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“The 3 Epistles of John and The Epistle to the Ephesians”

by
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About the Author



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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 1

1 JOHN 1:1

LUKE 24:39

*“Behold my hands and my feet,
that it is I myself ...”*

THE EPISTLE OF 1 JOHN

John was one of the earliest disciples of Christ. He was a fellow fisherman of Peter and James before the Lord called them. “... *James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him*” (Luke 5:10-11). Thus was John introduced onto the Gospel scene.

He is the same who wrote the Gospel named after him. He referred to himself as “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” (John 21:20). He and his brother James once requested Jesus to grant them the privilege of sitting at His right and left hand at the kingdom of heaven. In response, the Lord told them that their request was impossible, but their commitment to Him would result in great suffering. As it turned out, James became the first martyr while John became the last Apostle to die. This short background tells us of the context of the three epistles of Apostle John.

“The external evidence for the authorship of First John shows that from the beginning it was universally received without dispute as authoritative. It was used by Polycarp (who knew John in his youth) and Papias in the second century, and later in that century Irenaeus (who knew Polycarp in his youth) specifically attributed it to the Apostle John. All Greek and Latin church fathers accepted this epistle as Johannine.” (Source: *The Open Bible*, introduction to 1 John.) It is thus part of the New Testament Canon and is used confidently as the inspired Word of God.

THOUGHT: The writing of this epistle came with a cost.

PRAYER: Lord, let me always have confidence in Thy written Word.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2

1 JOHN 1:1-7
HEBREWS 11:5

*“... he had this testimony,
that he pleased God.”*

FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST

God is light; God is love; and God is life. These are some of the comparisons that John used to describe what God was to him. He was living in a close fellowship with the God of light, and thus he was not in darkness.

Jesus Christ is the theme of this epistle. It encourages God's children to have fellowship with Jesus Christ. This includes knowing Him and walking in His light and confessing their sins to Him. Confession and forgiveness of sins go hand in hand. Obedience in word and deed ought to follow so that fellowship with Christ becomes meaningful.

Those who have fellowship with Him have a meaningful quality of life. This is only possible after the second birth. Nicodemus who was discussing this matter with Christ in John 3 did not know that the Lord was referring to the spiritual and not the physical. To be born again is a spiritual birth that comes by faith in Jesus Christ. This transformation leads one to have the life of God which is eternal life. Walking with God is walking in His light, love and life.

The saints' fellowship with Christ did not begin only after His incarnation. He had fellowship with the saints in the Old Testament, as seen in the example of Enoch: *“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God”* (Heb 11:5).

What is your fellowship with Him like?

THOUGHT: “What a fellowship, what a joy divine!”

PRAYER: Lord, may I always walk close to Thee.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3

1 JOHN 1:1-7

JOHN 14:6-7

*“If ye had known me,
ye should have known my Father also ...”*

JOHN'S DESCRIPTION OF GOD

John used simple language in his epistles, unlike other New Testament writers. His messages were straightforward and clear. His readers could easily understand him. Light, love and life are everyday words that he used to describe God.

When he said that God is light, he was saying that anyone who has fellowship with God must walk in the light. The requirement to walk in the light means that one must walk in obedience to the commandments of God. This includes regular confession of sins (to God, not to a human priest). In this the blood of Christ will continually cleanse us. Christ serves as our Advocate before the Father. When we walk in the light, we give up any hatred that we may have against anyone and replace it with love. Factors that disrupt our walk with God include loving the world, being trapped by lies and false teachers, etc. These are the things that the Apostle saw in his day and he addressed them.

God is also love, and His children are also to walk in love. John stressed this when he said that if we do not have love we do not know God. Love is not an abstract idea, it must be practical. It is more than just talking about love. Our actions must show it. It is giving, not receiving. As described in Scripture, it has to be unconditional. That is why Jesus said we must love our enemies and pray for them. His love has all these qualities and when we follow in His steps, we will not see any condemnation. We will always walk with a clear conscience.

God is also life. Jesus Himself said that He is *“the way, the truth and the life”* (John 14:6). John had experienced God as life. When one is born again, the journey of spiritual life begins. Faith in Jesus Christ gives us God's life. Does your experience testify of these assertions about God?

THOUGHT: One must always walk in the light, show love and have life.

PRAYER: Lord, may I ever be the bearer of Thy light.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 4

1 JOHN 1:1-7

MATTHEW 16:13-17

*“Thou art the Christ,
the Son of the living God.”*

KNOWING CHRIST IS TO FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM

To know Christ is to fellowship with Him. Jesus Christ is God and the text introduces Him by ascribing to Him divine attributes. He was in eternity past and was there in the beginning, i.e. at the time of creation. There was none other except God at that beginning. John also described His human attributes. He heard Him speaking and saw Him with his physical eyes and touched Him with his hands. Jesus is called *“the Word of life”* (1 John 1:1). This is to say that God came down in human form.

The Apostle clearly expressed the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ. John was an eyewitness of all the things that were manifested in Jesus Christ. He is the eternal God because He was with the Father. The debate about the person of Jesus Christ began at the time of John.

The statement about the person of Jesus was finally made in the Council of Nicea in AD 325, and became a creed of the Church. The statement asserted that Christ was one person with two natures: the divine nature and the human nature. The Gospels speak of His life and work from the time of His birth to His ascension into heaven. John summed up all these to show that as disciples of Christ they knew much about Christ in the flesh.

The Apostle said that they were declaring the things that they had heard and seen so that those who heard their words had fellowship with them. Christian fellowship, unlike earthly friendship, is the coming together in mutual faith and sharing the blessings of Christ. It is one of the foundational practices of the early church.

The knowledge that the disciples had of Christ brought them together so that they defended the truth of the person of Jesus Christ. They embraced Him as their Lord and Saviour.

THOUGHT: Jesus Christ is God and He will for ever be God.

PRAYER: May Jesus Christ receive all glory and honour!

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 5

1 JOHN 1:1-7

ACTS 2:42

*“And they continued stedfastly
in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship ...”*

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The communion of saints is one of the affirmations of the Apostle’s Creed. This was formulated as one of the affirmations of the early church that one has to subscribe to before baptism. It was not only stated on paper, it guided the church in her practices. Fellowship brings believers together to hear God’s Word preached or read. They also needed to have faith to obey. Preaching also teaches Christian doctrines. This is one of the things that the early church was engaged in, together with the breaking of bread and prayer. These practices consolidated their faith and promoted fellowship.

Though the visible church on earth is not perfect, the elements of true faith must be exercised and seen for the edification of believers. John and the other Apostles gave guidelines on these external requirements. The visible church must have all the marks of a true church, which are taught in the Scripture by the Lord Himself.

In one of His parables, Jesus likened Himself to a vine and the disciples the branches. John 15:4-5, *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”* This was a challenge from the Lord, and John was one of those who heard Him, and now he was guiding his own disciples to similarly follow Christ.

THOUGHT: Christ is the perfect example in the communion of the saints.

PRAYER: Lord, may I never neglect communion with other saints.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 6

1 JOHN 1:1-7

MATTHEW 6:9-15

*“Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.”*

PRAYER AS PART OF FELLOWSHIP

Jesus taught His disciples to pray to the Father. He gave them guidelines on prayer attitudes and taught a sample prayer. Prayer constitutes fellowship with God. This is the kind of fellowship that the Apostle was talking about. The unregenerate heart is destitute of the guidance of the Holy Spirit and cannot have any fellowship with God. The Apostles were called to preach the gospel. Their preaching was aimed at leading lost sinners to the true and living God, so that they might be transformed and have fellowship with God. This is the declaration that John was referring to here.

Knowledge of Christ brings full joy. This real and true joy comes from God. Today many people are preoccupied with what the entertainment industry can offer them. What is offered is the most dominant activity in all media outlets. The so-called celebrities who run the industry are idols of many young people. It is needful that God's children occupy themselves with seeking God and making Him their true God. This is when they will find that needed joy. It comes by walking close to God through His Word. In Joshua 1:8, God told Joshua, *“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”*

Prayer goes hand in hand with the reading of God's Word, and it becomes a real dialogue with our Creator. Without Christ, there is no peace and there is no meaningful joy.

THOUGHT: I must watch and pray to sustain my fellowship with God.

PRAYER: Lord, let me find joy in Thee alone.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 7

1 JOHN 1:1-7

PSALM 119:11-12

*“Blessed art thou, O LORD:
teach me thy statutes.”*

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

Walking in the light leads to the manifestation of a godly character. Jesus is the *“light of the world”* (John 8:12). Thus to keep the doctrine of Christ is to follow His light. John wrote, *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). Light and darkness are two opposites. Light allows the full use of one’s eyesight and one can then act correctly. Darkness limits or renders useless one’s ability to see.

Light in today’s Bible text is not referring to physical light. It refers to the principles and virtues which will make a person act rightly. It is also descriptive of wisdom, guidance and favour. Jesus called Himself the Light of the world and the Apostle John used the same expression to show that he was speaking of Christ. He also said that God is light. The Psalmist also used the same expression: *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”* (Ps 119:105). The truth enshrined in God’s Word makes for the cornerstone of meaningful fellowship.

Walking in the light means obedience to Christ, a repeated truth in the text. In doing this the believer finds joy and confidence in God. John wrote to encourage this kind of fellowship and emphasized the importance of holding fast to this Apostolic doctrine.

At the time of the Apostle John, there were already false teachers and John wrote partly to refute them. He did this by stressing obedience to God’s Word, i.e. walking in the light.

THOUGHT: Darkness flees at the entrance of light.

PRAYER: Lord, may Thy Word always be a light to my path.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8

1 JOHN 1:1-10

1 SAMUEL 18:1-5

*“Then Jonathan and David made a covenant,
because he loved him as his own soul.”*

FELLOWSHIP AND TRUTH

Brethren living in fellowship are always to tell the truth to one another. It is not possible for one to claim to have fellowship with God and yet be walking in darkness. The claim can only be a lie. Christians can trust one another and build meaningful fellowship when they are truthful to one another.

A good example of Christian fellowship is the friendship between David and Jonathan in the Old Testament. They entered into a covenant of friendship that even death could not break. Jonathan was committed to protect David. After his death, David eulogised Jonathan saying that their love *“was wonderful, passing the love of women”* (2 Sam 1:26). When David became king, he sought Jonathan’s kin to show kindness to them for his friend’s sake. The measure of commitment to Christian fellowship is bound by love without hypocrisy.

The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia* and the word for love is *agape*. There are other words that are used to express the oneness that Christians are required to have. However, above these, truth must be in the forefront. When the Scriptures speak of separation from unbelievers, truth is the central factor. Truth brings believers together and meaningful Christian fellowship is built on that foundation.

Telling the truth is part of God’s moral law. *“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour”* (Exod 20:16). This is the assertion of the Ninth Commandment. Telling the truth is one of the qualities of a true friend and a worthy neighbour. Always tell the truth.

THOUGHT: Build my fellowship on the foundation of truth.

PRAYER: Lord, deliver me from the temptation to lie.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 9

1 JOHN 1:1-10
PSALM 51:1-19

*“Have mercy upon me, O God,
according to thy lovingkindness ...”*

SIN AND FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness of sin is another element that brings believers together. John said that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7). Each believer is a beneficiary of the shed blood of Christ. The regenerate are brought together into one fellowship by the cleansing blood of the Lamb.

Confession precedes forgiveness of sin. John showed the value of confession when he said, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). David again set a good example. He committed a double sin of adultery and murder when he was king of Israel (2 Sam 11). It was the worst sin for a believer of that position. The Lord sent Nathan the prophet to confront David. The prophet chose his words carefully and had David to condemn himself. David had a soft heart and was willing to confess his sins. That confession has been made a permanent record in Psalm 51. It is not a dignified experience going through such a process. Nevertheless it was necessary in order to be reconciled to God and to those David had sinned against. David was victorious in dealing with his sins. Later he was certified as a man after God’s own heart. He was repentant and willing to confess his sins; and he received full restoration.

The Lord gives everyone a second chance as long as they are repentant. When one desires to be reconciled to God, there is always that offer of forgiveness. Truthfulness, as stated earlier, is the mark of sincerity. Nominal Christianity has no place in the house of God, but the sad fact is that there are many who feign repentance but are not sincere. They are known by their fruits. They come to church with their pre-conceived notion about the church, and they impose their own standards when they can. In this, the church has to strictly impose disciplinary measures on them to arrest such a situation.

THOUGHT: Confession is a mark of true repentance.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always be quick to repent of my sins.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 10

1 JOHN 1:1-10
ROMANS 6:1-9

“... *that the body of sin might be destroyed,
that henceforth we should not serve sin.*”

THE PRESENCE OF SIN IS REAL

Sin entered the life of man shortly after creation. Genesis 3 recorded the entrance of sin into the human race. Since then, it is an evil that man has to contend with all the days of his life. Thus the Apostle John wrote, “*If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us*” (1 John 1:10).

The word “sin” occurs hundreds of times in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. There are two Greek words used for sin. One is “*harmatia*” meaning to miss the mark. The other is “*parabasis*” which means to overstep the forbidden line. It is defined thus: “Sin may then be defined ultimately as anything in the creature which does not express, or which is contrary to, the holy character of the Creator” (J. O. Buswell). Sin is not simply the absence of good. Sin is as real as any disease that infects the body; it infects the soul of man.

It was Satan who originated the temptation to sin and deceived our first parents into transgression against God. It was after that fall that God immediately gave the promise of salvation in the seed of a woman in Genesis 3:15. When the angel announced the birth of Jesus, he said that He would be so named because He shall save His people from their sin (Matt 1:20-21). Some years after that announcement, John the Baptist introduced Jesus publicly as “*the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29).

The basic reason for the incarnation of the Son of God was to deal with the effects of sin on the human race. Paul agreed with John when he said in Romans 3:23 that “*all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*” The Scriptural testimony of the reality of sin tells us that we need a remedy.

THOUGHT: “*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Rom 6:23).

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy gracious gift of eternal life.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11

1 JOHN 2:1-2
JOHN 3:14-18

*“That whosoever believeth in him
should not perish ...”*

THE POSITION OF CHRIST AND SIN

John wrote at length on the work of Jesus Christ and God’s commandments. He gave guidelines on obedience and overcoming those who discourage obedience. Christ is called the advocate and propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Obedience to Him is the solution to sin.

An “*advocate*” (1 John 2:1) is one who pleads for another. It is a term nowadays used for lawyers who represent others in court cases. The Greek term is *parakletos*. Jesus used this term in the Gospel of John to refer to the Holy Spirit and it is translated “*Comforter*” (John 14:16). John here applied it to Jesus. His work of intercession at the right hand of God the Father commenced immediately after His ascension to heaven. He assumes His position having completed the work of redemption when He gave His life for the sins of the world. Note the truth in the well-known Bible verse, “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*” (John 3:16). Who has not memorised these words?

Christ is also referred to as “*the propitiation*” (1 John 2:2). It is defined as that “by which God is rendered propitious, i.e., by which it becomes consistent with His character and government to pardon and bless the sinner. The propitiation does not procure His love or make Him loving; it only renders it consistent for Him to exercise His love towards sinners... Christ is ‘the propitiation’, because by His becoming our substitute and assuming our obligations He expiated our guilt, covered it, by the vicarious punishment which He endured ...” (Source: *Easton Bible Dictionary*.) Do you have a part in Christ?

THOUGHT: The work of Christ as our advocate is our confidence.

