## FAREWELL TO TITUS

In his third missionary journey, Paul called the elders of the church at Ephesus to Miletus for a farewell meeting (Acts 20:17-38). When it was time to part, they hugged one another and wept. Their love for one another (that had been built up during Paul’s ministry trip to their city) was so strong that they did not want to part. When he wrote to Titus, the bond of love is clear in between the lines.

Paul did not forget to express affection to friends through the salutation from his side and the salutation to the recipient. He referred to “*All that are with me*” as sending their greetings to Titus. He also sent greetings to those that love them in the faith through their pastor. This shows that Paul was not alone in expressing his concern for the church in Crete and their shepherd. Beside the two who were on their way to see Titus, the names Tychicus and Artemas were also mentioned. They were companions of the Apostle in the ministry.

Paul used their calling not only to spread the gospel message but also to edify other servants in the same ministry. Paul wished the Cretians the grace of God and closed with a heartfelt “*Amen.*” There is absence of love when Christians do not relate to one another in this manner. On the other hand, the chief of the Apostles knew the powerful effect of love. Let none of the Christian brethren lack in this area. It lifts hearts with joy.

In this final part, there is a clear demonstration of the Apostle’s commitment and organisational ability in bridging his co-workers well. He had the desire to sustain the gospel service by all means. The practical lesson to whoever reads this message is that you must go and do likewise. The Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified as you bring the saving message to lost sinners. In return you will also receive manifold blessings. Amen.

**THOUGHT:** Love is the greatest commandment in the Law.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me love others as myself.

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1

**1 PETER 1:1-2**

JOHN 1:37-42

“...*thou shalt be called Cephas  
which is by interpretation, A stone.*”

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## INTRODUCTION TO 1 PETER

Peter was one of the early disciples of Christ and was chosen as one of the Apostles. He had weaknesses, but was apt to lead the Apostolic band when the need arose. In this first letter that he wrote to Christians who were scattered in different regions of the Roman Empire, he stressed the preciousness of salvation as his main point. It offers hope in the future by the present endurance which builds on the past foundation. Eternal salvation is the hope of all believers and is the core subject of the gospel.

Peter was an Apostle of Jesus Christ and he introduced himself as such. The New Testament said much more regarding the life and ministry of Peter than the rest of the twelve Apostles as recorded in Acts. However, the two epistles Peter wrote and the writings of Paul showed Peter to be active many years after the ascension of Christ. He travelled extensively, and tradition says that he went to Rome and met his death there under the persecution of Emperor Nero, which occurred in AD 68. He wrote this epistle around AD 64. He occupied a central role in the early church. He wrote this letter to “*the strangers scattered.*” This was a reference to Christians of all races who had gone to different parts of the empire, both Jews and Gentiles. He called them “*the elect according to the foreknowledge of God.*” He is referring here to election to salvation.

Peter was a fisherman by profession. When Jesus called him, He told him and his companions that He would make them fishers of men. It was a metaphoric way of telling them that they were going to be evangelists, to bring men to the saving knowledge of Christ. The day of Pentecost marked the formal commencement of the ministry of the Apostles. Peter was the main speaker for that day. Besides evangelism and nurturing of the church, Peter occupied himself with nothing else for the rest of his life. He knew the meaning of suffering for the cause of Christ. He made this the key theme in his epistle.

**THOUGHT:** When God calls, no man can resist.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may Thou call more fishers of men.

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## THE PRECIOUSNESS OF SALVATION (I)

Peter outlined the Christian's proper response in the midst of persecution. The majority of his readers were facing such suffering. He wrote to show them the mind of the Lord in these circumstances, so that they may be able to endure without wavering in their faith. He consoled them by showing them that Christ also suffered.

Peter spoke of the believers' position in Christ as well as their future hope. He did this to remind the readers that they were merely sojourners on earth. Their true destiny was the eternal glory that shall be revealed. He showed also that their salvation depended on the grace of God. In his salutation, he prayed that this free gift might be multiplied. Thus, they were to adopt an attitude of submission even as they suffered for the name of Christ. He left no doubt about his faith in the promises of God for the future. He addressed God in the best expression to stress what he believed (1 Pet 1:3).

He believed in the deity of Jesus Christ and also in His resurrection. He was the first-hand witness of all the works of Christ and he was the one who answered a question on the Person of Christ. There is no greater teacher of doctrine than Christ Himself and Peter learnt directly from Him during His three years of public ministry. Peter's ordinary speech was laced with his beliefs of Christ, and he was confident and ready to tell anyone of them. He had that experience of denying Christ before His crucifixion, but he had since repented of that. He knew that God was abundant in mercy. He looked forward to the future resurrection. This hope that believers have is of an incorruptible inheritance as holiness reigns in their lives. The heritage is also everlasting and reserved in heaven where earthly infirmities are absent. It shall be a perfect inheritance.

Salvation is precious because it gives hope based on the promises of God. The preaching of the gospel results in that faith among the believers and they become heirs of God. This gospel will be preached for a witness to all nations till He comes.

**THOUGHT:** Everyone who calls on Jesus' name shall be saved.

**PRAYER:** May every believer strive to attain that blessed hope.

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## THE PRECIOUSNESS OF SALVATION (II)

The perseverance of believers comes because they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Christ made a particular promise when He said, *"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand"* (John 10:28). While we live and cherish the assurance of the Lord, life on earth is not a bed of roses. It is full of trials and temptations, and they come one after another. Peter agreed that there were manifold temptations. But we must rejoice because these are only for a season. He added that the trial of the believer's faith is more precious than gold which perishes. Trial here is compared to the purifying by fire to remove impurities from the precious metal so that it becomes a first class precious metal. The faith of Christians also goes under such a parallel process and, in the end, by faith he can endure any trial. His faith will be precious at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Believers love Christ. Though they have not seen Him, yet they believe in Him and rejoice with unspeakable joy full of glory. God also honours all His promises. We can believe by faith that God will fulfil them. We need not be like Thomas who wanted to see before he believed. The end of faith is the salvation of souls. The blessings of God come only through believing. Salvation also was the theme of the prophets; they searched and told of the grace to come. Every book of the Old Testament contains the gospel message. Peter was familiar with all these and said that the Spirit of Christ which was in them testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. The things that were revealed about Christ came to pass. Christ Himself confirmed this at the synagogue in His home city of Nazareth, when He read from Isaiah 61, and told the congregation that that Scripture was fulfilled. God spoke of the future in the past. Salvation of sinners is such a precious gift of God. It runs through all of God's revelation and the Apostle Peter upheld this in this exhortation.