PRAYER: Lord, may I be among those whom Thou represent.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12

1 JOHN 2:3-6

MATTHEW 19:16-22

“... *but if thou wilt enter into life,
keep the commandments.*”

OBEDIENCE AND REDEMPTION ARE ONE

While Christ paid the penalty for redemption, man has the duty to be obedient. John said that we know that we know Him when we keep His commandments. At face value, His commandments refer to the Ten Commandments. This is true because His divine code is a summary of every command that God has given. Disobedience to God, while claiming to know Him, is a lie and there is no truth in anyone who lies. In contrast, one who keeps the Law of God, in him is His love perfected and he walks with Him. Walking after the steps of Christ is true obedience. There is no law against walking in the path of Christ.

God's commandments are always the same and do not change at any time. In keeping the Word of Christ, according to the Apostle John, the love of Christ is perfected. Obedience expresses honour and love. The relationship we have with Christ is exemplified in the relationship we have in the family. The minors obey the superiors who in turn love the minors. This brings harmony in the family setting. Christ is the Lord of all and commitment to obey Him brings great joy.

The Apostle expressed it more clearly when he wrote, “*He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked*” (1 John 2:6). Those who abide in Christ and walk as He walked are those who have first come to find salvation rest in Christ. When the Lord invited the sinners to come to Him, He told them that He would give them rest and that they would find rest unto their souls (Matt 11:28-29). The Apostle must have been one of those who heard Jesus and he repeated the same truth in his writings.

Jesus personally dealt with sinners who (though the outcasts of society) had repentance in their hearts as they encountered Christ. One example was Zacchaeus. Jesus said to him, “*This day is salvation come to this house ...*” (Luke 19:9). And Jesus dined with him in his house.

THOUGHT: All sinners are saved by grace offered in Christ.

PRAYER: Lord, may I have a part in Thy offer of grace.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 13

1 JOHN 2:3-7

PSALM 119:17-24

*“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of thy law.”*

THE COMMANDMENT DOES NOT CHANGE

God's commandment is always the same. It is the light. The Apostle stressed this subject because it is the only direction to follow. Obedience comes with blessings based on the promises of God. The darkness is past and true light shines. John pointed to the importance of brotherly love saying that he who hates his brother lives in darkness.

The kind of speech and exhortations given in Scripture are not like the laws enforced by the secular police. The believer is expected to understand the law and willingly obey. He is not forced to love his brother, but the absence of it brings very negative consequences. John addressed this because he wanted new believers to bear a testimony for Christ. He wanted to make everyone in the fellowship feel welcomed and see the transformation that comes with new life in Christ. Love for others is also a proof that one has God's love in him and that he is saved.

Obedying God's commandments builds brotherly love and there is no occasion for stumbling. The second table of the Ten Commandments shows how we are to love our brethren. It is true that no one can keep the commandments of God perfectly. But all have sinned in transgressing them, and in this all are deprived of the blessings of God. The Lord however is gracious and readily welcomes those who repent. There is forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ.

The giving of the Law of God through Moses was esteemed as the greatest event in human history up till that time. The Lord Himself spoke of the superiority of that Law. He told Israel that there was no nation that had such laws as they had. Though circumstances had changed by the time of the Apostles, the basics of the Law of God does not change. It is imperative that man obeys them.

THOUGHT: “All may change but Jesus never, glory to His Name.”

PRAYER: Keep me faithful to Thy law, O Lord.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 14

1 JOHN 2:8-11

ACTS 16:27-34

“... he set meat before them, and rejoiced,
believing in God with all his house.”

BROTHERLY LOVE IS KEEPING THE COMMANDMENT

When a person is born again, everything becomes new. The change that occurs brings a fresh start. Learning to keep the commandments will be a new experience. Thus the Apostle said he was writing a “*new commandment*” (1 John 2:8), as termed by Jesus in John 13:34. Loving one another is exemplified in Jesus. It must also be in believers because the darkness is past and the new light now shines.

Many of us who were born again as adults will always have a testimony of that change. At that time we had child-like questions and as the light shone through we learned many new truths. Brotherly love is one of the first few lessons that are learnt. The initial interaction with other believers is most memorable. The Apostle said that this must be the case when we come to the light.

The conversion of the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:27-34 is a dramatic testimony. It showed the change that came with new life; brotherly love was instant. He was saved and he washed the wounds of the apostles and he was baptized. He had come out of darkness into God’s marvellous light. True light shone in his life.

The words of the Apostle described the change that occurs when one is born again. He said, “*He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him*” (1 John 2:10). In other words brotherly love is expected of every believer as he abides in the light. Stumbling is yielding to temptation. When the works of the flesh are manifested in a believer’s life, it is a return to darkness and one does not know where he is going. Such occasions call for immediate repentance so as to sustain brotherly love. This is the Lord’s desire.

THOUGHT: The love for Christ builds brotherly love.

PRAYER: Lord, ever save me from occasions of stumbling.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15

1 JOHN 2:12-14

PROVERBS 22:6

*“Train up a child in the way he should go:
and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”*

MESSAGE TO LITTLE CHILDREN

John here was addressing a mixed age group of Christians. There were little children, youths and adults. The Lord Jesus did not exclude the children from His audience. Even when some adults wanted them to be kept away, He insisted that they be allowed to come to Him. They were able to understand the message of the gospel, and they learnt. Children are an important class in any Christian community.

John said that he wrote to the children because their sins were forgiven for His name's sake. It was important for them to know that they were sinners and the gift of God's grace reached out to them as well. They were equally saved as the adults. The second message to the children was that they had known the Father. Simple theology is clearly expressed in the first question in the Introduction to the Shorter Catechism for children: “Qn: Who made you? Ans: God made me.” This is a truth that a professor of science with evolutionist persuasion cannot acknowledge. The children know, and need to know more, about the Father. Thus the need to teach them.

The recognition of children by Christ and the Apostles has inspired ministries like the Sunday school movement and also the writing of hymns for children. These have gone a long way in upholding the truth. Little children are given direction on how to grow up in the faith and to follow the ways of the Lord in their lives. They have known the Father because they have been introduced to Him at an early age.

The hymn “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world” carries an important message in view of the atrocities meted out on them, for example by Pharaoh at the time of Moses' birth and by King Herod at the birth of Jesus. Both baby Moses and baby Jesus were targets in those killings. Look at what they became as adults. What is the hope for our children today?

THOUGHT: All children are precious in God's sight.

PRAYER: Lord, may our children learn Thy Word, and be saved.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16

1 JOHN 2:12-14

ECCLESIASTES 12:1

*“Remember now thy Creator
in the days of thy youth ...”*

MESSAGE TO THE YOUTHS

The Apostle John then turned his attention to the youths as there were young people in the audience that he was addressing. They were believers who had given their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. John addressed them and mentioned their worth. He said that they had overcome the wicked one. In the second mention, he said they were strong and the Word of God abided in them. He repeated that they had overcome the wicked one. This victory attributed to them shows that they were church members who were strong in the faith.

Overcoming the wicked one means they had been saved from a life of sin, and had turned to a life of righteousness in Jesus Christ. This description sets them apart from unbelieving youths. When the Apostle said that they were strong, it was partly because they had the energy. Young people are more mature than children and they are able to make decisions and to act upon them. When they are guided rightly they will be able to accomplish much good for the cause of the gospel.

Like the Apostle John, Solomon also wrote to the young people calling upon them to remember their Creator. In the book of Proverbs, Solomon spent a greater part of it addressing youths. The reason for every call is to warn them not to misuse what God has given to them. Those who are still of the world are under the control of the wicked one. This makes them the cause of much wickedness in the world. But these young people equally need salvation.

THOUGHT: Christ is a Refuge for every young person.

PRAYER: Lord, save our youths from the power of the wicked one.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17

1 JOHN 2:12-14
EPHESIANS 6:1-4

*“That it may be well with thee,
and thou mayest live long on the earth.”*

MESSAGE TO THE FATHERS

The third group that the Apostle John addressed was the fathers. Their designation as fathers represented them as elders and leaders of the younger. They were an authority. The commandment *“Honour thy father and thy mother”* gives fathers that respectful position.

When Paul touched on the subject of fathers, he sounded a caution that parents were not to provoke their children to anger. Paul required parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The bottom line in this regard is mutual honour. This easily comes when all have given their lives to the Lord. This will include necessary obedience, this is how John expressed it: *“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked”* (1 John 2:4-6). Fathers have a duty to lead in this regard because they have known Him that is from the beginning. They have had more time and experience in the faith and were more grounded and mature. Thus, a father is the leader and he is to guide those of his household to follow the Lord’s direction. It is true that darkness is past and true light is now shining.

The value of brotherly love deserves repeated attention. In the family setting it is more important. Members of a family are to love another. This comes by keeping every commandment that relates to them. Fathers are to exercise leadership in this regard.

THOUGHT: Responsible fathers act with the fear of the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, give us homes where respect and obedience reign.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 18

1 JOHN 2:15-17

GALATIANS 5:19-24

*“And they that are Christ’s have crucified
the flesh with the affections and lusts.”*

KEEP OFF THE WORLD

Heeding the counsel to keep off the world leads one to victorious spiritual life in the Father. The things of the world are sinful and the Apostle John gave the warning to keep away. Entanglement with the world is a departure from the Lord. The text gives a clear summary in verses 15 to 16: *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”* The depravity of the human heart leads to sin and this is the description of sinful living.

It was sin that led Adam and Eve to break God’s covenant. That sin was similar to what John was saying. Eve desired to eat the fruit without restraining her misguided appetite. The lust of the eyes caused her to admire the appearance and she got carried away by the look of it. The worst part is the pride of life. Satan promised Adam and Eve that they would be like God. However, a little reasoning would have informed them that they were blinded. There is no way in which they could compare with the Creator. The Apostle John gave this warning because he knew that all transgressions are anchored in this kind of sin.

There is a promise to those who do the will of the Father: they abide for ever. The Lord will reveal His will to those who are determined to follow Him. This determination is fulfilled when a child of God keeps the world and its lusts at bay. The world passes away and its lusts, but he who does the will of the Father abides for ever. The one who does God’s will manifests the reality of salvation in his life, that God is indeed his heavenly Father. He truly has eternal life and abides forever.

THOUGHT: *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ...”* (Jer 17:9).

PRAYER: Lord, give me a heart that loves to obey Thee.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 19

1 JOHN 2:18-20

EPHESIANS 6:10-17

“... *be strong in the Lord,
and in the power of his might.*”

THE COMING OF ANTICHRIST

The love of the world is in opposition to Christ. The coming of the Antichrist was expected in John's time. He asserted that many antichrists had already come and that it was “*the last time*” (1 John 2:18). The antichrists deny both the Father and the Son.

In the days of Jesus, there was much opposition from the Jewish leaders. John was one of the original disciples of Christ and a prominent Apostle. He saw how the Lord had transformed the lives of believers through the Gospel. He gave this warning in the text because of his many years of experience. Earlier he talked about the world in reference to the community of sinful humanity that possessed a spirit of rebellion against God. Their opposition to God made them value those things which were contrary to God's will. This is the antichrist's spirit at work.

Satan is the antichrist himself and he amplifies the attractions of the world and leads a system that opposes God. The many antichrists that the Apostle mentioned are Satan's agents. They come in the form of human beings. Satan is also called “*the prince of this world*” (John 12:31). He reigns in the world and seeks to win many to his side at all times. The tragic consequences of the love of the world come in many different forms. Satan makes people to turn away from the Lord's work and to influence others as well. He alienates them from God and brings in corrupting sins. He also amplifies the deception of false teachers. All these are his wiles to kill and to destroy.

The only way to overcome the Antichrist is to have greater love for the Father as the Apostle John taught. Seek to please God every day in everything and strive for spiritual growth. Growth comes through prayer and reading of God's Word as well as in witnessing for Christ. You do not need to fall prey to the temptations of the world.

THOUGHT: Putting on God's armour defeats the Antichrist.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always stand up for Jesus.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 20

1 JOHN 2:21-24

JOHN 14:6

“... *I am the way, the truth, and the life:
no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*”

STANDING IN THE TRUTH

One of the attributes of God is that He is true. It is called the veracity of God. It is defined as “that perfection of God in virtue of which He is true in His inner being, in His revelation, and in His relation to His people. ... this attribute is also called God’s faithfulness” (Berkhof).

The Apostle built on the saying of Christ that He is, among other things, the truth. The Greek word “*pistos*” (meaning “faithful”) is related to truth. It is “a chief element of the nature of God ... a ground of confidence in His promises ... the truth of God stands for the consistency of His nature and guarantees His full response in all the relations of a universe of which He is the Maker, Preserver, and End” (ISBE).

John wrote, “*I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth*” (1 John 2:21). On the opposite end is the antichrist. The word translated devil means a slanderer or a liar. Everything he does is against God’s truth. Yet faith stands on the truth, for God is true. “... *it was impossible for God to lie ...*” (Heb 6:18).

The words of Christ that He is the truth will always remain true. In opposition to the truth, lies will continue. Today, liberal theologians are having a field day denying Christ. Their blasphemies must not be repeated. They do this because they do not know the Father. Spurgeon said that there is nothing that is new in theology except that which is false. The mindset of men who deny Christ is the same in all generations. They are all energized by the wicked one. The truth “... *which ye have heard from the beginning*” (1 John 2:24) does not change. It will always remain and continue to proclaim itself because it is of God.

THOUGHT: “*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32).

PRAYER: Lord, may I continue in the Son and in the Father.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 21

1 JOHN 2:24-27

JAMES 1:25

“... but a doer of the work,
this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

THE GOSPEL ALWAYS REMAINS

The Apostle used the phrase “*which ye have heard from the beginning*” in 1 John 2:7 and he repeated the same phrase in 1 John 2:24. His simple exhortation is that we are to let what has been “*heard from the beginning*” abide in us. In the Gospel of John, the Apostle wrote of the works and sayings of Christ in a way that was easily understood. He simplified the sayings and works of Christ, selecting those that showed the core message of the gospel. At the end of the Gospel of John (in John 21:25), John said that there were many other things that Christ did which were not written in that book. What he wrote was sufficient for his audience to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing they might have life through His Name (John 20:30-31).

When John wrote this epistle, his audience were familiar with the truths of the gospel. His teachings in this epistle are also the teachings of the other gospel writers and other Apostles. Part of his audience may have been converted under the other Apostles. John is the only gospel writer who recorded the conversation of Jesus and Nicodemus. The main message of that conversation constitutes part of that which the disciples had heard from the beginning. James called it the perfect law of liberty and the believers should continue in it: hearing and doing. Such shall be blessed in their deed (James 1:25).

The greatest blessing that comes with abiding in the truth is eternal life. The Apostle constantly raised a red flag because the deception of the wicked one was always there. However, he pointed at the blessedness that comes in continuing in the gospel. He used the word “*anointing*” (1 John 2:27) to refer to the work of the Holy Spirit who abides in the believers. He is the true Teacher as promised by Christ and He teaches all things. The believers ought to abide in Him; thus the need to abide in the gospel.

THOUGHT: The gospel of Christ is the anchor that keeps the soul.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always hold on to the gospel truth.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22

1 JOHN 2:24-29

MATTHEW 25:37, 46

“... *but the righteous
into life eternal.*”

THE PURITY OF LIFE

The Apostle referred to all believers as “*little children*” in 1 John 2:28 though earlier he referred to little children, youths and elders. He always exhorted them to remain in the Lord. “... *he shall appear ...*” (1 John 2:28) refers to the Second Coming of the Lord. Among other things required at the Second Coming is purity of life. He said this shall give us confidence. This is boldness and not shame.

Christ spoke of the same things when He spoke of His coming. He said that the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in heaven, He shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He followed this with three parables in Matthew 24:27-51 that called for readiness at His coming. It is the believer’s duty to wait and keep that requirement of a pure life. They are to wait for that Coming and always look for it. When there is that confidence, we will love that expectation of His appearing. It will be a promotion of the faithful. Meanwhile we get busy in witnessing for Him, for He said that the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world then the end shall come. The Apostle closed the book of Revelation with the words, “*Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus*” (Rev 22:20). Such a prayer comes from one who walks in purity of life.

John stated that the Lord is righteous and every one that does righteousness is born of Him. The Lord referred to the believers as the righteous when He talked of judgment in Matthew 25:37, 46 and He said these shall have eternal life. When one is born again and has put on the Lord Jesus Christ, he will demonstrate the works of righteousness. Truth is the spiritual prescription for walking in Christ.

THOUGHT: Purity of life is righteousness and freedom from sin.

PRAYER: Lord, keep me from sin so that I may walk in the purity of life.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23

1 JOHN 3:1-3

JOHN 1:12

*“... to them gave he power
to become the sons of God,
even to them that believe on his name.”*

THE IDENTITY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD

The manifestation of fellowship with Christ is seen in the purity of life and the exercise of righteousness. This would never be possible without the atoning work of Christ. Above all there is also bestowal of grace that leads to salvation through faith. The Apostle exclaimed that this is the gift of the love of God. In this, the believers qualify as the sons of God. In John 1:29 and 36, John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. The disciples who heard John speaking thus followed Jesus (John 1:37).

The Lamb was a reference to the Passover lamb that was offered every year. This sacrifice was a type of the Messiah and those disciples understood what John meant. Here is the promise given earlier through the prophet Isaiah: *“Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off”* (Isa 56:5). John 1:12 asserted that those who receive Him are given the power to become the sons of God. The disciples were called Christians the first time at Antioch (Acts 11:26). It was meant to be a derogatory term but it stuck as their honourable identity. They were truly the children of God because they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. The world does not know them because it does not know Christ.

John again pointed to the future as the culmination of their faith in Christ. He noted that *“... it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is”* (1 John 3:2). The appearance of the Lord refers to His Second Coming again. It will truly be a turning point where the hope of Christians will be realised. He added, *“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure”* (1 John 3:3). Do you?

THOUGHT: Jesus merited the adoption of believers.

PRAYER: Lord, may I value my position merited by Christ.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24
1 JOHN 3:4-6
PHILIPPIANS 3:6-11

“... but that which is through
the faith of Christ, the righteousness
which is of God by faith.”

THE MARK OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (I)

Sin is incompatible with God's Law; it is transgression of God's moral standards. Jesus Christ in His earthly pilgrimage suffered and died, He was offered for sin. The lowest part of His sufferings was crucifixion and death. He had not committed any sin, but He took the place of the sinner. He shed His blood to take away our sins.

The practice of righteousness is conformity with Christ. Anyone who abides in Him does not sin. On the contrary anyone who lives in sin has not seen Christ or known Him. In the temptations that the devil brought against Jesus, the Lord showed that He had answers for every one of the devil's tricks. And the devil left Him. One who is born of God does not live a life of sin. This is because the seed of God remains in him. God has given him a means of overcoming sin. This comes from knowing Christ as Lord and Saviour. One can have confidence in trusting Christ who gives victory over sin.

There is a contrast between the children of God and the children of the devil. The practice of righteousness is a mark of fellowship with God. The heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 are said to have subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness and obtained the promises among other achievements. Righteousness is central to their conduct. One of the first exhibits of the children of the devil is the failure to love. John repeated that this is the message that has been heard from the beginning. The command to love one's neighbour is a command of general knowledge and leads in the path of righteousness. He sums up the mark of righteousness thus: “*Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him*” (1 John 3:6).

THOUGHT: All our righteousness is by the blood of Christ.

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to go in Thy path of righteousness.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25

1 JOHN 3:7-10

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

*“Those things, which ye have
both learned, and received,
and heard, and seen in me, do ...”*

THE MARK OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (II)

The word “*righteousness*” is the noun form of “right” and is another word for expressing truth. The Apostle John used this word repeatedly because he wanted his readers to accept the gospel in its simplicity. In all his writings, he chose the simplest language to express God’s truth. In the Gospel, he quoted Jesus using the term “*be born again*” (John 3:3, 7).

Righteousness means doing what is right and shunning that which is wrong. This is the dictionary definition: “Purity of heart and rectitude of life; conformity of heart and life to the divine law. Righteousness, as used in Scripture and theology, in which it is chiefly used, is nearly equivalent to holiness, comprehending holy principles and affections of heart, and conformity of life to the divine law. It includes all we call justice, honesty and virtue, with holy affections; in short, it is true religion” (Webster’s 1828 Dictionary).

A child of God will naturally draw a boundary with the world so that he can live in the sphere of righteousness. The conversion of an adult to the Christian faith may be followed by a dramatic change in his life. He may have been an alcoholic or a drug addict, but the Holy Spirit leads him to exercise true righteousness. And his testimony will be a witness to others. Another addiction is gambling. It was reported recently that there were sixty betting companies in one East African nation and the authorities suspended the betting activities. Christians must not wait for the world to tell them what to do. They must know that betting to gain what one did not work for is akin to stealing. The new life in Christ is a life of righteousness. This again the Apostle expressed clearly: “*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God*” (1 John 3:9). Let everyone reading this take heed.

THOUGHT: Conversion and subsequent righteousness is drawing a demarcation line with the world.

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to follow Thy path of righteousness.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26

1 JOHN 3:11-14

LUKE 10:30-37

*“Then said Jesus unto him,
Go, and do thou likewise.”*

THE MARK OF BROTHERLY LOVE

The Apostle stressed the need to love one another as part of the gospel that the believers had heard from the beginning. This was how Jesus summed up the keeping of the second table of the Ten Commandments. Love is the central element in human relations. If one loves one's neighbour, one will not break any of those six commandments against one's neighbour.

The Apostle John cited Cain as a bad example and said that he was of the wicked one. Cain acted under the control of the devil and became the first murderer. He slew his own brother. *“... And wherefore slew he him? ...”* (1 John 3:12). John posed this question and gave the answer, *“Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.”* John showed the damage that the lack of love brought. With such an example being cited, our mental judgment immediately goes against the offender and condemns Cain. But there is need for us to ask ourselves: “Am I guilty too of such an offence? Or of any offence?”

When believers draw a demarcation line to separate from the world, they naturally become enemies of the world. The Apostle said that we ought not to marvel at such a reaction. The Christian testimony sets believers apart so that they pass from death into life. They show their testimony by their demonstrated love. John stressed this point severally because this must come naturally when one lives in Christ. When Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, the Samaritan showed that he did what was naturally necessary. On the contrary, the priest and the Levite were bound by the laws of men and forgot to honour God by showing mercy to the man in need. John said that such abide in death.

THOUGHT: A regenerated heart does the bidding of the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to show true love to others.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 27

1 JOHN 3:15

EPHESIANS 4:26-27

"Be ye angry, and sin not:

let not the sun go down upon your wrath."

THOU SHALT NOT KILL

Murder is an act that does not escape the attention of all who hear about it. Crimes related to murder are committed ever so often. The prohibition of murder is a universal law. Many nations have laws that prescribe capital punishment for murder. It is also one of the prohibitions in the Ten Commandments. It is stated in four simple words: "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod 20:13). It may sound simple, but it is difficult to obey. And its transgression has lasting consequences. John repeated this command thus, *"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him"* (1 John 3:15).

Though many understand the far-reaching implications of murder, the evil act has not stopped in human society. Such an act does not come without prior planning. The Old Testament addressed many circumstances related to murder. The Lord Jesus also addressed this commandment when He commented, *"And whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire"* (Matt 5:21-22). The answer to the danger of murder is to promote brotherly love. Giving heed to the exhortations of Scripture and giving priority to spiritual matters are the right ways to overcome the danger. It will help us to tame our emotions and to address differences soberly. Anger is danger.

THOUGHT: Walking with the Lord daily saves one from anger.

PRAYER: Lord, teach me not to allow anger to rule my life.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 28

1 JOHN 3:16-17

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-14

*“But what things were gain to me,
those I counted loss for Christ.”*

THE LOVE OF GOD

The love of God is well expressed in John 3:16. We are saved from sin because God loved us. The Apostle stressed this point in his writings because that expression is central to the gospel. Here he said, *“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren”* (1 John 3:16). The offer of Jesus on the Cross was a demonstration of God’s love. Jesus laid down His life for sinners. John added that Christians must lay down their lives for their brethren. This will not accomplish what the death of Christ did but it will lead many to benefit from the gift of Christ. John was the last of the Apostles to live and he must have witnessed the martyrdom of many of his brethren. He knew that it was worth giving one’s own life for the sake of Christ.

The centuries of church history also show that the truth of the gospel of Christ has been preserved because there were those who were willing to lay down their lives for it. The Apostle John in his last days, as he testified in the book of Revelation, was exiled to the island of Patmos. He said he was there for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

God’s love is also shown in providing for the needy. John said that anyone who has the goods of this world and shuts his bowels of compassion on him who is needy, cannot have the love of God abiding in him. Jesus said that love for one another will show others that the believers are truly His disciples. The whole aim of good works is to show the love of God to others. Out of that testimony, others may believe in Christ and be saved.

THOUGHT: The love of God radiates through faithful disciples.

PRAYER: Lord, give me opportunities to show Thy love to others.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 29

1 JOHN 3:18-19

2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-15

*“For the love of Christ
constraineth us ...”*

LOVE IN DEED AND TRUTH

The love that John stressed here was simply love with sincerity. It is this kind of love that Paul described in 1 Corinthians 13: *“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”* Charity is another word for love. The Apostle John said that we must not just love in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Jesus spoke of the need to love our enemies. The real test comes to Christians when they have to be a testimony to the world around them. One example is when we go for evangelism and we experience much rejection in our outreach. A teacher told a story of a woman evangelist. (I have repeated this story several times because it illustrates clearly what it means to love even your enemies.) This lady handed out a gospel tract to a man seated in the car. He did not only reject the tract but spat on her face. The woman turned aside, took her handkerchief and wiped her face. She again turned to the man and said to him that the enemies of Jesus did the same thing to Him. The man was touched and was responsive and eventually became a believer.

The truth that John was talking about is the gospel of Christ. It is a message of salvation and God’s eternal plan for sinners. Jesus came to seek and to save sinners but they have to be told what Jesus has done for them. John added that when we know the truth we *“shall assure our hearts before him”* (1 John 3:19). The religions of the world to some extent teach good morals, but they do not know the Saviour who gave His life for sinners and who is the only way to God the Father. He is the truth and giver of life. Christians have a duty to tell the world the good news of salvation in love.

THOUGHT: Love in deed and truth leads a sinner to salvation.

PRAYER: Lord, let me love even my enemies in deed and in truth.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30

1 JOHN 3:20-21

ROMANS 2:11-16

*“Which shew the work of the law
written in their hearts, their
conscience also bearing witness ...”*

LISTENING TO CONSCIENCE

The Apostle John used the word “heart” in this context to mean conscience. His message was clear. The conscience will tell a person what is right and wrong. John added that God is greater than our hearts because He knows all things. This has to do with the question of sin. Men act upon the instructions of God’s moral code when they are obedient. Paul said that the work of the law of God is written in the heart. This is to say they were there before the promulgation of the Mosaic Law. The testimony of the patriarchs confirms this truth. Some prohibitions in God’s law are universal laws that everyone knows through conscience.

The heart is able to condemn everyone who is guilty; it makes them aware of their own wrongdoing. When there is confidence towards God, then our hearts do not condemn us. God will answer our prayers because we keep His commandments and do all the things that are pleasant in His sight. Enoch was one who pleased God, and was blessed with direct ascension to heaven. He did not see death and was counted as one of the heroes of faith. The Holy Spirit used his conscience to guide him to do those things that were right before God. Enoch lived at a time when God’s revelation was minimal, yet his testimony shone through.

The recognition of the great love of God prompts us to be obedient to Him in purity of life. The heart plays a major role in this regard. On the other hand it must be remembered that there is a negative side in what the heart does. It is deceitful and can lead one to great danger. However, when we speak and practise the truth, the voice of conscience will always approve what we do.

THOUGHT: God affirms to us His truth through our hearts.

PRAYER: Lord, let me always listen to Thy voice through my heart.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31

1 JOHN 3:22-24

MATTHEW 12:50

*“For whosoever shall do the will of my
Father which is in heaven, the same is
my brother, and sister, and mother.”*

OBEDIENCE AND ANSWER TO PRAYER

God’s answer to prayer is conditional. He does everything according to His eternal will. Jesus taught in the Lord’s Prayer that we pray for the will of God to be done. When individuals are doing God’s will they are naturally led to keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. The Psalmist said, *“The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry”* (Ps 34:15). God bestows the grace of righteousness and listens to those who call on Him.

From the human point of view, before prayers can be answered, certain conditions need to be fulfilled. But everything goes back to God’s sovereign will. When Samuel told Eli the Lord’s message, it was unpleasant news. But Eli responded that He was the Lord and he would let Him do what it seemed good to Him. He knew that there was nothing he could do to change His will.

In today’s text, God’s will is thus stated, *“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.”* This is the primary requirement for the Christian. It is the Holy Spirit that leads believers to make that confession about the Son of God. There is mutual fellowship with Jesus Christ when we keep His commandments. John added that we know that He abides in us by the Spirit which He has given to us.

Early in the gospels the Lord Jesus Christ called His disciples. John was one of them. When the Lord told them that He was going to make them fishers of men, they surrendered to follow Jesus. Many of them did not have a place they could call home. The ministry before them was their priority. They obeyed and saw God’s answer.

THOUGHT: Humble obedience comes with blessings from the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always submit to Thy holy will.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1

1 JOHN 4:1-2

MATTHEW 7:15-16

*“Beware of false prophets, which
come to you in sheep’s clothing ...”*

WARNING ON FALSE PROPHETS

John spoke at length with repetition on the meaning of the love of God for those who believed. This love is manifested at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh. Love for one another cannot be separated from the love of God. The Holy Spirit indwells believers and they know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Jesus said that love is the greatest commandment.

Love for God upholds the truth, but there are false prophets who forbid obedience to this truth. The Apostle warned against these false prophets in the text. He warned against belief of every spirit. They ought to be tried whether they were of God. The presence of false prophets was a reality in the Old Testament times. It is also true in every generation. These are agents of Satan as he is always active in opposing God. The Apostle here did not give a specific case, but in his ministry he had encountered many of them.

In Acts 8 when Philip had evangelised in Samaria there were many who believed. When the Jerusalem leaders heard about this, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Among the Samaritans there was a false prophet named Simon. He was a sorcerer and bewitched the people of Samaria and presented himself as the great one. When he professed faith in Christ, he had a wrong motive. Thus he offered money to be given power so that he too could dispense the Holy Spirit. Peter rebuked him sharply and told him to perish with his money because he thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Such were the experiences that the Apostle John had in mind when he warned against false prophets. Believe not every spirit but try the spirits.