**THOUGHT:** Nothing compares with God's gift of salvation.

**PRAYER:** Lord, bring sinners to the Saviour, let them not delay.

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## A CALL TO HOLINESS

Holiness is a requirement for every believer. The first step to the attainment of this virtue comes by the blood of Christ. One who repents of his sins and comes to salvation in Christ receives His gracious offer of full pardon of sins and justification. He is positionally holy before God. Following salvation, he needs to be sanctified daily. Peter exhorted those who came to God to remain in holiness.

The first step in holiness is contained in the phrase *“gird up the loins,”* such is the requirement of readiness in emergencies. One has to be ready to act at short notice. This figurative speech refers to one’s thoughts. He called for a sober mind and for one to hope to the end. This is for the grace that is brought at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Holiness and remaining in it does not come without deliberate effort, this is the purpose of Peter’s exhortation. The mention of grace and the command to seek holiness is an irony, but human responsibility is not separated from the grace of God.

The Apostle touched on things that constituted holiness. He said, *“As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance”* (1 Pet 1:14). These are the things that cause defilement and are incompatible with the holy character of God. The Apostle quoted from Leviticus 11:44 where the Lord called for holiness because He is holy. He said we must be holy in all manner of conversation. That is to say that we are to live every day conducting ourselves in the manner which God has prescribed. Everyone has a past, often with disgraceful sins in a small or a big way. The need for holiness means that all ties with that past are severed and a new life of obedience to God is pursued. Paul called this the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new one. The Lord Jesus said that one must be born again. All these expressions mean that new life in Christ is necessary for every child of God as he demonstrates a worthy conversation before the Lord. Holiness is the crown of new life in Christ. May our Heavenly Father grant us the grace to live as He desires for us to live.

**THOUGHT:** Holiness is a fruit of the Spirit.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I pursue holiness.

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## GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF HOLINESS

In the early days of the New Testament church, the Apostles and early disciples who were Jews had reservations in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter himself was a victim of such prejudice more than once. However, the Lord compelled him politely to go and preach where he was directed. He became the first of the Apostles to enter the house of a Gentile and preach the gospel of Christ (Acts 10). He preached in the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and the Lord visited these Gentiles with the Holy Spirit. When the church had to debate the matter, the witness of Peter brought a final solution to the controversy. They were thus free to have fellowship with Gentile believers because God ordered them to do so. It was on the basis of that experience that Peter remarked that God is without respect of persons but judges according to every man's work.

The redemption of those who believe is not by corruptible things, as silver or gold. These are material things that will come to an end at a particular time or when their usefulness ceases. However, those who are carnally minded will value them so much that they will go to any lengths to acquire and retain them. The Lord Jesus Christ also spoke of these and exhorted us not to lay our treasures on earth where moth and rust will corrupt. He counselled rather that we should store up heavenly treasures which are not subject to corruption. Peter knew of these words of the Lord and he added, *“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Pet 1:18-19). These verses speak of the value and incorruptibility of Christ's blood, by which He redeemed us. This offers a sure hope of eternal life by faith alone. This again is the gift of God and thus all believers are beneficiaries of His grace. This is the gospel that is preached.

**THOUGHT:** Heavenly treasures are of greater value than earthly ones.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I store up treasures in heaven now.

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## THE TIME OF HOLINESS AND ITS MANIFESTATION

Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world to be the Lamb of God and was made manifest in these last times to believers. And God had chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world. Thus when God the Father foreordained Christ, He also chose the believers. The process of believers entering into that eternal glory also involves the resurrection of Christ. He accomplished the work of redemption in His death, having paid the penalty for sin. He was also raised from the dead and became the firstfruits of those that shall be raised. The Son of God ascended up to glory to intercede for believers before the Father. In Him we believe in God and our faith and hope is in God.

The purification of the soul brings great transformation. Peter exhorted on perfect love with a pure heart. The remarks he made described what holiness means in a transformed soul. The truth makes one free and the Holy Spirit works in the heart to bring about that change. The person thus changed will learn to love God and others.

Regeneration is the change that comes to a person who believes in Christ for salvation. In those early days, there were many conflicting religious views and many did not understand the redemptive work of Christ. The Apostle strove to encourage believers to chart their own position by obeying the Scriptures. He told them that they were born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible. Christians are born again by the Spirit and by the Word of God. Peter stressed that the Word of God endures for ever. In the Word of God is the gospel message to unbelievers so that they may be saved. Christ commanded the gospel to be preached to the very end to every nation.

As the Apostle makes a call to come to the Lord and to seek to conform to Him in holiness, first steps need to be taken. God Himself is holy and we can have fellowship with Him in that grace. He had chosen us before the foundation of the world and faith in Him is a step to eternal reward.

**THOUGHT:** Let us be holy as the Lord is holy.

**PRAYER:** Lord, I resolve to take time to be holy.

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## THE POSITION OF BELIEVERS IN CHRIST

The position of believers in Christ begins with their sincere desire for the Word of God, having tasted of His grace. They offer a worthy service to the Lord. In so doing they gain an exalted position as God is merciful to them. They will then live worthy of the gospel of Christ till they attain the eternal reward. These factors are disclosed here.

They desire the Word of God sincerely, having laid aside the evil character of their former way of life in the flesh. The deeds of the old character are malice, guile, hypocrisies and envies. The change requires the keeping of the heart from these evils and also the watching of one's speech. When one is endued with new life, the words of his mouth are also polished. He will not tell a lie or any kind of evil communications. He will have a burning desire for the Word of God and grow in the faith. The Apostle compares that desire with that of the newborn baby for milk. Since milk is the only sustenance for newborn babies, they can desire nothing more than this nourishment. Adults also can have such a strong desire for things they like to eat. *“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God...”* (Ps 42:1-2). A desire for God and His Word has to come before one can grow in the faith. A taste of the grace of God encourages growth.

Life with Christ begins with birth and, like the physical baby, the spiritual baby also has to grow. This encouragement is required for both old and new believers because there is always strong opposition from the evil forces to retard their spiritual growth. The opposition has succeeded to the point where many Christians are ignorant of the basic doctrines of the faith. When the sincere desire for the Word of God is absent, growth will not be forthcoming. The shepherd of God's flock has the responsibility to *“feed the flock”* (1 Pet 5:2). Otherwise, he will not be providing the necessary nourishment. Both the flock and the shepherd contribute to facilitate the necessary growth in Christ.

**THOUGHT:** Spiritual nourishment is needful in our daily menu.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to measure my spiritual growth.

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## THE OFFERING OF SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES

The Old Testament worship was characterised by the offering of blood sacrifices. Peter here spoke of spiritual service. He referred to Christ as a living stone which men disallowed but is chosen of God and precious (Ps 118:22). The Lord Jesus used these references to answer the chief priests and elders who had questioned the source of His authority (Matt 21:42). Peter identified this stone to be Jesus of Nazareth when he defended the preaching of His gospel before the chief priests. They had questioned him and John when they healed the lame man at the gate of the temple (Acts 4:8-11). This leaves no doubt as to what he meant.

He then turned to the believers and gave them a designation, *“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet 2:5). Here he gave them three titles and raises the disciples above the Temple that the Jews adored so much and also above the priests who offered services in that house. The offering of spiritual sacrifices was also a new expression that the Jews did not comprehend well. Peter was thus affirming the spiritual position of believers before Christ. He needed to stress that this does not come in a mechanical manner through fulfilling certain rituals, but by a heart wholly surrendered to Christ.

The Apostle also cited in verse 6 the words of Isaiah 28:16 which referred to Christ. He agreed with the psalmist that the chief cornerstone laid in Zion was Christ. He was elect and precious, and whoever believed in Him shall not be confounded. The disobedient take Him for a stone that was rejected by the builders, but He is made the head of the corner. He added that He became a stumbling block and a rock of offence because they were disobedient, and these people were appointed to that end of being stumbled and offended. The advantage of believers is a big contrast with the fate of these unbelievers.

**THOUGHT:** A life given to God is a spiritual sacrifice.

**PRAYER:** Lord, teach me to offer spiritual sacrifices.

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## THE EXALTED POSITION BEFORE GOD

The Apostle had a good choice of words in expressing the blessings that come to believers. He stated in verse 9, *“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.”* Each position is described with a fitting adjective. These are the blessings that God’s people have, but they also have to demonstrate them in their lives. The transformation from darkness into the light of Christ is a gift of God. This change makes them a people of God because they have obtained mercy. Peter had the privilege of witnessing many lives being transformed and turned to Christ. He could speak all these things through that experience. He was also a living testimony of God’s calling both as a Christian and as an Apostle. Prior to his calling, he was a fisherman; he was not educated like the scribes or Pharisees. In the end, however, he was one of the foremost scholars of Christian theology. He was with Christ and he was the right person to address the subject at hand. He made the position of believers very clear.

As strangers and pilgrims, believers must abstain from fleshy lusts that war against the soul. They do so in showing an honest conduct before unbelievers. In the world, there are all kinds of people. In many cases, these people are miserable because they do not know the Lord. Christians are to bear a testimony before them so that they may know that there is hope in the Lord. They may speak evil against and mock Christians when things are going well for them, but the reward of believers may be seen as they stand for Christ. They will change their perception when they see the confidence of the faithful. The Apostle called for a positive response to his exhortation.

What is your position before Christ today?

**THOUGHT:** Live worthy of the gospel of Christ.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I be a living witness for Thee.

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## SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY (I)

The assertion of the Apostle in the text is understood in the requirements of the fifth commandment as stated in its clear understanding. It calls for the preserving of the honour and performing of duties belonging to everyone in their several relations, as superiors, inferiors and equals (Shorter Catechism). The specific superior here is the civil government and ordinary masters.

Obeying authority is obeying God. Peter opened with the words asking his audience to submit to every ordinance of man. Father and mother form the basic institution of human society and are ordained of God. Authority begins from the home and obedience begins here to the highest One which is God Himself. This is the main precept of the aforementioned commandment.

The Apostle asserted that the civil government was ordained of God. The Apostle lived under the Roman government; he grew up at the time of Jesus and learnt a few lessons. As an Apostle of the Lord, he learnt of a Christian's duty to the government. He learnt one practical lesson from Jesus (Matt 17:25-27). Jesus Himself paid taxes to the Roman government. In a related instance, the leaders of the Jews told their officers to ask Jesus if it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar. The question was a trap to catch Jesus, but He did not answer as they had expected. The Lord gave the often quoted answer that they should give to Caesar what belonged to Caesar and to God what belonged to God (Matt 22:15-21). It was thus lawful to pay taxes. Jesus also set an example when He submitted to the trial under Pilate. The governor passed an unjust sentence on Him but He still submitted.

The instructions of Jesus led Peter to expound more on the establishment of civil government. He said that they were sent for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of the obedient.

**THOUGHT:** Submission brings harmony in human society.

**PRAYER:** Lord, teach me when to submit.

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## SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY (II)

Apart from sustaining harmony in society, the civil government has many other responsibilities that encourage righteousness to the good of her citizens. It is an authority ordained by God and it is the duty of a Christian citizen to obey. This will render a good testimony and put to silence the ignorant and the foolish. When Israel was under the direct rule of God (i.e. theocracy), all the laws were incorporated into one under Moses. Under the kings, the religious matters were under the priests. The moral law, however, applied at all times. Obedience to authority came under the civil law, and jurisdiction was delegated to the office of the king. At the time of writing of this epistle, the Jews were expecting to be liberated from the rule of the Romans, but the Lord’s message to Christians was to obey.

The Apostle urged that Christian liberty must not be used as a cloak of malice, but to serve God. On a positive note, Peter exhorted that honour should be given to all. It is seen in love for the brethren, the fear of God and honour to the king. Thus, all (superiors, inferiors and equals) are to coexist in harmony. In the days of Peter, servants were not employees who were paid a monthly wage, but were permanent servants whose basic needs were provided for. They were required to be subject to their masters in all things. Peter instructed them to obey both good and bad masters. That order was abused and the situation deteriorated to slavery and human trafficking. International treaties were made to put that to an end.

This command is addressed to employees today as well employers. A mutual understanding is needful for each to fulfil their duties and live in love toward one another. The Apostle counselled that we must put God first and be ready to endure injustice for His sake. He said, *“For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully”* (1 Pet 2:19). Such endurance does not come naturally, but one needs commitment out of a heart that fears God.

**THOUGHT:** Obedience to any authority has to be in the Lord.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may Thy justice be my shield and defender.

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## ENDURING SUFFERING IS GOD’S WILL

Pain is negative, and it is never pleasant to anyone; thus to associate it with God is incompatible with our human line of thought. However, God sees it differently and the Apostle Peter repeated what is contained in the doctrine of Christ: *“For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God”* (1 Pet 2:20). Christ set the example in this regard when He offered Himself. Though the chief priests sent officers with great force to arrest Him, Jesus said that it was not difficult for Him to ask the Father for legions of angels to protect Him. However, He did not do this, but submitted to the will of His accusers. His endurance was foretold by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 53:7), and this prophecy had to be fulfilled. Peter added that we should follow in His steps. Peter said this having himself learnt the lesson from Christ. He was also in the eye of the storm in all that befell Christ. He attempted to protect the Lord and even cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest, but Christ forbade him. Peter submitted to Him who judges righteously.