THOUGHT: Every good tree is known by its fruits.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me wisdom to discern the false prophets.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2

1 JOHN 4:3-4
JOHN 20:24-29

“... *blessed are they that have not seen,
and yet have believed.*”

CHRIST IS COME IN THE FLESH

Christ's coming in the flesh is called His incarnation. There is a different understanding of incarnation in other religions. But the coming of the Son of God in the flesh is an historical event that is verified in the historical records of Scripture. In the days of John, people were beginning to deny that Jesus had come in the flesh. Yet there were those still living, including John, who saw Jesus and witnessed His resurrection. The events of Jesus' life were recorded for the church.

It was with this background that the Apostle John wrote these words: *“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world”* (1 John 4:2-3).

This is a basic doctrine of the Christian faith but it was attacked and had caused much controversy. The Apostle saw it necessary to make it clear. Thereafter the church developed what is known as the “Apostles' Creed” which made clear the position of Christ and the Trinity of God.

The Gospels recorded the life of Christ from the announcement of His birth to His ascension to heaven. It was after His resurrection that even His disciples doubted if He was the one and He had to take time to explain to them. John was an eyewitness of all these and he wrote with that knowledge. He told the believers to affirm that indeed Jesus came in the flesh and if they did not believe they were not of God. Those of the contrary opinion were to be removed from church fellowship because they were of the antichrist. Christ indeed came in the flesh.

THOUGHT: Jesus came in the flesh to save man from his sins.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for coming to live among us to save us.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 3
1 JOHN 4:3-5
1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-21

*"I will destroy the wisdom of
the wise, and will bring to nothing
the understanding of the prudent."*

CHRIST IS GREATER THAN THE WORLD

At the beginning of his gospel John wrote that those who believe in Jesus Christ were given the power to become the sons of God. This is adoption into God's family. He repeated here the same truth that believers were of God. This is their victory because Christ is greater than the world.

Victory implies warfare and it is true there is war between Christ and the antichrist. Believers are like David in battle with Goliath. They can overcome because Christ is with them. There may not be an appearance of victory externally, but with Christ victory is sure. Paul called the preaching of the cross of Christ the power of God, but to the unbelieving it is foolishness. Doctrines of Christ constitute the whole gospel. When believers hold on to these doctrines, they experience the truth of these doctrines because Christ is with them. Christ is greater than the world. Faith in Christ is the victory that overcomes the world.

John gave a contrary picture of the world when he added, *"They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them"* (1 John 4:5). This goes with the affirmation of Jesus that the way to destruction is broad and the way to life is narrow. Little persuasion is needed to follow the broad way. Many openly live sinful lives and become immune to guilt. The mind-set is that since everybody is doing it, it must be fine. Many church leaders today live a life of hypocrisy. They are self-proclaimed leaders but they are false prophets. They do not hide their love for money and pride. They have followed the ways of the world and the world hears them. However, Christ is greater and true believers must continue to follow Him.

THOUGHT: Jesus is our Rock, in Him we hide.

PRAYER: Lord, keep me faithful so that I will not follow the broad way.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 4

1 JOHN 4:6-11

ROMANS 1:19-23

“... that which may be known
of God is manifest in them;
for God hath shewed it unto them.”

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH (I)

The undivided love for God overcomes the world. John spoke of those who love God: *“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error”* (1 John 4:6). This repeated expression is the only hope for believers. The gospel truth is made simple in teaching children so that they can understand. The expressions used are also applicable for adults. They are only made complicated by the human heart that is restless and questions the truth of God.

Truth is always the path to follow to please God. Love for one another is preceded by love for God. John said that those who loved others were born of God. Men are able to know God through natural revelation. However, the presence of sin clouds their understanding so that they will not serve Him as God. Paul said this in Romans 1:21: *“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”* The spirit of truth is here overcome by the spirit of error. However, we must strive to seek the truth.

The love of God is manifested in the world by His sending His only begotten Son into the world that believers may live through Him. The world does not know this because they do not believe that He came in the flesh. The truth is that Jesus came in human form and became the propitiation for sins. In the Law of Moses, there were many prescribed offerings that were offered repeatedly for the propitiation for sins. Even the high priest was not exempt. He offered for himself first and then for the people. The complex manner of these ceremonies reveals how much was achieved in Jesus when He became man. The spirit of truth rests in Him.

THOUGHT: The Spirit of truth brings salvation to sinners.

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

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 5
1 JOHN 4:6-11
ROMANS 16:24-27

*“Now to him that is of power to
stablish you according to my gospel,
and the preaching of Jesus Christ ...”*

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH (II)

The Apostle John went around the same subject and often repeated what he had said. The repetition of the truth is most needful as it helped to stick the truth in the readers' minds. John's approach is different from that of Paul for the later Apostle used arguments, but John stated the truth in a simple way. He described the coming of Jesus as the manifestation of God's love. He used the twin commands to love God and to love man to build Christian fellowship.

He used the manifestation of the love of God to appeal to believers to love one another as God had loved them. This also will help the believer to develop a closer walk with God. This is again a reminder of the two tables of the Ten Commandments, each table speaks of the twin love of God and of man. This will lead to a life of peace with God and with man.

The need to keep these commandments is of absolute importance because it is the truth. Believers must strive to have a semblance of what John said. “Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love” is the first line of a hymn we love to sing. The story goes that the writer of the hymn (John Fawcett) was about to be transferred as pastor to another church for better pay. The church organised a farewell party for him, but it turned out to be a welcome party! The pastor valued the love shown to him more than money. He chose to remain with his church. He knew that God's truth was the tie that bound them in love, so he penned those lines.

The spirit of love is absent in the world. Wherever we go in the world, we see thousands of people running up and down to earn a living. A greater number of them are also walking on the broad way. They need to know the truth and the love of God.

THOUGHT: “The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.”

PRAYER: Lord, may I be a channel of blessing to others in love.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 6

1 JOHN 4:12-15

JOHN 16:7-15

“... if I go not away, the Comforter
will not come unto you; but if I depart,
I will send him unto you.”

THE HOLY SPIRIT INDWELLS BELIEVERS

When there is love for one another, God dwells in us. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and is fully God. Jesus had promised His disciples before His ascension that He would not leave them comfortless but would send the Holy Spirit to be with them. The day of Pentecost is the watershed of the coming of the Holy Spirit. He remains in the church since then. He is a guide to believers and the love of God is perfected in His presence.

The Apostle John spoke of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit thus in 1 John 4:13: “*Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.*” The gifts of God are gifts of grace. There is nothing that we can give to God in exchange for these gifts. The gift of the Holy Spirit is by grace, the same as all other gifts of grace. Every believer has a testimony of salvation, but cannot explain exactly what made him believe. Some had prohibiting backgrounds, but they were still brought to the Lord when the time came. Man’s activities cannot challenge the sovereign will of God. This is brought up here because there is much talk about the Holy Spirit among the Charismatics. Some have gone to the extent of dispensing the power of the Holy Spirit to others.

Believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the time of their call to salvation. He enables them to persevere and constantly causes them to be filled with His power in attending to the duties of their callings. Salvation begins with knowing Jesus Christ as Saviour. The Holy Spirit implants that faith in their hearts. This leads to the confession of sins and the whole process of salvation takes effect. The Lord uses different ways to convict the hearts of sinners to come to Christ, but the Holy Spirit is the chief agent.

THOUGHT: The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, from heaven has come.

PRAYER: Let me always submit to Thy sovereign will, O Lord.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7

1 JOHN 4:16-18

JAMES 2:22-24

“.. Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness ...”

LIVING IN GOD’S LOVE

The relationship that comes with belief in the Son of God is well expressed in 1 John 4:16: *“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”* The same is also echoed by other Apostles to explain the meaning of God’s love. Paul said that God commended His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). John’s words show that we belong to the household of God when we believe.

The adoption of believers comes with their justification in that they are counted as if they had not committed any sin. In this, the text said our love is made perfect. This gives believers boldness in the day of judgment. This is the day when the love of God will come to full realisation. When we know that God has thus justified us, we live in that confidence and with great expectation. We are made to walk in His likeness, as the Apostle John said, *“.. because as he is, so are we in this world”* (1 John 4:17). The relationship that develops is like that of mutual friends. We build friendships in the church or institutions of learning that may remain for life. A time may come when we part ways with our friends out of necessity. Though we may not be together physically, the friendship remains. When we happen to meet again, we take much time to update one another. In Him, however, there is no fear of separation. The text thus concluded, *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”* This is a wonderful assurance.

THOUGHT: Abraham was called a friend of God for he obeyed Him.

PRAYER: Teach me the depths of Thy love, O Lord.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8

1 JOHN 4:19-20

2 PETER 2:20-22

*“... they have escaped the pollutions
of the world through the knowledge of
the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ...”*

LOVE FOR GOD GIVES CONFIDENCE

God first loved us and so we love Him. Complete obedience which is a show of the believer's love for God gives confidence that even judgment will come with reward, not punishment. Our love for God is the return of His love because He first loved us. John had first-hand experience being one of the earliest disciples of Jesus. The Apostle John called himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. He did not regret any minute that he spent with Jesus while the Lord was with them. This first-hand experience taught him much about the love of God.

The Jewish leaders looked down on the disciples of Christ because they were not educated. However, when these disciples spoke, these Jewish leaders marvelled and took note that they had been with Jesus. In their humility they were raised to the highest plane in Jewish society. Their exaltation was the cause of constant persecution. Nevertheless God manifested great works through their hands. John saw all these as the gift of God's grace and said that God first loved us. He did not fail to link the love of God to the love for the brethren. He added, *“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”* (1 John 4:20). This is a logical conclusion. It paints a clear picture of what the Christian community should look like externally.

Love for God must be enlarged in the hearts of His children. There is a need to give priority to the things that pertain to God. Love for the brethren is also a living testimony. There is always boldness when we thus keep God's commandments.

THOUGHT: Love for God must always be in the superlative scale.

PRAYER: May Thy love be the signature of my life, O Lord.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9

1 JOHN 4:21

1 CORINTHIANS 13:3-8

*“Rejoiceth not in iniquity,
but rejoiceth in the truth.”*

LOVE IS FOLLOWING THE STEPS OF CHRIST

The Apostle recalled that the commandment in 1 John 4:21 (“*...That he who loveth God love his brother also*”) came from the Lord. He said it was the commandment they had received from Him. The Lord Jesus Christ is the King of the universe and any commandment from Him surpasses all the decrees of earthly kings. This is the commandment that John was referring to: “*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another*” (John 13:34). John heard Jesus pronouncing these words and they remained with him. When he spoke at length on this command, he had a feeling of the need to emphasize it.

The Lord added the reason for giving that commandment: “*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*” (John 13:35). One of the marks of true disciples of Christ is love for one another. This has to be their testimony to the world. Early in the book of Acts we see the disciples demonstrating their love by providing for the needy brethren. The office of the deacon in the church came out of that ministry. Love is the greatest service we can render to God because it is the key to everything else we do for Him.

It is to be emphasized that he who loves God loves his brother also. It is natural, humanly speaking, to hit back when someone provokes you. The Apostles who were present when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane were ready to fight the officers who came to take Him. Peter actually cut off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest. Jesus restrained them and healed the ear of the servant. Love for enemies is also shown here. Love follows the steps of Christ. Christian love is always unconditional. Let this be our testimony to the world.

THOUGHT: “When nothing else could help, love lifted me.”

PRAYER: Lord, teach me always to exercise Thy love.

FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

The statement of the doctrine about Jesus Christ comes up repeatedly in this epistle. John also said the same in his Gospel. Jesus was represented in the Old Testament in many pictures. However, one common thing made them effective: faith. The Apostle here said that whosoever believed that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. Faith in Jesus Christ gives one that privilege. In the Gospel, John came to the conclusion of eternal life as the final reward (John 3:16). He added that the love of the Father is also love for the Son. One who is born of God is a Christian in the true sense.

All believers have to hold the same faith. In the camp of Israel during the Exodus, every member of the congregation had to observe the same commandments. They had to offer the same sacrifices, in the same way. Strangers were also required to follow the same commands, especially in matters of worship. These principles also help in the composition of a Christian community. Churches have formulated their constitutions and statements of faith in line with the common faith.

The stated doctrine here cannot change. John added more on this saying: *"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments"* (1 John 5:2). All through Bible history the children of God were always distinct. Those who rebelled during the Exodus were instantly punished. The leaders made sure that everyone was cooperating. The Apostles also held to the same faith and reproved any deviation. When they were compelled to act or teach against the truth, they chose rather to die than to deny their faith. The denial of Jesus as the Christ was common among the Jews in the time of John. John had to speak again and again in defence of this doctrine. This is the gospel.

THOUGHT: Believing in Jesus is keeping God's commandment.

PRAYER: Lord, may I ever hold to one faith in Christ.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 11

1 JOHN 5:3-5

EPHESIANS 5:1-2

*“Be ye therefore followers
of God, as dear children.”*

GOD’S COMMANDMENTS ARE JUST

To love God is to keep His commandments. God is our heavenly Father, and His commandments are not grievous to His children. It is possible to obey. Correction is grievous to him that forsaketh the way (Prov 15:10). This is not to say that there is perfection on the side of man in keeping the commandments. All must keep a closer walk with God so as to be able to have a testimony of keeping the commandments.

In the world is lawlessness. Jesus referred to the world as the broad way. It is easy to follow and there are many who follow that broad way. The only way to overcome the world is to be born of God. This demarcates the boundary between the just and the unjust. Peter called it darkness and God’s marvellous light (1 Pet 2:9). Those differences are worlds apart. Anyone who has been transformed can bear a testimony of experience of the two worlds. One who is born of God knows the change that has taken place but cannot fully explain how it came. The Scripture tells us how God works in the heart.

Victory over the world comes because of our faith. Paul described the world as the works of the flesh, and faith in God as the fruit of the Spirit. The other distinction is between the reprobate and the elect. God uses this to direct those who seek victory. Anyone who follows that route will not fail but is free from condemnation. There are commands in Scripture to exercise this faith, to stand fast, to continue and to abound. We need to pray for our faith to increase. All this leads us to victory. Since God is just, His commandments are just.

THOUGHT: There is victory in keeping God’s commandment.

PRAYER: Lord, may I never stop trusting Thee.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12

1 JOHN 5:6-8

ISAIAH 11:1-3

“And the spirit of the LORD

shall rest upon him,

the spirit of wisdom and understanding ...”

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY REVEALED

The doctrine of one God in three Persons is partially revealed in the Old Testament and is made clear in the New Testament. The text before us today is the clearest. Those who do not understand will criticise Christians of believing in more than one God. This is a doctrine that is not easy for a finite human mind to fully understand. The early church wrestled with this doctrine and finally came up with a clear statement.

A brief one by Berkhof: “...while He exists in three Persons called Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These are not three persons in the ordinary sense of the word; they are not three individuals, but rather three modes or forms in which the Divine Being exists. At the same time they are of such a nature that they can enter into personal relations. The Father can speak to the Son and vice versa, and both can send forth the Spirit. The real mystery of the Trinity consists in this that each one of the Persons possesses the whole of the divine essence, and that this has no existence outside of and apart from the Persons. The three are not subordinate in being the one to the other, though it may be said that in order of existence [*i.e. functional hierarchy*] the Father is first, the Son second and the Holy Spirit third, an order which is also reflected in their work.”

The definition may raise more questions than answers, but that is the mystery of the Trinity of God. The revelation of God in Scripture is progressive and in this regard the New Testament is clearer in revealing this doctrine. During the time of Christ’s pilgrimage on earth, a time came when the three Persons were together and the disciples bore witness to that revelation. When Jesus was baptized the heavens were opened and the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove and lighted upon Him. The voice of the Father was heard from heaven saying, “*This is my beloveth Son, in whom I am well pleased*” (Matt 3:16-17).