The Son of God died to bear the penalty of our sins on the cross. There is no pain that one can endure that is worse than that of the Roman cross. It was designed as a means of executing the worst of criminals. Crucifixion began with scourging with a whip that had sharp bits attached to it that would tear off the flesh of the victim. Then he would have to carry the heavy cross to the place of crucifixion and be nailed to it. Like in the case of Christ, they would have to endure hours of pain and finally death. This is the price that Christ paid to purchase our redemption and to give us life. He did this for the joy that was set before Him, that is, the salvation of sinners. He died that we might live to righteousness. Peter could not give a better example than that of the Lord. Peter said that we were as sheep gone astray, but are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. When you keep the law, you are part of God’s redeemed.

**THOUGHT:** Obeying Him fulfils the whole law.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always follow Thy example.

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## SUBMISSION IN THE FAMILY

Peter's writing on the subject of submission continues. He now focused on the family. When there is harmony within this nucleus unit, there will be harmony beyond. God designed nature to be so. Believers have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and they are to set an example in keeping this commandment. There will be continued peace and harmony when they are obedient to God. The Apostle spelt out the roles of all members of the family in seeking this goal.

The wife is to submit to her husband. This is again in line with the command to honour father and mother. A wider observation of the command includes all superiors, inferiors and equals. The husband and wife have many things to share every day. Their adherence to the biblical order will give them a peaceful coexistence. They are to understand their roles and respect each other. In many cases, the commandment has been misused by both husbands and wives. Men use it to oppress their wives, and fail to show love as they are commanded. Wives overreact and reject the commandment altogether. Such scenarios create confusion and open doors to multiple problems. In the end, God is ignored and the parties concerned live in misery. On the other hand, the Apostle asserted that if there were those who did not obey the Word, these may without the Word be won by the chaste conduct of the wives. The believing wives become a living testimony. Such conduct, coupled with fear, is necessary.

It is true, as Peter said, that women like to adorn themselves beautifully on the external. The Apostle objected to such mere external adorning and exhorted women to adorn themselves internally, just as holy women who trusted God also adorned themselves by being in subjection to their own husbands. The true and valuable adorning is the one hidden in the heart which is not corruptible. This is shown in a meek and quiet spirit which in the sight of God is of a great price.

**THOUGHT:** Love builds families.

**PRAYER:** Lord, give us homes where obedience reigns.

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## THE EXAMPLE OF WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

Peter gave the example of Sarah (Abraham’s wife) who obeyed Abraham and called him “lord.” Such an address reveals a meek spirit that is willing to obey as the Word of God commands. Peter said that the believing women are daughters of Sarah as long as they do well and not be afraid. The extent of rebellion on the part of the women in the days of the Apostles is not known. However, the fact that Peter gave this exhortation shows that there may have been some problems in the church in relation to the conduct of the women.

The Apostle’s word was meant to correct that situation. The language of the Scripture and the expectation from the Lord is that His children should always conform to His commandments. This will bring about meaningful relationships and fellowship. There are women named in the Bible who have done well and are good examples to follow. In the New Testament, the testimony of Priscilla stands out. She was a constant companion of her husband in the ministry. Every time her name is mentioned, she would be serving together with her husband Aquila in the ministry. She was active and knew the Scriptures well and received Paul’s commendation for her good example.

In the world, there is much debate about the place of women in society. There are feminist movements that advocate gender equality. Many feel that women have a raw deal and therefore they form organisations to fight for women’s rights. Their grievances may be reasonable or may be extreme. Believers, however, have a guide from God’s Word on how to live peaceably. They must not be carried away by the current of the world. The stability of a family depends greatly on the relationship between the husband and wife. This begins with the love for God and with learning to fear Him. Both husband and wife have to be of one mind in this regard so that each plays his or her role and God is honoured. In turn, He blesses them.

**THOUGHT:** A home where there is love is a wealthy home.

**PRAYER:** Lord, build godly homes among Thy people.

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15

**1 PETER 3:1-12**

JOB 1:1-3

*“...and that man was perfect  
and upright, and one that  
feared God, and eschewed evil.”*

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## THE ROLE OF THE HUSBAND

Peter commanded husbands to give due honour to their wives. He added that though the wife was the weaker vessel, husband and wife together were heirs of the grace of life. This order of things will exist only in this earthly life. This is because the Lord Jesus said that in the resurrection there will be no marriage (Matt 22:30). In the mansions above, there will be no martial relations. It will be a wonderful fellowship of the saints. While believers wait for that glorious state, the order on earth now is to obey God in submission one to another. The Apostle added that when they live as instructed by the Word of God, their prayers will not be hindered. The husband is given the role of leadership; he is to lead not only in external matters but also in their relationship with God.

The story of Job is the best example in this regard. The Bible says that he offered sacrifices every day for each of his children, for he assumed that his children have sinned and cursed God. When the crisis instigated by Satan hit the family, Job's wife was desperate and lost all hope. In that hysteria, she told Job to curse God and die. Job stood firm and told his wife that she was speaking like a foolish woman. He continued to wait on the Lord. In the end, he received double blessings from God. He died a happy man and full of days. He showed what leadership in the family means.

Next, are the children. In line with the same commandment, they are to honour their parents in the Lord. Every member of the family is included here. This does not come about easily. The extended family will include relatives, neighbours and friends. When they remain trusting in God, He will lead them to bear a good testimony for Him.

The exhortations above fortify the requirements of the fifth commandment and is in keeping with the Law of God.

**THOUGHT:** *“...he that will love life, and see good days...”*

**PRAYER:** Lord, may our husbands eschew evil, and do good.

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## **BELIEVER’S RESPONSE TO SUFFERING**

Christians are not free from trouble. The Lord may bring sufferings as a means of testing their faith. At the same time, Satan may instigate trouble and great suffering in his efforts to get believers to sin against God. The classic case in this regard is that of Job. Peter visited this subject and gave counsel showing that sufferings can be for a good purpose.

Suffering is part of the faith. God’s children are free from harm when they follow that which is good. The Apostle asserted this through a rhetorical question. Since they live in a sinful world, there will be those who will delight in inflicting pain on believers even though they are innocent. Peter counselled that suffering for righteousness was a joy.

Barnes added, “While it is true that the Saviour was persecuted by wicked people, though his life was wholly spent in doing good; while it is true that the apostles were put to death, though following his example; and while it is true that good people have often suffered persecution, though laboring only to do good, still it is true as a general thing that a life of integrity and benevolence conduces to safety, even in a wicked world... nothing else would give security but confidence in their integrity... Compare Psalm 37:3-6.”

There is freedom from fear and trouble; these were fitting consolations for the immediate recipients of this letter because they had no freedom to exercise their religion. God was their protection, and Peter was confident that they would come out successfully. The Apostle was preparing them to handle any situation which they would find in the exercise of their faith. The changes that came to the church later in history show that Christians were better off under persecution than when they were free. Believers who were true in the exercise of their religion could stand under any circumstances.

**THOUGHT:** Hypocrites will not be willing to suffer for the faith.

**PRAYER:** Lord, give us hearts wholly given to Thee.

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17

**1 PETER 3:13-22**

MATTHEW 13:20-21

*“...when tribulation...  
ariseeth because of the word,  
by and by he is offended.”*

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## SURE STEPS IN SUFFERING

Any kind of suffering is never comfortable, yet this is part of the cross that Jesus said that His disciples must bear. Peter himself was cast into prison more than once and the Lord rescued him miraculously. Extra-biblical history said that Peter died a martyr's death, being crucified upside down at his own request, as he did not think himself worthy to be equated with Christ in his method of death. However, pain is pain and thus he suffered. God gave him the grace, as per his own words, to bear that persecution. He told his audience to sanctify the Lord in their hearts. The Lord knows the hearts of believers more than what they say.

It is necessary for every Christian to commit his trust in Him without wavering. This gives Christians confidence and joy in the midst of oppression. They will have a deep knowledge of the Word of God. Martyrdom has done great service to the Church more than any other effort that has been made to proclaim the gospel. One post-apostolic saint named Polycarp (when faced with death for his faith) remarked that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.” The Apostle said that the defence of the faith was to be made with meekness and fear. Recent history of the Church reveals great persecution of believers mostly in countries that were dominated by the former Soviet Union. Presently, most Muslim countries do not allow evangelism or voluntary conversion. Regardless of all these, the Lord has made it possible for many to hear the gospel and there are Christians who are faithful even in the most unexpected places.

When the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to His disciples, He also said that persecution would come, but they would overcome by enduring and that they would be given wisdom to answer any false charge. Meekness and fear is a demonstration of a true Christian spirit based on love and the fear of the Lord. All committed Christians will allow these counsels to guide them in whatever situation they find themselves in.

**THOUGHT:** Revenge is not part of the defence in persecution.

**PRAYER:** Lord, grant Thy wisdom to our suffering brethren.

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## CONFIDENCE IN SUFFERING

The term "Christian" was a derogatory term first given to the disciples of Christ at Antioch. It was in this renowned Greek city that Christianity prospered in the early church. The believers embraced that term with great joy. It has since become the identifying mark of all believers in Christ.

Those early disciples had confidence and the Lord made their testimony a means of taking the gospel to other lands. (Note: Paul and Barnabas were commissioned as the first Christian missionaries from the church in that city.) Peter added that though they might be seen as evil-doers, their accusers would be ashamed when they beheld their good conduct in the Lord. Truth gives confidence to the disciples of Christ. Their conduct cannot be hidden even among those who oppose them or do not share the same faith.

The Apostle added that it was better that they suffered in well-doing, and not as evil-doers. Their suffering included physical, mental and spiritual sufferings. Reading the Psalms and many of the lives of the saints in the Bible will illustrate this point. Take the case of Daniel in the sixth chapter of his book. He was faithfully discharging the duties of his office in the Babylonian government. He was successful and had an irreproachable conduct. But, those around him were full of jealousy. They devised a way of catching him as they tricked the king into signing a law that would see Daniel cast into the den of lions to be mauled to death by the hungry beasts. The law forbade anyone from praying to any god (other than the king) for thirty days. Their trick worked, but God intervened and saved Daniel miraculously. In the end, his accusers were thrown into that same den and perished. The salvation of believers may not come the same way it came to Daniel, but God will always be on their side.

**THOUGHT:** Confidence in the Lord is a source of joy.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me be confident in any adversity.

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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19

1 PETER 3:13-22

PSALM 69:4-9

“...the reproaches of them  
that reproached thee  
are fallen upon me.”

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## THE POSITION OF CHRISTIANS IN ADVERSITY

Christ suffered for a good cause. He suffered, died and was resurrected in order that we may be saved and have eternal life.

There are various interpretations to 1 Peter 3:19-20, but the important point is that eight souls were saved. Christ has the power to save. Adam Clarke explained, “The inhabitants of the antediluvian world, who, having been disobedient, and convicted of the most flagrant transgressions against God, were sentenced. . . ; and the long-suffering of God waited one hundred and twenty years, . . . during which time, as criminals tried and convicted, they are represented as being in prison – detained under the arrest of Divine justice, which waited either for their repentance or the expiration of the respite, that the punishment pronounced might be inflicted.”

Christ is now in an exalted position. In the Beatitudes, He said, *“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”* (Matt 5:11-12).

The Apostle and other disciples had first-hand experience in the matter of suffering. As followers of Christ, they were regarded by the Jews as outcasts and were persecuted to death. The Romans also were against them as followers of an illegal sect. They also had traitors within. These experiences made Peter pen these words to encourage the remnant. They could only be happy when they took suffering positively. They were to live in confidence that God had a purpose in what befell them.

**THOUGHT:** A mistaken zeal in a Christian is dangerous.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me be zealous in righteousness.

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## THE EXTENT OF SUFFERING IN RELATION TO SIN

Peter continued to expound on the subject of suffering. He gave new insights to the disciples that this painful aspect was part of their faith. He counselled them to serve after the example of Christ and take any afflictions positively. Their reward shall be far greater than the present pain. This would give glory to God, the faithful Creator.

Peter said that Christ suffered in the flesh and thus believers were to follow in His steps. The rejection of sin means that one no longer lives after the flesh and lusts of men but after the will of God. The will of God is revealed in His moral precepts and the Apostle counselled that God's children must follow this path. There has to be a transformation from one's past ungodly life. The deeds that accompanied that ungodly life are thus listed as works of the flesh. Anyone who is thus engaged is spiritually dead.