THOUGHT: “God in three Persons, Blessed Trinity.”

PRAYER: Lord, may I hold to the truth of Thy Trinity.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13

1 JOHN 5:6-8

PSALM 119:105-112

*“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.”*

THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE TEXT

The text made the aforesaid doctrine understandable. It helped the church in formulating clear statements of the doctrine. The Nicean Council (AD 325) debated the place of Jesus Christ in relation to God the Father. They concluded that Jesus was fully God and fully man. John wrote to guide believers on the proper position and evidence of the work of Christ. He said that He came by water and blood. The two elements were significant in cleansing ceremonies. They were used to symbolize removal of sin. Jesus shed His blood as propitiation for sin and water is used in baptism for purification.

It is possible that the controversy surrounding this doctrine affected the transmission of the biblical text. It will be noted that some translations of the Bible and also the Greek critical text omit verse 7. This text is commonly referred to as the “Johannine Comma.” This omission came from the critical analysis of Westcott and Hort that upheld the ancient manuscripts of *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* as the most reliable, yet the opposite is true. They are the most corrupt manuscripts. The Received Text is the accurate text. They made a great mistake and removed a doctrine of God. John said in Revelation that none of the words of God should be removed or added. Thus 1 John 5:7 cannot be removed.

The authenticity of this passage cannot be doubted, moreover it does not contradict other passages in the Bible on this subject. The Apostle was very particular in stating his words in a simple and understandable manner. The statement of the doctrine is clear, but the enemy does not want it to be made clear. He seeks to confuse God’s people with ambiguous assertions that in effect are denials of God’s truth. We thus uphold the authenticity of this text and the doctrine of the Trinity.

THOUGHT: The Bible truth stands in all generations.

PRAYER: Lord, may Thy word be ever a lamp to my feet.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14

1 JOHN 5:9

JOHN 8:28-36

“... *the Father hath not left me alone;
for I do always those things that please him.*”

THE WITNESS OF GOD IS GREATER

Jesus met with the greatest rejection from the Jewish community. He was never officially accepted as the Christ. John wrote this because of the failure of that nation to acknowledge their Lord. The witness that he was referring to was that which would confirm Jesus as the Messiah. In this He would have all the qualities that the prophets had assigned to Him.

The Jewish leaders made themselves spokesmen on religious matters. The witness of the Apostles was rejected and all the disciples of Christ were persecuted or made outcasts. The witness of man is also true when it is based on the Word of God. John was speaking here before the completion of the New Testament, but he was a witness of what Christ did and said. He was also a witness of His resurrection and ascension. He was one of the twelve Apostles who was commissioned to go into all the world and preach the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. He added, “... *for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son*” (1 John 5:9). There were two occasions recorded in Scripture that a voice from heaven came and confirmed Jesus as the Son of God. One mentioned earlier was during His baptism and the other was at the mount of transfiguration. John was one of the witnesses there and he was repeating that testimony of the Father.

He did not argue in his witness but he simply stated the facts. He would tell the religious leaders to prove him wrong in what he was saying. John’s language and testimony was to speak the truth. In the ninth chapter of his Gospel, he testified of a man who was blind and Jesus opened his eyes and he saw. He captured the testimony of that man when the Jews pressed him to tell them how he was healed. The man simply replied, “*I was blind but now I can see.*” Truth is truth.

THOUGHT: “*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*” (John 13:35).

PRAYER: Lord, may I ever uphold the truth of Thy Word.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15
1 JOHN 5:10
ROMANS 8:16-17

*“The Spirit itself beareth
witness with our spirit,
that we are the children of God.”*

BELIEVE ON THE SON

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ. He testified concerning him. The people recognized the ministry of John for they took him to be a prophet. When he told his disciples about Jesus they also followed Jesus. His testimony which he told the nation of Israel was that indeed Jesus was the Messiah. Anyone will be counted a disciple of Christ when he believes.

Matthew Henry had this to say, “The real Christian has seen his guilt and misery, and his need of such a Saviour. He has seen the suitableness of such a Saviour to all his spiritual wants and circumstances. He has found and felt the power of the word and doctrine of Christ, humbling, healing, quickening, and comforting his soul. He has a new disposition, and new delights, and is not the man that he formerly was. Yet he finds still a conflict with himself, with sin, with the flesh, the world, and wicked powers. But he finds such strength from faith in Christ, that he can overcome the world, and travel on towards a better. Such assurance has the gospel believer: he has a witness in himself, which puts the matter out of doubt with him, except in hours of darkness or conflict; but he cannot be argued out of his belief in the leading truths of the gospel. Here is what makes the unbeliever’s sin so awful; the sin of unbelief. He gives God the lie; because he believes not the record that God gave of his Son. It is in vain for a man to plead that he believes the testimony of God in other things, while he rejects it in this. He that refuses to trust and honour Christ as the Son of God, who disdains to submit to his teaching as Prophet, to rely on his atonement and intercession as High Priest, or to obey him as King, is dead in sin, under condemnation; nor will any outward morality, learning, forms, notions, or confidences avail him.”

THOUGHT: Belief in the Son of God is the whole gospel.

PRAYER: Lord, may I never deny my faith in Jesus Christ.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16

1 JOHN 5:11

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-26

“... Christ the firstfruits; afterward they
that are Christ’s at his coming.”

THE GIVING OF ETERNAL LIFE

The greatest and the ultimate reward for every believer is eternal life. Before Christ ascended to heaven He made a promise to the disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them. The Apostle said here that God has given us eternal life. This life is in His Son. This is so for Jesus said that among other things He is life. When we think of life, our human understanding is limited to life in the flesh. It is like we cannot think of light without the sun. God, however, is above physical life and the light bearer. It will be remembered that God created life and the light bearers at the beginning, but He is life and light Himself.

In the flesh, a time comes when each must die. The answer to this is the promise of resurrection. This is victory over death. Jesus is called the first born of them that slept. He indeed died in the flesh and was raised on the third day. Paul spoke at length on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. He reasoned, *“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”* (1 Cor 15:17-19). Eternal life is there because Christ has defeated death. He concluded thus: *“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor 15:57). When we think of eternal life we do not think of medicine, doctors or surgery. There will be no need for these. Life in Christ will be perfect.

One of the attributes of God is that He is eternal. Jesus is the second Person in the Godhead, He is eternal as well. In John 3:15-16, Jesus linked eternal life with faith in Him. Paul also said that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 6:23). All the promises and declarations relating to eternal life are linked to Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: We believe in Jesus and we have eternal life.

PRAYER: Lord, let me find habitation in those mansions above.

THE SON OF GOD IS LIFE

The Lord Jesus Christ said He is life. John here applied it to the relationship with man: *"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."* The origin of life is the creation wrought by God. In the flesh, it begins with natural birth; and in the case of Christ, it was by supernatural conception. This life is brief and is compared to a shadow, a cloud or a flower. It is there and disappears shortly. God is the preserver and protector of life. He provides for the needs of the body and perfects it in glory.

Regardless of the shortness of life, man seeks to preserve it and provide for its needs, and bear the sufferings of the flesh. Believers make God's kingdom their first desire. The grace of God leads man to obey Him and to benefit in receiving the gift of God.

Knowing the Son of God leads to a spiritual path. The Triune God is the source of spiritual life. This is revealed to man in God's Word. One is born again to enter this path and goes all the way to glorification in the promised eternal home. Second birth transforms life as we wait for the ultimate reward. Thus it is required of us to be spiritually minded. We grow in knowing Christ, we love Him and we obey. We give our lives as a holy sacrifice. Our names are written in the book of life (Phil 4:3; Rev 17:8).

Jesus said that He came that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10). So, life in Him is not perishable but it abides for ever. Christ taught His own to overcome the common enemies, the devil, the world and the flesh. There is life in the Son of God.

THOUGHT: Life in the Son of God is sure hope.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, that my name is for ever written in the Book of Life.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18

1 JOHN 5:13
JOHN 20:30-31

*“... these are written, that ye might believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ...”*

THE PURPOSE OF WRITING

All the writers of the Scriptures had reasons for writing. Moses was the first one to pen the words of God. He did this at the command of the Lord, and in total he wrote the Pentateuch. All the prophets did the same at the command of the Lord. This gave answers to many generations to come as they bore a testimony for the Lord. The Scriptures are a permanent record to be used for all time, inspired and preserved to the last tittle.

In 1 John 5:13, John stated the purpose for his writing: *“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”* His aims had been shown repeatedly and he did this to magnify their importance. In his Gospel, John also stated the purpose of his writing. He also added that there were many other things that Jesus did and said that were not written (John 20:30). In those early days of limited communication, God chose to preserve His revelation to man in writing. Their purpose has worked and continued into the future. Every written word of God is equally important. Paul declared all Scripture to be profitable for doctrine.

John was the last of the Apostles to die and he wrote five New Testament books. He rendered a lasting service to the church mainly through his writings. His words spoke to his immediate audiences and continue to speak to all generations. His stated purpose has been fulfilled as the gospel goes to the whole world and many believe in Jesus Christ. John's Gospel addressed basic truths of Christianity and was a reference in reaching out to those who have not believed in Christ. They will believe when they know the truth. He confirmed his Gospel in his epistles. He wrote Revelation with a seal of the Lord.

THOUGHT: There can be no church without the Bible, God's truth.

PRAYER: Lord, let me always value the purpose of Scriptures.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19
1 JOHN 5:14-15
1 TIMOTHY 2:1-3

“... first of all, supplications,
prayers, intercessions,
and giving of thanks, be made ...”

GUIDANCE IN PRAYER

Prayer is the second lesson the children learn after knowing that there is God. The meaning of prayer is thus given in the *Shorter Catechism*: “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.” The Apostle restated in the text what the Lord Jesus Christ had said: “*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.*” The relationship that a believer has with the Lord Jesus has been explained. When it comes to prayer, there is this assurance of answer because of the regard that He has for those who believe in Him.

Many people are not informed that prayer does not change the mind of God, but it changes us to conform to His will. The Word of God is used to direct us in prayer. The Lord Jesus gave a sample prayer commonly known as the Lord’s Prayer. He taught other lessons with illustrations on prayer. Every petitioner has to be persistent in prayer. The Apostle added in the text “*if we ask any thing according to his will*” (1 John 5:14). We know that He will answer our prayers if our petitions are in accordance to His will.

The Lord also gave guidelines for private prayer in Matthew 6:6. There is also an example of family prayer in Acts 10:2, 30 by Cornelius. There are also examples of public prayers. In 1 Corinthians 14:14-17, Paul said that one who prays must pray in a known language and all can say “Amen” for the petitions made. Prayer requires purity of heart and belief, and are offered in Christ’s name. More guidelines teach us to adore God, to confess our sins, make supplications, intercede for others and give thanks to God. God will thus hearken to our petitions.

THOUGHT: God answers prayer.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to pray without ceasing.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20

1 JOHN 5:16-17

*“And because I tell you the truth,
ye believe me not.”*

JOHN 8:42-45

SIN IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH GOD

Sin is defined in the Catechism as any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God. When new believers accept Christ as Saviour they know that they have to confess their sins and forsake them. Even the unbelieving human society has an idea of sin though they do not give a solution for it. Usually murder and stealing are seen as great sins. Sin is more than general human perception.

The Scripture speaks of original sin and actual sins. Here are excerpts from Berkhof: The original sin was committed by Adam. As he is the representative of the human race, all were made guilty through him, and that heritage leads to the depraved human nature. Actual sins are sins that individuals perform in distinction from his inherited nature and inclination. While original sin is one, actual sins are many. They may be sins of the inner life, such as pride, envy, hatred, sensual lusts, and evil desires; or sins of the outer life, such as deceit, theft, murder and adultery.

In 1 John 5:16-17, the apostle spoke of sin unto death and sin not unto death. Among this there is one unpardonable sin (sin unto death), the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, after which a change of heart is impossible, and for which it is not necessary to pray about (Matt 12:31-32). John gave a warning here because sin brings death.

Satan is a source of sin as Jesus said he was a liar from the beginning and the father of lies. He featured prominently in the transgression of Adam. Man's heart is always deceitful and is a source of sin as well. That original sin is the mother of all sins. David in his confession in Psalm 51 said that he was conceived in sin. The Bible warns frequently of secret sins, open sins, shameless sins and sins of youthful lusts. Let us flee from all sin.

THOUGHT: Every sin has consequences.

PRAYER: Lord, may I take time to be holy.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 21

1 JOHN 5:18-21

JUDE 20-23

“.. building up yourselves on your most
holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.”

FREEDOM FROM HABITUAL SIN

Faith in Christ and holiness to God is the point the Apostle was stressing in the epistle. He closed with these warnings on sin because sin can spoil all the efforts that had been made to follow God. He qualified believers as those who were begotten of God, and they keep themselves that the wicked one may not touch them. James defined the expected holiness in these words: “*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world*” (James 1:27). John also agreed with this exhortation to keep one away from habitual sin.

Here is a comment from Barnes: “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not – Is not habitually and characteristically a sinner; does not ultimately and finally sin and perish; cannot, therefore, commit the unpardonable sin. Though he may fall into sin, and grieve his brethren, yet we are never to cease to pray for a true Christian: we are never to feel that he has committed the sin which has never forgiveness, and that he has thrown himself beyond the reach of our prayers. This passage, in its connection, is a full proof that a true Christian ‘will’ never commit the unpardonable sin, and, therefore, is a proof that he will never fall from grace.

Keepeth himself – It is not said that he does it by his own strength, but he will put forth his best efforts to keep himself from sin, and by divine assistance he will be able to accomplish it.

And that wicked one toucheth him not – The great enemy of all good is repelled in his assaults, and he is kept from falling into his snares.”

Always remember the cleanliness that God expects of our hearts.

THOUGHT: “*Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.*”

PRAYER: “*Wash me thoroughly... and cleanse me from my sin.*”

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22

2 JOHN 1-3

2 TIMOTHY 1:3-8

*“I thank God, whom I serve from my
forefathers with pure conscience ...”*

A TESTIMONY OF GOSPEL OBEDIENCE

John wrote two short letters, one to an unnamed elect lady and her children, and the other to the beloved brother Gaius. These formed John's second and third epistles. Both letters are a testimony of the gospel obedience and a demonstration of affectionate fellowship of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. They also contain warnings and appraisal of true fellowship. To the recipients of the second letter (an obedient lady disciple and her children), John expressed his love for them in the truth and all who know the truth. This unnamed lady was undoubtedly a strong Christian who had served well in the church, and her children were believers also. John added others who knew the truth.

In the book of Acts there were prominent women whom Paul commended for their ministry to the church. Examples are: Priscilla the wife of Aquila, Lydia of Philippi, etc. This letter of John is also a commendation of many women who have served well in the church.

John added that the truth which indwelt believers will be forever. The truth in the Apostle's mind is a reference to a body of Christian doctrines. These were brought to clear light by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This lady was one of those who accepted these truths and had the conviction to obey and follow its instructions. John was greatly encouraged by her testimony. It was not an easy task, more so for a woman, in a hostile environment. It was her stand for the Lord that made John write these words of encouragement to her. He wished her peace and mercy from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Son in truth and love. This was an expression of best wishes and prayers to God that His grace would be poured sufficiently to keep His children in His peace. It was encouraging for the Apostle to know that his work among the disciples of Christ was fruitful.

THOUGHT: Do I obey the truth? Am I worthy of commendation?

PRAYER: Lord, may my testimony touch others for Thy glory.