However, salvation that comes in Christ brings a visible change. Peter observed that those who see them think it strange that they do not run after those fleshly things. This affirms that the profession of faith in Christ leads to a changed life. This bears a good testimony that a transformation has occurred in the heart. The transgressors also have their time of reckoning for God has appointed a day of judgment. At that time, all will give an account of what they have done and a time of retribution would follow. The gospel was preached to those who have died for a purpose. These refer to believers who have died in and for the faith. They also will have to give an account, but their reward will be joy as they live according to God in the Spirit.

The Apostle's counsel at the end was to watch and pray. When we are closer to the Lord and are faithful to Him, we will submit to His will. Rendering charitable service to others is also a sure means of walking with the Lord.

**THOUGHT:** The righteous expect blessed rewards from the Lord.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me not suffer as an evil doer.

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## LOVE SUSTAINS TRUE FELLOWSHIP

Love is the identifying mark of a Christian; Christ affirmed this and the Apostles also taught this. There must be a demonstration of love in every Christian fellowship. Peter added that this will cover a multitude of sins. Love for God and your neighbour are the first and the second commandments in the Law. Thus, keeping of each of the Ten Commandments is keeping the whole Law, and keeping sin at bay. It is above all things needful to heed this counsel.

The Apostle recommended hospitality as one means of keeping the commandment. (Note: A pastor is required to be hospitable.) The Lord Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan as a good example of rendering hospitality to a stranger. The Samaritan did what the priest and the Levite did not do: he saw the need of that robbery victim and gave him first aid and took him to an inn. Guest houses in those days served as nursing homes as well. The good neighbour took care of all the needs of the victim. One can imagine the friendly relationship that developed between the two men after that time. The Lord Jesus commended that action as an example to be imitated.

The Apostle added that every man has received a gift and so they ought to minister to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. This is also a way of showing gratitude to God for the blessings He has bestowed. In addition to external deeds, our speech also carries much weight in showing our desire to minister to others. Thus, we are to speak the oracles of God; this is a spiritual ministry that will edify others. It is to be done according to the ability that God has given to us. When we speak for Christ and build true Christian fellowship, Peter saw the outcome and said, *“...God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen”* (1 Pet 4:11b). This is an echo of heavenly fellowship and surpasses all earthly sufferings.

**THOUGHT:** What do you share with your friend’s friend?

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me show love as a witness for Thee.

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22

1 PETER 4:12-19

PSALM 37:5-7

*“Rest in the LORD,  
and wait patiently for him:  
fret not thyself...”*

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## REPROACH OF CHRISTIANS

A reproach to Christians for the name of Christ is their glory. Peter himself and John were brought a number of times before the council of the Jews to answer charges about their teachings. In Acts 5:41, they departed from the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Peter was writing these words out of experience. He added that the Spirit of glory and of God rested upon them. The adversary speaks evil, but on the part of believers God is glorified. Peter warned that none should suffer as a murderer or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busybody in other people's affairs. However, if one suffers for being a Christian, then God is glorified.

There were many hostile forces against the church at the time of the writing of this epistle. The counsel given (such as Peter's) was meant to prepare the church for the task ahead so that the faithful may win the battle in those early years. The suffering that they went through was meant to consolidate their faith and became a pattern for the church in all ages. The Apostle's evaluation was a strategy that would bring victory. As in any venture, there will still be casualties. A fellow apostle with Peter became the first martyr and the adversary's intention was also to get rid of Peter, but the Lord saved him. Regardless of all these, they had their eyes fixed on victory and they never turned back.

Judgment begins in the house of God. Even though the righteous will not be punished, they will need a clean bill of spiritual health. The disobedient will also face judgment and punishment. It will be a sad time and this calls for urgency in preaching the gospel. However, those who suffer according to the will of God are asked to commit their souls to Him, for God is the faithful Creator. He knows what is best for His people. The exhortations of the Apostle give more insights on suffering. Christ was their example. The disciples went through the same. Today's believers too are to take sufferings positively.

**THOUGHT:** Reproach is part of the cross that Christ calls us to bear.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me take up my cross gladly.

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## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF ELDERS

As a pastor, Peter had the duty of declaring the oracles of God to the flock. But he was more than a pastor, he was also an Apostle and a witness of the works of Christ. By God’s grace, he became the leader of the Apostles. He then wrote to guide the elders and the church. This becomes the pattern that guides the church today as well.

Peter addressed the elders of the church and identified himself as an elder with them. He was a first-hand witness of the sufferings of Christ. Originally, he was a fisherman and the Lord called him and he became one of the earliest disciples of Christ. Jesus told him and others to follow Him and He would make them fishers of men. This placed a duty upon them to preach the gospel of Christ and to lead men to salvation. Jesus taught them and on more than one occasion He sent them to preach in the villages. During His last days on earth, before He was taken up to heaven, He commissioned them to go and preach the gospel to the entire world. Peter was thus qualified in theological knowledge, and the Holy Spirit was his Teacher and Guide. Later, he affirmed that the writing of the Scriptures was the work of holy men of God who were led by the Holy Spirit.

The main duty of church elders is to feed the flock of God. The Lord Jesus Christ called Himself the Good Shepherd. The use of the same term in reference to elders places the same duty on them. Shepherding is providing spiritual food to God’s flock. Peter instructed the elders on how to carry out their duty. They were to be examples to the flock, and not be as lords over the flock. They were to serve with a willing heart and a ready mind, and not by constraint. Peter learnt his lesson well from the Lord that anyone who wishes to be a leader must humble himself as a little child. The spirit of humility, however, is missing today where modern clergy lord over their people. A true elder must measure himself against the standard set by the Apostle.

**THOUGHT:** The office of an elder is a good work.

**PRAYER:** Lord, raise up worthy elders in Thy church.

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## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SAINTS (I)

A church has Christ as the Head, elders as shepherds, and other officers and the laity. All these have to work to bring to pass the will of Christ. The Apostle asked his readers to submit to the elders and avoid pride (1 Pet 5:5-6). The Apostle cited the Scriptures in Proverbs and Isaiah to clarify his message. Humility has its reward, he asserted. He also asked them to cast all their cares upon God for He cares for them.

At the same time they have an adversary, the devil. He told them to be vigilant and sober because the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about seeking whom he may devour. He told them to put up a strong resistance by faith against the devil, because the same afflictions also come to their brethren that are in the world. Knowing that they were in the company of other faithful brethren would encourage them to endure afflictions. Through much tribulation Christians will enter into the kingdom of heaven. The devil was the prime mover in the transgression of Adam that plunged the whole humanity into the misery of sin. In other examples, the devil is restless when he sees saints prospering and walking with God. He will seek to blackmail and defeat these believers.

Readiness is needful and God's children are told to put on the whole armour of God so as able to overcome the wiles of the devil and to withstand in the day of evil (Eph 6:11, 13). This resistance requires wisdom from above in order to overcome, for the ways of the devil are subtle and believers need wise, godly perception in order to overcome. As the saying goes, a stitch in time saves nine; there must be quick action to overthrow the deceptions of the evil one. The church must look to God for blessing, help and direction to fulfil their God-given duties.

**THOUGHT:** Christians are soldiers of the cross.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let all members of my church be responsible.

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## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SAINTS (II)

In the benediction which Peter penned in this epistle, he cited the blessings that the saints have in the Lord. He said that God is the God of all grace. His gift of salvation is free and all who submit to Him are bestowed with the heritage of eternal life. This glorious gift comes in Jesus Christ.

The Apostle did not exonerate believers from suffering, but said that God will make them perfect, establish, strengthen and settle them. Those early days were a difficult time for the leaders to shepherd the flock and to continue building up the flock. Thus, Peter appealed to God who has all the glory and dominion for ever. God, with all those attributes, shows that there is none like Him. Committing the saints into His hands was the best protection they could have. God is the Creator and He knows and determines the destiny of all His creatures. The saints have a perfect protection. The Apostle could not look anywhere for their protection than in God who is able to do all things.

In the brief epilogue, Peter revealed the kind of fellowship he had with the other brethren. He mentioned the name of Silvanus, the church in Babylon and Marcus. He showed that the letter was actually penned by Silvanus who acted as his secretary. He described him as a faithful brother. He was a disciple and had the calling to serve the Lord. Peter encouraged him and assigned him important duties. The reference to Babylon has been assumed to be a figure of speech referring to Rome. The location of this church however is of no consequence; the point is that he referred to believers in a church. Marcus is Mark, who wrote the gospel. Tradition credits him for the establishment of the church in Egypt. Peter affirmed a communion of saints. The guide he gave is worthy of our attention. His words are not just for brief exhortations; they are the foundation of the church for ever.

**THOUGHT:** Our hope is the crown of glory offered in Jesus Christ.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let us build a church that shall appear in heaven.

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## **CHRISTMAS HAS A MESSAGE OF SALVATION (I)**

The message of Christmas is not about feasting, decoration or big sales. It is a memorial of one of the greatest events in human history when the Son of God became the Son of Man. It is the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Much has been said and written about this day, whether it is for or against. Those who oppose the celebration of Christmas allege that it originates from a pagan holiday. Others object to it because of the commercialism associated with it. Some objections may have valid reasons. However, as Christians, our celebration is not related to what others do or say about Christmas. We observe the day because it carries significant meaning to us. We are celebrating the birth of Christ, not the day. The understanding of the meaning of the first advent of Christ will make all the events associated with this day significant. In the narratives in the four gospels, much was said regarding the work and Person of Jesus Christ. At Christmas, these passages are given special focus.

Besides others, Matthew 1:21-23 carries the main message of the first coming of Christ. It says, *“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”* Jesus is the Saviour and His birth is by God’s eternal plan. God dwells among men through His Son Jesus Christ.

Christ’s birth is a cause for celebration and joy, but its remembrance is not a command of God. Anyone who does not wish to celebrate it breaks no law of God. However, there are great advantages in its observation: it is a testimony to the world and a means of reaching out to unbelievers. The celebration cannot be written off, but it is there to stay as a witness for our Lord.

**THOUGHT:** Jesus Christ is Emmanuel.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may the spirit of Christmas speak for Thee.

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## **CHRISTMAS HAS A MESSAGE OF SALVATION (II)**

The supernatural virgin conception of Christ is one of the qualities that makes Him the Saviour. He had to be sinless in order to be able to save sinners. As a result of the fall of Adam, all his posterity was born with the heritage of that original sin. Christ however did not have a human father and He was sinless. The virgin birth was God's way to ensure that the Lamb of God can take away the sins of the world. God is His eternal Father and remains so even at His incarnation. That is why He is called the only begotten Son. This shows the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. It may not be easy to understand this in human terms, for the being of God is beyond human comprehension. We accept it as it is taught in the Bible.

The birth of Christ was a miracle that puzzled everyone; even Mary questioned its possibility when the angel first made the announcement to her. All who came to learn of the conception were confused. The Scripture text foretelling this event is very clear; it was done in fulfilment of prophecy. This was in reference to the 700-year prediction by the prophet Isaiah. This was so specific that no one can doubt. Men seem to be slow to accept prophecies in Scripture when they come to pass. Christ can be the Saviour because He was sinless. God made it possible for Him to become man so as to identify Himself with man. The highlighting of the narratives on His birth at Christmas is meant to bring the message to those who need Him, that they may be brought to the salvation offered freely through the atoning work of Christ.

In the Old Testament era, the animal sacrifices foreshadowed Christ's sacrificial work as these offerings comprised of clean domestic animals without any physical defect. Secondly, these were offered by the priests only. Christ by His suffering and death became both a priest and also a sacrifice.

**THOUGHT:** Christ is the Priest who takes away the sins of men.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I celebrate Christmas meaningfully.

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### **CHRISTMAS HAS A MESSAGE OF SALVATION (III)**

Prior to the narrative of Christ's birth in the Gospel of Matthew, there is a list of His ancestral line in the flesh which traces His lineage to Abraham. Luke also has the same list but it goes beyond Abraham to Adam. What is stressed here in the genealogy is that Jesus came from the house of David. The scepter of the kingdom over His brethren was given in Genesis 49:8-12. Both Mary and Joseph came from that royal family. Mary became the virgin mother, while Joseph was the legal father. If Jesus was born in the days of monarchy, He would have qualified to sit upon the earthly throne of Israel as king. He is indeed King, but of a different order. This will be fully revealed at His second advent. Christ must be a king to become the eternal Saviour. A king is a protector and a ruler of the people. He is so declared by the prophets. He was also no less a prophet.

The name Jesus means Saviour. Jesus' role as the Saviour of the world is embodied in His name. He lives to fulfil that calling contained in His name. This name was given to Him by the angel before He was born. The Scripture says that Mary kept in her heart all the things that the angel said.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem according to the prophecy of Micah. Every detail regarding His first coming was accurate. His ministry began when He began to reveal Himself to the world. His first miracle was at Cana of Galilee; and others followed. He also chose a team among His disciples and after His ascension, He delegated to them the responsibility of preaching the gospel of His kingdom here on earth. Christ was born in the fullness of time by God's appointment and He came with humility to live among men and identified Himself with them. This coming was God's greatest gift to mankind. This is cause for rejoicing, reflected in the observation of the day of His birth.