WALKING IN TRUTH

John was a man of few words and stated his intention in simple terms. He put across his point thus in verse 4, *“I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.”* The other reason for the Apostle’s joy is that in the midst of widespread disobedience, the recipients of the epistle had done well in obeying the truth.

The commandment is always summed up in the demonstration for love for one another. John valued this in the community of believers because without love there is no meaningful fellowship. It was the same in the days just after the ascension of Christ. Those early disciples expressed their love for one another in selling their goods and giving to the needy. This brought a challenge to the church such that the Apostles had to seek a solution. Thus, the office of the deacon was established and people who were qualified were appointed to that office. This was their effort to ensure that Christian fellowship was sustained. The bond of love is important and necessary for the church. Love for God and keeping His commandments come first. The Apostle brought up this requirement many times because it is a key element in keeping the church together. Christ had taught this to His disciples and they were to keep this commandment.

All true doctrines are from God. Believers do well to keep them. The Apostle warned of contrary doctrines. Teaching true doctrines will counter deceivers who may come in different shapes and sizes. There are those who deny true doctrines outright, and then there are those who give false interpretation. The last group is those who preach true doctrines but do not practise what they preach. The main doctrine that was denied was that of Jesus’ incarnation. The Apostle saw this as a total rejection of the gospel. He thus stressed that the truth was needful.

THOUGHT: Our salvation is that Jesus came and died for our sins.

PRAYER: Lord, may I never fall prey to any deception in doctrine.

WARNING AGAINST DECEIVERS

When Christ was on earth, He faced much opposition from the Jewish leaders. That opposition was carried over to the early church. During the time of John, there were many who denied that Christ had come in the flesh. The Apostle declared these to be antichrist. The understanding of the term is obvious, they stood against Christ. This is used in Scripture also to refer to Satan. He is the instigator of opposition to Christ. He will appear during the Great Tribulation together with the false prophet and will deceive the world. He has sowed the seeds of deception from the beginning.

The Apostle could tell of this false teacher when he wrote this letter. He also acknowledged that the church had made great gains. He exhorted that they should not lose those things, but that they would receive their full reward. In this sense, it is not earthly gain but rather abundant life that goes with eternity. Christian life on earth is great gain for those who believe. They will have peace, joy and hope of a heavenly reward.

Believers who live under persecution and other earthly perils still have joy and hope because the Lord is their strength. John spoke of this through experience. He had seen the hostility first hand when he was with Christ as one of the early disciples. He was also part of the early church that saw great persecution in Jerusalem. His brother James was the first casualty of the Apostles as King Herod put him to death. John must have been driven out of Jerusalem at the destruction of that city by Romans in AD 70. The only historical record of him is in Revelation 1:9 where he said that he was in the isle of Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Despite all these, he looked forward to an eternal reward. He urged the faithful to move forward to add to what they had gained.

THOUGHT: Always lift up the banner of Christ.

PRAYER: Lord, may I stand up for Jesus whatever the cost.

CHOOSING PARTNERS IN FELLOWSHIP

John refuted the error that was prevalent concerning the person of Jesus Christ as he did in the first epistle. There was a widespread denial that Christ had come in the flesh. He told the recipients of the epistle to look at themselves that they do not lose those things that they had worked for, but they should receive their full reward.

The answer to the transgressors who did not abide in the doctrine of Christ is separation. He said that such do not know God and lived after their own thoughts. They did what was right in their own eyes. This is always contrary to the law of God and satisfies the desires of the flesh. The unregenerate will always be blind to the ways of the Lord. On the other hand, those who abide in the doctrine of Christ have both the Father and the Son.

The picture is thus presented and the choice is clear. Those of the same mind will have a meaningful fellowship and will pursue common goals. In earthly matters, people come together against their opponents in different fields. This happens mainly in games. Though those contests are of little value, it still causes a lot of friction. The contest of true believers must be about heavenly things because there is a sure hope in things pertaining to God.

John asked the readers to reject those who did not bring the true doctrine and not to receive them in their homes or greet them. He said that if they did so they were partakers of their evil deeds. This is a clear command on biblical separation and promotion of the cause of Christ. He had more to say but he reserved it for a face-to-face meeting, a more meaningful fellowship than ink and paper. Mutual fellowship upholds the love of Christ. There is a need to warn of contrary doctrines, but standing in the truth builds mutual Christian fellowship.

THOUGHT: Christian fellowship is heavenly joy.

PRAYER: Lord, may I build brotherly fellowship upon the Rock.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 26

3 JOHN 1-13

PSALM 133

*“Behold, how good and how pleasant
it is for brethren to dwell
together in unity!”*

THE MESSAGE OF THIRD JOHN

Third John is a short letter written to a friend. John encouraged fellowship with Christian brothers. He expressed his love for Gaius and assured him of his prayers for his health. He also expressed his joy for Gaius persisting in the truth. They were good friends in sharing their worldly goods and also brothers in common faith. By supporting these men who were ministers of Christ, Gaius became a fellow helper in truth. John had the same zeal as Paul in missionary outreach; he did not have a place he called home. Originally he came from Galilee, ministered in Jerusalem and finally to distant lands. Gaius had hosted him in his house as he indicates in his letter. This disciple was also a supporter of missionaries who came to his church. The character of this brother was pleasing to the Apostle and he had all these good commendations of him. John was one of those who benefitted from the generosity of Gaius.

There is more about John's ministry in extra-biblical history. In his later ministry, he served at Ephesus which was the chief city in the Roman province of Asia. It is also indicated that he commissioned a number of travelling teachers to spread the gospel and strengthen them in maturing the churches. These missionaries were supported by Christians who welcomed them to their homes. Gaius was one such host. Little is known about Gaius in terms of his background and family but much is known here about him as a servant of the Lord who demonstrated his love and received commendation of the Apostle.

Though John did not mention the name of Jesus Christ in this epistle directly, his use of the word *“truth”* referred to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Also the expression, *“for his name's sake”* in verse 7 was a reference to Christ. John has a message of Christ in this short letter.

THOUGHT: All who know the Lord are one in Him.

PRAYER: Lord, may I value the generosity of my brethren always.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27

3 JOHN 2-8

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8

*“Every man according as he purposeth
in his heart, so let him give ...”*

THE GENEROSITY OF GAIUS

John had an earnest desire for the welfare of his host, who had shown great love for the Apostle. The Apostle was happy and was encouraged by the generosity of this disciple. In a few words, he commended him and showed brotherly love. He indicated that Gaius, a believer, had held fast to the truth of Scripture. He walked in that truth and had a testimony from others: *“the brethren ... testified of the truth that is in thee...”*

The generosity of Gaius began with him as a person. He was a believer who stood firm for the faith. When John said that he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in the truth, he was implying that Gaius was one of his children. A preacher has a right to call the believers under his ministry his children. Paul told the Corinthians that he had begotten them through the gospel (1 Cor 4:15). John was right to indicate that relationship with Gaius. He was faithful in serving other brethren and strangers. John encouraged him in doing a good work saying this of the report he had heard of him: *“Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well.”* This was an unusual encouragement to John because his ministry was hindered severally by false disciples who did not walk in the truth.

Gaius had laboured for the sake of Christ's name. His testimony stood out and John wanted to use it to advance the missionary outreach to the Gentiles. He wrote this letter to spur his efforts that the ministry would be more fruitful. He was like giving him wings to fly to hasten the ministry of the gospel. Gaius had a generous heart and was ready to serve with the Apostle. What can you do for the Lord today?

THOUGHT: Generosity is also a fruit of the Spirit.

PRAYER: Lord, may I be ready to give to others what Thou hast given me.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 28

3 JOHN 9-11

PSALM 10:2-6

“The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God ...”

PRIDE IS NOT FOR THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

There is no background information given about the characters mentioned in the text except that Gaius was a good man and Diotrephes was a proud man. John had written a letter to the church and Diotrephes did not receive them. He was not a servant of the Lord though he pretended to be one. He had no love for the brethren nor was he given to hospitality. He just wanted to become a leader for the sake of it. John said that when he would come he would remember the deeds that he had done. Diotrephes spoke ill of them with malicious words. He showed a forbidding attitude and did not receive the brethren. He also forbade those who desired to receive them and cast them out of the church.

In every description, Diotrephes was a bad man. He was proud and wanted to be above everybody. Matthew Henry had this comment of him: “Both the heart and mouth must be watched. The temper and spirit of Diotrephes was full of pride and ambition. It is bad not to do good ourselves; but it is worse to hinder those who would do good. Those cautions and counsels are most likely to be accepted, which are seasoned with love. Follow that which is good, for he that doeth good, as delighting therein, is born of God. Evil-workers vainly pretend or boast acquaintance with God. Let us not follow that which is proud, selfish, and of bad design, though the example may be given by persons of rank and power; but let us be followers of God, and walk in love, after the example of our Lord.”

One wonders why Diotrephes was associated with the church. However, there are such people in the church. Paul said that their conscience is seared with a hot iron (1 Tim 4:2). They act without any sense of guilt. Pray that such in our midst may repent.

THOUGHT: *“Pride goeth before destruction ...”*

PRAYER: Lord, may I tame the ever present spirit of pride in me.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 29

3 JOHN 12

TITUS 1:5-9

“... that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”

COMMENDATION FOR A MAN OF GOD

In contrast to Diotrephes, Demetrius was a good man. The qualities of a man of God are shown in his testimony. One of the requirements that Paul listed for an overseer of the church was that he must have a good report of them that are without; lest he fall into reproach and snare of the devil. Demetrius was such a person. He had a good personal testimony.

The Apostles were able to identify among the disciples those who could be entrusted responsibilities in the church. In the case of Timothy, Paul met him in his journey to Derbe and Lystra and it is testified of him that he was well reported by the brethren that were in Lystra and Iconium and Paul took him into his evangelistic band (Acts 16:1-3). The testimony of Demetrius was pleasing to John. His faith also was doctrinally sound. John said that he had a testimony of the truth itself. He was the right person to be entrusted with the care of the church. He was truthful and lived an upright life.

John also confirmed his suitability to carry out church duties. He made a good companion of Gaius and they were able to carry on the witness of the gospel. The place of their service is not indicated in the letter but it is believed to be in parts of Asia Minor where John served then.

F.B. Meyer applied the character of Demetrius thus: “The Christian must always act worthily of God, especially toward strangers, vv5-6. ‘For the sake of the Name,’ v7, - as children we must maintain the family honor. Such hospitality makes us fellow-workers with the truth. There is a Boanergic touch in v10. The threefold witness to Demetrius should stir our desire to emulate his character. What will it not be when the dimness of earthly converse is exchanged for the face-to-face intercourse of eternity! v14.”

THOUGHT: “A good name is rather to be chosen than riches ...”

PRAYER: Lord, make me a worthy servant in Thy house.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 30

3 JOHN 13-14

ACTS 20:32-38

“... I commend you to God,
and to the word of his grace,
which is able to build you up ...”

JOHN'S FAREWELL

A farewell with kind words reflects Christian love. The Apostle stressed in his letters. 3 John was probably delivered by Demetrius to Gaius. This was occasioned by the report of some brethren who returned to the Apostle and informed him of the hospitality of Gaius. His conduct was commendable and a contrast to the other arrogant man.

Though John did not directly mention the name of Christ in the epistle, the sentence “*for his name's sake they went forth*” is an indirect reference to Christ. He also assumed that their common faith would inform Gaius of the reason for this letter. He said in verse 11, “*Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.*” These words indicated the key to their relationship. He also gave the examples of three characters in this epistle.

John expressed that he wanted to say more to his friend, but he did not want to put it in ink and paper. He hoped to see him face to face. There is a difference between writing and personal contact. Even with modern communication technology, personal touch cannot have a substitute. Paul was a missionary to many places. He also had the ability to write to the churches about many things that he had taught. However, he valued personal visits more than writing. That was why he travelled extensively. It is indicated here also that John visited many places to encourage Christians and that was the ministry of his calling.

In his last words, he said to Gaius, “*Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.*” It was common for Apostles to give such farewell salutation and to mention names of brethren who had been helpful in the ministry, and thus, let the brotherly love continue.

THOUGHT: It is a virtue to commend brethren who are worthy.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to appreciate the ministry of others to me.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 1

EPHESIANS 1:1-2
ACTS 20:17-31

*“... I have received of the Lord Jesus,
to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”*

THE CHURCH OF THE EPHESIANS

Morris MacDonald (in his book published by the FEBC Press in 1999) observed that the Ephesian church is the only New Testament church examined by three New Testament writers. In Acts, Luke wrote from the vantage of history; in Ephesians, Paul wrote from the vantage of testimony; while in Revelation, John wrote from the vantage of eternity. MacDonald also noted that it was the only church where three of its leaders were known: Paul who oversaw its beginning, Timothy who continued its development and John who directed it in its maturing.

The founding of this church is recorded in Acts 18-19 and is a product of Paul's missionary efforts. Ephesus was a commercial centre in Asia Minor and was also a religious centre. It housed the idol goddess of the Greeks known as Artemis (or Diana in Latin). Paul found it a ripe field for gospel outreach. At the end of his second missionary journey he visited Ephesus where he left Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18-21). Paul remained and ministered to the church at Ephesus for three years (Acts 18-19). The Ephesian church grew and matured during that time and became the mother church of at least seven churches (the church of the Colossians plus the six churches mentioned in Revelation).

The ministry of the gospel began to hurt the idolatrous worship in Ephesus and also the worldliness. This resulted in an uproar and Paul had to leave the city. However that adversity unintentionally greatly helped in publicising the gospel. A strong church was already organised and the elders were committed leaders. Paul had established a Bible School where he trained the disciples while in that city (Acts 19:9). When he returned from Macedonia, he summoned the elders of this church to Miletus and in that last meeting he spent a great deal of time charging them to remain strong in shepherding the church of God. The church was already on her feet and went on to further maturity.

THOUGHT: Faithful missionary outreach yields godly churches.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always have an evangelistic zeal.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 2

EPHESIANS 1:1-2

1 THESSALONIANS 2:11-16

“... when ye received the word of God

... ye received it ... (as)...

the word of God.”

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

The epistle was addressed to the saints who were at Ephesus and who were faithful in Christ Jesus. The writer identified himself as Paul an Apostle of Jesus Christ. This is one of the so-called “prison epistles” that Paul wrote during his first Roman imprisonment in AD 60-62. He referred to the imprisonment in Ephesians 3:1, 4:1 and 6:20. The content of the epistle reflects the maturity of that church. Paul knew this church very well and he fed her with spiritual meat. In the epistle he addressed very important theological matters and gave clear explanation in a language that is easily understood.

Paul’s oft repeated phrase “*in Christ*” (or similar expressions) appears thirty-five times in the epistle. This shows the central place of Christ in his message. He focused on the believer’s responsibility to walk according to the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. As he expressed to the elders earlier, Paul wrote to prevent problems in the church as a whole and encouraged maturity in Him. The key words of his message are given in Ephesians 2:8-10 and 4:1-3 which stressed salvation by grace and the need for humility and patience in upholding the unity of the church. Chapter 6 is the grand finale of Paul’s message. He said that Christians were blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, yet spiritual warfare was still a daily experience of the Christian while still in the world. He gave the clearest admonition on how to “*be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*” (Eph 6:10b).

Paul wrote to inform his readers of their position in Christ, stirring them to look to the source of their daily spiritual living. He told them to walk worthy of the calling wherewith they were called. He listed the heavenly possession of believers as adoption, redemption, power, life, grace, citizenship and the love of Christ. Thus the church matured.