**THOUGHT:** There is joy in accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may this Christmas testify unto Thee.

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## GOD DOES NOT CHANGE WITH TIME

Psalm 90 is attributed to Moses and may be the oldest Psalm that was written (about the same time as Genesis). Moses addressed the subject of time and its limitation. As a prayer, Moses showed his regard for God and God’s concept of time. He also showed God’s reaction to sin and asserted the limit of man’s life. He ended with a prayer in relation to the truths he has expressed. This is how we are to number our days.

God is eternal and is our dwelling place in all generations. These opening remarks of the psalm acknowledge an attribute of God. Moses was the writer of the account of Creation in the book of Genesis and he had first-hand knowledge of what God had done. He acknowledged that God was there before the world existed. He referred to God as a dwelling place because He is the One who upholds all His creations. Man was created and continues to live because God lives. He added that before the mountains appeared and before the earth was formed, God existed in eternity. The doctrine of the eternal existence of God is a mystery that human mind cannot comprehend. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* says this in part of God, “There is but one only living, and true God: who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory...” All these qualities attributed to God are found and expressed in different parts of the Scriptures and Moses was aware of these and he tried to express these in this psalm.

The relationship that God has with man requires that man remains close to Him. However, due to sin, man has been separated from God. God calls the children of man to return to Him.

**THOUGHT:** God has concern for the crown of His creation: man.

**PRAYER:** Lord, may the passage of time not change my position.

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 29

PSALM 90

EPHESIANS 5:15-17

*“Redeeming the time,  
because the days are evil.”*

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## GOD’S CONCEPT OF TIME

Since God is infinite, He is not confined by time. Moses declared in plain language that in God’s sight a thousand years is as yesterday when it is past and as a watch in the night. God has existed from eternity. Thus, length of time to Him is nothing. The account of Creation said that He was able to create everything in the world in six days, and He did this by the word of His mouth.

The work that He did in that short time would take ages for man to study its details. Even with that effort, man cannot comprehend the physical world. God has power over all these things and knows everything. On the other hand, the time factor is important for man because God had created man to work according to a given time factor. When He created the sun and the moon, it was specifically stated that they were created to regulate time and seasons. In effect, this forms the operating mode in the life of man. Thus while time is not a confining factor to God, man has a responsibility to regulate himself according to the passage of time. Since man is the creation of God, He has ordered the regulation of time for the benefit of man. Man has a responsibility to make use of time wisely.

The measurement of time in years has been counted for generations and events of history are identified with the time in which they occurred. The measurement of time in months is mainly useful in agricultural productivity as there will be seasons of ploughing, sowing and harvesting. Today, employers mainly pay their employees by the month. Thus, time governs much in the field of labour. The days of the week also are useful and the Scripture gives a guide on the use of that time unit. One day in seven belongs to the service and worship of God, and six days are to be used for secular duties. In the Old Testament, there were other days and particular feasts set apart for the service of God.

**THOUGHT:** God is not governed by time.

**PRAYER:** Lord, teach me to use my time wisely.

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## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SIN AND TIME

God responds to sin with anger. It was after Creation that God made a covenant of works with Adam, but it was not long before man transgressed that solemn pledge. This made God angry. God knows all the secret sins of man, and He is angry with them.

The relationship between sin and time is obvious. A person takes time to think and subsequently commits sin. When time is used wisely, there is no time for sin. Thus, good use of time is in conformity with God’s will. Since the thoughts of men are only evil continually as in the days of Noah, Moses asserted that they passed away in wrath. The years are spent as a tale that is told. The years of man are brief due to sin. Moses put the lifespan of man at an average of seventy, up to eighty years. These words were penned many centuries ago, yet this is the reality of man’s life today. In Genesis 5, there is a genealogy of the people who lived before the flood. They lived up to nine centuries. The oldest was Methuselah who lived to be nine hundred and sixty nine years. The majority of them lived above nine hundred years. After the flood, the years came down drastically to below two hundred years, and subsequently it was below one hundred years. Those mentioned by Moses here are those who die natural deaths, but there will be those who die earlier because of sickness, accidents and other causes. The reason for all these is sin. Thus Moses asked rhetorically as to who would know the anger of God. The fear of God goes hand in hand with God’s wrath.

God sets the years of a man’s life. He also has power over the activities of men. Moses requested that God may teach us to number our days. Our modern way of life demands that man works according to a given time line. High-tech gadgets regulate the time for us. These are meant to help in making good use of time.

**THOUGHT:** The festivities that welcome the New Year and greetings are all reminders of the quick passage of time.

**PRAYER:** *“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”*

## SCRIPTURAL WISDOM IS COMMON SENSE

When one is conscious of time, one is wise. Scripture is designated a book of wisdom and the overall sum is that one has to use it as common sense and live according to it. When it comes to the use of time, it is common sense that one who idles away his time becomes poor and other evils follow in his lifestyle.

Moses spoke of this out of personal experience. He lived in Pharaoh’s palace in the first forty years of his life. He gave heed to wise counsel and left the luxury of a royal home to become a shepherd. He spent the next forty years of his life in that lowly job. He was ready to die then according to the span of life that God gives. God, however, gave him another forty years, and greater responsibility. When he died, he did not show any signs of aging. His physical faculties were functioning well. He knew what God had done for him and he spent his time meaningfully. He became a great man.

He prayed that the Lord would repent concerning His servants. This does not mean that God would change His mind, but that He would make sinners conform to His will so that they are spared the pain of His wrath. He also prays for early satisfaction and happy days. Happiness comes when one knows God and makes use of his days to please Him. Though Moses was known to walk with God, he identified himself with the transgressors in Israel and sought forgiveness on their behalf. He also prayed for God’s work and His glory to be manifested to His children. Lastly, he prayed for the beauty of the Lord to be upon them that their works may be established. Time spent for God brings all these blessings.

Moses was granted wisdom to make this prayer to God and to pen it down for a permanent record. It is a fitting prayer in a time of transition. It helps us to understand that even though a man changes, God is always the same. He does not change. Let us look to Him and stand for Him.

**THOUGHT:** Only God can give me direction for the future.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let scriptural wisdom be my common sense.

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To: **The RPG Ministry**

Calvary Pandan B-P Church

201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609 337

Tel: (65)-6560 1111 Fax: (65)-6561 1861 Email: rpg@calvarypandan.sg

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