THOUGHT: The words of the apostles are indeed the words of God.

PRAYER: Lord, may I uphold the value of Thy written Word.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3

EPHESIANS 1:1-2

ACTS 9:3-9

“Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”

THE SALUTATION OF THE APOSTLE

Paul identified himself as the writer of the epistle, and he qualified himself as an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. He was known in Ephesus having been their minister for three years. Most of the members were converted through his ministry, thus he would know them by name. They too would have no doubt about the identity of the writer.

Paul was an Apostle of Jesus Christ; thus his message had to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ. That he was serving in that office by the will of God went back to the time of his conversion. He was called in a special way and was endued with the knowledge of God. He became an instant preacher without much experience or training beyond the time he spent in Arabia. The testimony of his calling is recorded in Acts 9. The Lord revealed to Ananias of Damascus of Paul's appointment thus: *“Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.”* Paul became an Apostle by virtue of this heavenly revelation. His background as a Pharisee gave him advantage in the knowledge of the Old Testament. As a Pharisee, Paul served with misguided zeal. But then as a believer, he knew the right interpretation and application of the Scriptures.

Paul identified his audience as the saints who were at Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus. All believers who are born again qualify as saints. They do not need canonisation after their death to become saints. They were also faithful in Christ. The time that Paul had spent with them was most fruitful in their spiritual maturity and he knew their faith. He could thus address them as he did. Wishing grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ showed their common bond in faith.

THOUGHT: Faithful service yields good fruit for God's kingdom.

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

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4

EPHESIANS 1:3-6

“And he that searcheth the hearts

ROMANS 8:24-30

knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit ...”

ELECT BY THE WILL OF GOD

The testimony of our individual salvation is not the same, but it is the same Lord who saves. If all goes according to our own will, we will all be lost. Paul informed the saints where their blessedness came from. It was God the Father who blessed them with all spiritual blessings in Christ. The election of God includes all that pertain to salvation. The Apostle revealed that God elected us before the foundation of the world. The result is that the elect will be holy and without blame before Him in love. While this is true, the Apostle laboured day and night to do what he knew to be the will of God.

Predestination is another word that supports God’s election. This is God’s plan or purpose with respect to His moral creatures. Election is His eternal purpose to save some of the human race in and by Jesus Christ. Those who oppose reformed theology have termed predestination an impossibility. However, God is sovereign, and He acts after the good pleasure of His will. His sovereignty is the final cause of all things. Our understanding is the distinction of His secret and revealed will. The secret will is the decree which is hidden in God. The revealed will is His precept which is revealed in the law and the gospel. His move in regard to salvation changes sinners to saints.

Adoption is also a privilege that God gives to believers, for John 1:12 said that *“... as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God ...”* Paul qualified this benefit with an expressive phrase *“... according to the good pleasure of his will”* (Eph 1:5), and concluded, *“To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved”* (Eph 1:6).

THOUGHT: The creatures are to submit to God’s sovereign will.

PRAYER: Lord, increase my knowledge of Thy will.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5

EPHESIANS 1:7-12

GALATIANS 3:10-14

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us ...”

REDEMPTION THROUGH THE SON

Redemption is the noun form of the verb redeem. Here are two dictionary meanings of “redeem” from the Webster’s 1828 Dictionary:

(a) To purchase back; to ransom; to liberate or rescue from captivity or bondage, or from any obligation or liability to suffer or to be forfeited, by paying an equivalent; as, to redeem prisoners or captured goods; to redeem a pledge.

(b) To repurchase what has been sold; to regain possession of a thing alienated, by repaying the value of it to the possessor.

This is what Jesus has done for us sinners. Jesus has purchased us back with His blood. We have received forgiveness according to the riches of His grace. Jesus has obtained eternal redemption for us. It is of interest to note that the Old Testament understanding of forgiveness of sin was through the offering of sacrifices for sin. But these are declared in the New Testament to be no longer of necessity. They were only pictures of the real Redeemer, Jesus Christ. God has wisdom and prudence beyond our comprehension.

The particulars of God’s redemptive plan are made known to us in the gospel. God revealed it according to the good pleasure of His will. This Paul said came to pass in the dispensation of the fullness of time. That is when the right time came. This thus speaks of God’s progressive revelation. The redemptive work of Christ leads us to obtain an inheritance. He has predestinated us according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will. The Apostle repeated the similar refrain: *“That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ”* (Eph 1:12). We have assurance of forgiveness because of Christ’s redemptive work.

THOUGHT: “Redeemed how I love to proclaim it.”

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for paying the penalty for my sins.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6
EPHESIANS 1:13-14
JOHN 15:26-27

“... I will send unto you from the Father,
even the Spirit of truth,
which proceedeth from the Father ...”

THE SEAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The three persons of the Trinity are involved in the salvation of believers. The Father chooses them, the Son redeems them and the Holy Spirit seals them. This comes by hearing the Word of Truth, the gospel of salvation. This instrumentality of the Word is very important for it teaches potential believers where to start their relationship with God.

The immediate positive response upon hearing is to believe. Grace and truth come by Jesus Christ. That truth is the Word that is preached. The ability to believe is the work of the Holy Spirit. We must not read more into this. Modern Charismatics have taken upon themselves the imaginary power to dispense the Holy Spirit, involving much emotion and external activity. The truth is that the Spirit works quietly in the hearts of genuine believers and confirms the Word in them. When they have believed, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. This sealing is the confirmation of their faith and their inclusion in the family of God. The promise that comes with the sealing, in the words of the Apostle, is “... *the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory*” (Eph 1:14).

Matthew Henry had this to say on the sealing: “He dispenses all his blessings, according to his good pleasure. His Divine teaching led whom he pleased to see the glory of those truths, which others were left to blaspheme. What a gracious promise that is, which secures the gift of the Holy Ghost to those who ask him! The sanctifying and comforting influences of the Holy Spirit seal believers as the children of God, and heirs of heaven. These are the first-fruits of holy happiness.”

THOUGHT: The Holy Spirit is the unseen power that touches believers.
PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for the work of the Spirit in my heart.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

MATTHEW 28:18-20

*“All power is given unto me
in heaven and in earth.”*

PRAYER FOR WISDOM AND REVELATION

When Paul wrote this epistle, he had been away from Ephesus for a few years but he kept in touch with them and thus knew the progress of the church. They remained faithful and loved one another. The Apostle gave thanks for them and said that he did not cease to pray for them. He asked that they be given the spirit of knowledge and revelation of God. The bestowal of that godly wisdom was the aim of the Apostle when he laboured among them.

Paul continued to express his wish for the Ephesian believers: *“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power”* (Eph 1:18-19). These expressions constitute the perfection of a Christian and this is needful for a meaningful fellowship with God. The fruits of salvation will be manifested and hope in the promises of God will be sure. It is the redemptive work of Christ that makes all these possible. As the eternal High Priest, Jesus rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father representing those whom He has redeemed.

The possibility of the perfection of the saints is because Jesus Christ as their representative is highly exalted. He has power in heaven and earth. When He ascended to heaven, He declared this to His disciples and promised to be with them until the end of the ages. The Apostle’s wish for the believers in Ephesus was that these promises of Christ be fulfilled in them. The church is the body of Christ and the fullness of Him that fills all in all.

THOUGHT: Wisdom and revelation come from the Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER: Lord, may I seek to grow unto perfection in Thee.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 8

EPHESIANS 2:1-3

1 PETER 4:1-4

*“That he no longer should live
the rest of his time in the flesh to
the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”*

DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS

The description of the Ephesian believers' old condition as dead in trespasses and sins represents their spiritual condition as unbelievers. Man in an unregenerate condition is spiritually dead and he does not have any hope of life. He lives a life of sin and the wages of sin is death. Paul was speaking to those who had been quickened, that is restored to life. He identified the result of that old condition: they walked according to the course of the world. This is a reference to free living without any restraint or moral basis. He also described another power that controlled world affairs, i.e. Satan the prince of the power of the air which now works in the children of disobedience. On the same matter, the Apostle told the Colossian believers that as unbelievers they were alienated and enemies in their mind by wicked works (Col 1:21).

He also described the conduct of unbelievers. They lived in the lusts of the flesh and fulfilled the desires of the flesh and mind. This is the kind of life a person lives when he does not have the salvific knowledge of Christ. The sinful life is a natural course of life without any restraint. Paul added that they were by nature children of wrath, even as others. This is the world which believers are asked to be a witness to for the salvation that comes through Christ. When Paul went to Ephesus the first time there were few Christians and it took effort on his part and the others to win them (who were in their old condition) to Christ. All Christians must draw a line between the world and their faith. Today that line is nearly invisible as the world has invaded the church through music and a pursuit for wealth; and the wayward ones represent the church.

It is not pleasant to recall one's sinful past but sometimes it is necessary in order to see how much God's grace has done. One who is genuinely saved will not forget the change that Christ has wrought in his life.

THOUGHT: Sin is a bondage that must be removed at all costs.

PRAYER: Lord, may I never return to my old ways.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 9

EPHESIANS 2:4-10

ROMANS 5:6-11

*“For when we were yet without strength,
in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”*

SALVATION BY GRACE

While we were yet sinners Christ died for us, this is because God is rich in mercy and great in love. While we were in that state of sin, He loved us. He made us alive together with Christ. The underlying factor is salvation by grace. The text tells us that this is the work of God. It is He who has raised us up together and made us to sit in heavenly places in Jesus Christ. The verbs used tell us that it is God alone who takes the action and we are passive.

The purpose of the bestowal of grace is thus stated in Ephesians 2:7: *“That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”* Grace is defined as the free and unmerited love and favour of God, the spring and source of all benefits that men receive from Him.

The description in Ephesians 2:8-10 of how God shows His favour makes these words the key part of this whole book. This is also a reference that featured prominently during the Protestant Reformation. The Church of Rome had added to grace salvation by works. The reformers stressed *sola gratia*, i.e. grace alone. The text states clearly, *“Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* In this, there is no way in which Rome can justify their version of grace “plus works.” Mandatory confession of sins to a priest and doing good works were assumed to secure forgiveness of sins. The sale of indulgences or forgiveness tickets made salvation nothing but a commodity that could be purchased easily with money. These practices are a total rejection of salvation by grace alone.

Being created in Christ Jesus refers to one’s second birth which is obtained in Christ. This brings with it the power to do good works as the natural outflow of salvation.

THOUGHT: Our God is a God of all grace.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always cherish the gift of Thy love.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

ACTS 10:34-43

*“Of a truth I perceive that
God is no respecter of persons.”*

RECONCILIATION OF JEWS AND GENTILES

All who believe in Christ are made the children of God. One of the identifying marks of a Jew was circumcision. The Gentiles were not circumcised and thus were counted as outcasts. The Apostle in addressing believers in Christ saw circumcision in the flesh made with hands as inferior. He appealed to the true circumcision of the heart. This brings all people together regardless of their background. The Apostle told the believers to remember their benefits as children of God without that external operation. They were now co-heirs of the blessings of Christ.

Paul described those benefits in Ephesians 2:12-13 that when Christ died on the cross and shed His blood, He opened the door for all nations to be partakers of the promises of God. This includes heritage of His kingdom. Believers from every nation are admitted to the fold of God. This truth gives them the greatest satisfaction. The Apostle called it *“our peace”* (Eph 2:14). Christ removed the barrier that stood in the way and brought all people together to become the universal church.

The Apostles carried this message in their missionary activities. Many were brought to Christ. That message has remained for centuries and the church today stands on the basis of its truth. Many pioneer missionaries started churches with husband and wife as the only members. However, their faithful labours in many cases saw whole communities being converted to Christ. It was so in the early church that the enemies in Thessalonica testified that the Apostles had *“... turned the world upside down ...”* (Acts 17:6). The Apostles’ message touched individuals and many were soundly saved. Ephesus was no exception, the gospel brought many to Christ, both Jews and Gentiles.

THOUGHT: Jesus is the Saviour of both Jews and Gentiles.

PRAYER: Lord, may the gospel preached bring many to salvation.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11

EPHESIANS 3:1-13

MARK 16:15-16

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

GENTILES ARE PARTAKERS OF THE PROMISE OF CHRIST

The extent to which the Jews hated the Gentiles is reflected in their response to Paul's speech in Acts 22:21-22. He told them that the Lord had told him that He would send him to the Gentiles. They then gave him audience, but then lifted up their voices and stopped Paul from speaking. In the text the Apostle explained that the Gentiles were part and parcel of the church. He was put in prison for that cause. He said he was given by God the stewardship for the Gentiles.

The “*mystery*” that he talked about was the ultimate purpose of the church according to God's eternal decree. This was not previously revealed but now was the time of revelation. God's programme for the Gentiles is spelt out in Christ's commission to the Apostles and more so in the appointment of Paul. Paul said in Ephesians 3:5-6, *“Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.”*

When God determined that the Gentiles should hear the gospel, it was Paul who was made an Apostle to them. He saw this as the work of the grace of God alone. The Ephesian church was basically a Gentile church and Paul addressed them as such. He declared the unsearchable riches of Christ. The mystery that had been hidden from generations was now revealed. In this there was the manifold wisdom of God now made known even in the spiritual world. It is God's eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord. This gave them boldness and access with confidence by faith. In this the Apostle told them not to be discouraged. You too must not be discouraged as a Christian.

THOUGHT: The Gentile church is here to stay.

PRAYER: Lord, may people of all nations be brought to salvation in Christ.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

1 PETER 4:15-17

*“Yet if any man suffer as a Christian,
let him not be ashamed ...”*

PRAYER FOR REALIZATION OF GENTILE CHURCH

Bowing the knees is figurative of prayer, and Paul petitioned the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was in Antioch that believers were called “*Christians*” for the first time (Acts 11:26). It was a name that the enemies used to chide them, but it remained as a name to their honour. Paul accepted that name before King Agrippa in Acts 26:28. He said that in Christ the whole family in heaven and earth was named. Peter also said that if any man suffered as a Christian, he would glorify God.

Paul prayed that God, according to His riches in glory, may grant four things:

1. that they may be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man;
2. that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith and that they might be rooted and grounded in love;
3. that they may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height (of God’s love);
4. that they may know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that they might be filled with all the fulness of God.

He finished his prayer with a benediction, committing the Ephesian Christians to Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that they ask or think, according to the power that works in them. The Apostle used this superlative expression because God is above all and He can do all things. Thus he ended his benediction: *“Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”*

The Lord did not only answer that prayer concerning Ephesus. He has answered it with regard to all churches of the Gentiles through all history since then. It is a prayer for our church today.

THOUGHT: All Christian activities are for the glory of God.

PRAYER: Lord, may the exceeding riches of Thy glory be mine.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13

EPHESIANS 4:1-3

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

*“Only let your conversation be as it
becometh the gospel of Christ ...”*

EXHORTATION TO UNITY IN THE CHURCH

Believers in Christ are to be practically united in common faith. This comes as they demonstrate the manner of life and love for one another. God makes us one and gives us gifts that we may mature. While calling for the need for unity in the body of Christ, he qualified himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He wanted to put across the message that it was worthy to go to prison for Christ's sake.

The call to Christians to walk worthy of the calling wherewith they are called has wide implications for a Christian. In another reference, Paul told believers that their character must be fitting of the gospel of Christ. Christians must have an external testimony that speaks for them. Everything that is included in the calling ought to be seen in one's life daily. When Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:37-40, he called for repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. Those were acts of public confession for everyone who had accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour. That profession is a lifelong commitment and nothing must deter it.

Paul preached in like manner at Ephesus and he expected new believers to show the same commitment in forsaking their sins and embracing Christ. In all his writing he did not fail to mention specific sins by name and warned that these must be avoided. On many occasions he admonished his audience to the effect that they lacked common sense. They had to make the gospel of Christ their yardstick.

The Apostle also advocated humility and the forbearance of one another in love as a means of keeping the unity of the body of Christ. He said that in doing this they were endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The desire of the Apostle needs to be seen in our church today.

THOUGHT: Unity is not ecumenism, but genuine obedience of faith.

PRAYER: Lord, may I strive to keep the unity of the faith.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14

EPHESIANS 4:4-6

2 CORINTHIANS 13:5-8

*“Examine yourselves,
whether ye be in the faith ...”*

EXPLANATION OF UNITY IN THE CHURCH

In today's text the Apostle spoke about a seven-fold oneness in God: body, spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, one God and Father of all. The unity must not be outside of these seven elements. The Spirit of Christ in the life of believers is manifested in faith and love. Faith shows our trust in God. He is the same Lord and never changes. We have to have complete trust in His promises. A step of faith makes one walk worthy of the gospel.

Christ designated believers as the light of the world. This was also the testimony that the Apostle was seeking for the Ephesian church. Love is the bond of Christian fellowship. The Apostle indicated in the text that oneness of believers was sustained by common love. Christians will learn to value this exhortation when there is an absence of love in their midst. In such a situation the church becomes one of dead orthodoxy. Out of this lack comes mistrust and division. The spirit that builds the unity disappears and the spirit of carnality takes over. This must not be allowed in the community of believers.

When Paul spoke to the elders of this church in Acts 20, he told them to shepherd the church of Christ which He purchased with His own blood. The ministers of the gospel are not to preach themselves but Christ and His saving Gospel. In Acts there is a record of confrontation between Paul and Barnabas because of John Mark. However, that was out of non-doctrinal disagreement and did not mean their faith was compromised. (There is evidence that they later were reconciled.) When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he knew that such negative reactions occur among Christians, but there is a remedy because they believe in one Lord. Unity ought to be the leading character in the body of Christ and that seven-fold oneness is the basis.

THOUGHT: All must be united in building up the body of Christ.

PRAYER: Lord, may I use my talents to build up the body of Christ.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 15

EPHESIANS 4:7-11

MATTHEW 25:14-30

“... to every man according
to his several ability.”

THE GIFTS AS A MEANS FOR UNITY

A talent was a coin with some monetary value. In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of three men whose master had delivered his goods unto. They received money of different values. Two traded with their talents and gained more. One did not and was punished. Out of that story the talent became synonymous to a natural gift or ability given to a person. Paul stated this in Ephesians 4:7, “*But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*” These will be gifts in ministering for Christ. Paul also quoted from Psalm 68:18 that talks about gifts to men.

Here is Matthew Henry’s observation: “Unto every believer is given some gift of grace, for their mutual help. All is given as seems best to Christ to bestow upon every one. He received for them, that he might give to them, a large measure of gifts and graces; particularly the gift of the Holy Ghost. Not a mere head knowledge, or bare acknowledging Christ to be the Son of God, but such as brings trust and obedience. There is a fulness in Christ, and a measure of that fulness given in the counsel of God to every believer; but we never come to the perfect measure till we come to heaven. God’s children are growing, as long as they are in this world; and the Christian’s growth tends to the glory of Christ.”

The Apostle listed five offices of the church (Eph 4:11) that were valid at his time to illustrate the spiritual gifts that were given. He was himself an Apostle, others were prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

THOUGHT: The talents that the Lord gave are to be used.

PRAYER: Lord, may I not neglect the talents that Thou hast given me.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 16

EPHESIANS 4:11-16

ACTS 17:4-7

“These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.”

THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS

Unity in the church (Eph 4:3) is sustained by the exercise of the gifts of those appointed to particular offices (Eph 4:11). In Ephesians 4:12, the Apostle listed three purposes: *“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”*

God communicated His words to men through people whom He had chosen beginning with Abraham and down to the Apostles. This communication is summed up in Hebrews 1:1-2: *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son ...”* God spoke through people whom He had especially chosen and equipped with spiritual gifts.

First, Paul mentioned Apostles and prophets (Eph 4:11a). Their main task was to convey God’s words to the world. Christ had delegated to the Apostles the responsibility of preaching the gospel. They did not only preach but also committed the words of Christ into writing. These became a permanent record and a standard guide for the church. In their lifetime, the Apostles went far and wide to announce the good news of salvation. The prophets had the same duty in the Old Testament. Moses was commissioned to write the words of God. His writings are the backbone of the Old Testament. Many other prophets were sent and they exercised their spiritual gifts.

Then Paul mentioned evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11b). Philip was an evangelist and worked hand in hand with the Apostles. Others like Timothy also belonged to this group; and they all fulfilled their duty.

THOUGHT: Faithful men sustain the chain of the gospel in all ages.

PRAYER: Lord, may I do my best as Thy witness in my generation.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17

EPHESIANS 4:12-16

ACTS 19:8-10

“... and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.”

GIFTS FOR EDIFYING THE BODY OF CHRIST

The gifts of the Lord are to be used for the edifying, or building up, of the church. Each makes a contribution to the advancement of the gospel. Such gifts are perfected by proper training.

Paul pioneered theological education at Ephesus in the school of Tyrannus. Theological institutions to train pastors have become part of the life of the church through history. Christian ministries (such as preaching, writing and Bible translation, etc) require proper training. Missionary work requires multiple skills, and professional training becomes necessary. Anyone with a gift ought to make the best use of it. Every work done for God has results. Perfecting means that the faithful will receive proper instruction to know God better and to grow unto maturation. Gifted people are required to cause the people to understand the words of God as the Levites did in the Old Testament. Teaching the words of God today, especially in the midst of many conflicting voices, is an absolute necessity. The Apostle likened believers to new-born babies who need to be fed with milk or other soft food. When they grow up they will need to feed on solid food or meat. This requirement is stated in Ephesians 4:14: *“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”* A faithful servant will serve as a parent to new believers.

When the body of Christ is instructed faithfully, she becomes a united church standing on the fundamentals of the Christian faith. The Apostles knew Christ as He taught them Himself. He left out nothing that was necessary for their service. They were entrusted with the duty of carrying the knowledge of Christ to the church.

THOUGHT: Effective witness comes by spiritual gifts.

PRAYER: Lord, may I know my gifts and use them for Thy glory.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18

EPHESIANS 4:17-22

JOHN 4:7-26

“... *thou wouldst have asked of him,
and he would have given thee living water.*”

HOLINESS COMES IN PUTTING OFF THE OLD MAN

Paul preached the gospel of salvation to the Ephesians in all its fullness. When he spoke to the elders of this church in Acts 20, he reminded them that he kept back nothing that was profitable to them, but he showed them and taught them publicly and from house to house. He also preached to both Jews and Gentiles.

Now, Paul revisited the basics of the gospel that believers must not walk as unbelievers walk. Life without Christ is a life of vanity. As far as the intellect is concerned, all are equally endowed and can excel in earthly knowledge. However, life without God is destitute of understanding, and separates a person from life with God. The Apostle said that man's understanding was “... *darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance ...*” (Eph 4:18). Their heart was blinded and could not know God. Naturally, this condition bears its fruits as Paul stated in Ephesians 4:19: “*Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*” He told the Ephesians that that was not the way they ought to go because they had already learnt the doctrine of Christ.

The Ephesians had heard about Christ, and Paul had taught them. Any inquirer about the doctrine of Christ will be like Nicodemus of John 3. He had asked Jesus how a man could be born again when he was old. This was his simple question to Jesus. Also, the Samaritan woman in John 4 asked Jesus to give her water that she would not thirst again. The same was with the Philippian jailor in Acts 16 who asked with great fear, “... *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (Acts 16:30). Each of them found the answer and was gloriously saved. Paul had given such answers to the Ephesians. He told them to forsake sin and to enter into newness of life as one puts off old clothes and puts on new ones.

THOUGHT: Everybody must be born again in order to see heaven.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always hold to the faith of my calling.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19

EPHESIANS 4:23-29

GALATIANS 5:22-26

*“If we live in the Spirit,
let us also walk in the Spirit.”*

HOLINESS GROWS IN PUTTING ON THE NEW MAN

The old man is transformed and renewed in the spirit of the mind. This comes when one's spiritual needs have been met. The Apostle asked the members of this church to put on the new man which is after God created in righteousness and true holiness. They must then walk in the newness of life.

In this new path, they would have to forsake sin and walk worthy of the faith that they professed. The Apostle specified the nature of conduct that they needed to have. As brethren, they were to put away lying and speak the truth. He admonished them also to exercise self-control in handling anger, and not to let anger fester and grow in them which would be a sin. Paul also showed that the devil was the instigator of sin and, in newness of life, the believer must not let Satan have a place in his life. Every believer must be on the watch. There was a need for alertness to counter Satan's evil methods. Paul also specified the need to repent of one's sin of stealing, and to steal no more. Such repentance must include restitution to correct the damage that was caused. In addition, the Apostle exhorted that the believer must labour with his hands for what he needed, as well as to have something to give to those who were needy.

Another mark of holiness is one's everyday conversation: *“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers”* (Eph 4:29). One example is two people walking together will tend to talk about a third person who is not with them. When there is no newness of life, they will talk evil of the third person. What about you? Love your neighbour.

THOUGHT: Newness of life in Christ promises a bright future.

PRAYER: Lord, may my life be a testimony of newness of life.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20
EPHESIANS 4:30-5:2
JOHN 14:15-19

*“And I will pray the Father
and he shall give you another Comforter,
that he may abide with you for ever.”*

GRIEVE NOT THE HOLY SPIRIT

The transformation that comes upon putting off the old man and putting on the new man is sustained by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle taught the Ephesian Christians not to grieve the Holy Spirit because they had been sealed to the day of redemption.

It grieves the Holy Spirit when a believer goes back to his old sins. Paul taught that they were to put sins away. He said this in Ephesians 4:31, *“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.”* When a believer is provoked, he may feel wronged and therefore may think that it is justifiable for him to become bitter or angry. Thus, he falls into the trap of Satan. He forgets to put away *“all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking.”* He forgets the counsel to be patient. Paul called for kindness to one another, tenderheartedness and forgiveness because God has forgiven us for Christ’s sake (Eph 4:32). A loving attitude does much in the restoration of one’s enemy. The Lord will teach a believer how to show that love. That is what is meant to follow God as children.

Believers are known as Christians, i.e. followers of Christ. Christ loves us and we are to imitate His example. He went to the extent of giving His life to save us from our sins. Everyone who benefits from the gift of Christ was once an enemy of the Saviour, but He extended His grace to us and we found salvation. The sacrifice of Christ is described as a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. This is the same description that was used to describe the sacrifices in the Mosaic Law. However, those earlier sacrifices were simply pictures of Christ who was to come. He became the gift of God’s love for sinners. The Apostle gave consideration to all these factors and urged the believers to remain faithful and not to grieve the Holy Spirit.

THOUGHT: I am created unto righteousness, not to wrath.

PRAYER: Lord, may I overcome all temptations to grieve the Spirit.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21

EPHESIANS 5:3-12

ROMANS 1:16-23

“... for it is the power of God unto salvation
to every one that believeth ...”

SEPARATION FROM SINFUL CHARACTER

Evil communications is a pathway to greater sin. These are stated as filthiness, foolish talking and jesting. The unregenerate cannot hold their tongue from uttering such things; but these are not convenient for a child of God. Instead a child of God must give thanks for salvation and exercise self-control facilitated by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Paul was specific to show that those who did such evils could not get away with it. He said, “*For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*” (Eph 5:5). He urged his audience not to be deceived. God punishes the disobedient over such deeds. Thus they must have nothing to do with such deeds.

Paul reminded his readers that they were once in that darkness, but then they were children of light, in the Lord, and they must walk in that light. The Ephesian Christians knew what the Apostle meant because all of them had a testimony of salvation. And they knew their past and how the Lord had separated them from that darkness. Paul said that “*the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.*” Thus their everyday life must prove what was acceptable to God.

Paul urged the Ephesian Christians not to be silent but to exercise separation and have no fellowship at all with the unfruitful works of darkness. Their position must stand out, pointing out errors. Though Paul was speaking here of relationship on the personal level, it was also true that there were churches who did not take any disciplinary action against erring members. This must not be the case. The Apostle painted a sad picture of the sinful world saying that it was a shame even to speak of those things that were done of unbelievers in secret. Thus there was a need for separation.

THOUGHT: “... *evil communications corrupt good manners*” (1 Cor 15:33).

PRAYER: Lord, may I always speak that which is edifying.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 22

EPHESIANS 5:13-17

ECCLESIASTES 12:1-7

*“Remember now thy Creator
in the days of thy youth ...”*

WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Jesus told His disciples that they were the light of the world and they were also salt. His remark was an obvious metaphor. The Apostle Paul added here that all things that were reprov'd were manifested by the light. He cited Isaiah 60:1 to show that Christ gave light. Light in this sense are truth and holiness, leading one to the right path in life.

Paul urged his readers to *“walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.”* How they used their time was one thing that would determine if they were wise or foolish. Wisdom tells us to spend our time well and productively. The world around us has perfected the use of time as they are motivated by monetary gain. If all servants of the Lord will adopt their example for heavenly gain much will be achieved. The saying that an idle mind is Satan's workshop is true, thus we need to be constantly occupied. God does not make us to be idle but to be active and productive. Paul also commanded the Thessalonians that if any would not work, he should not eat (2 Thess 3:10). God has endued man with intelligence and he will know that he has to labour to earn a living. Christians must be in the forefront in setting an example to the world, and not vice versa. Their diligence must be seen wherever they are so that they can be a testimony of the light of Christ.

Paul then urged his readers not to be unwise but to know what the will of the Lord was. When confronted with unusual circumstances, a child of God must be able to make quick decisions and find a good solution. Paul grew up as a Pharisee; their principles in many cases defeated common sense. The priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan had that rigid spirit and could not help a needy man. On the other hand, the Samaritan acted wisely with love and saved that robbery victim. Let us demonstrate our faith by keeping Christian principles.

THOUGHT: Sinful habits dim the light of Christ in us.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always make wise decisions.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 23

EPHESIANS 5:18-21

PSALM 119:9-16

*“Blessed art thou, O LORD:
teach me thy statutes.”*

BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Drunkenness is a social evil that has ruled the lives of many people. Excessive drinking even to death is not uncommon. Such behaviour seems to have been there through the ages. It was the same in the time of Paul’s writing. Christians must be excluded from such activities. Do not drink at all!

The Apostle’s prescription is to be filled with the Spirit. This means to be controlled by the Spirit. This is crucial for a successful Christian life. This filling also will be evidenced by the bearing of the fruits that have been mentioned. Part of Christian fellowship and worship is hymn singing. The Apostle said, *“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”* (Eph 5:19). In communication, music is a very powerful medium, and the world knows this. So they exploit it to the fullest. The music industry generates much income to its players. Today, the so-called gospel music has also entered this arena. The content, however, is not different from the world. They have christened that music as “praise and worship” and many churches have adopted this for their use. Paul was not speaking of entertainment but psalms, hymns and spiritual songs that edify the soul. These also give praise to the Lord.

“Thank you, Lord” must always be on the lips of a child of God. When we consider our position, especially our salvation as presented in this epistle, there is much to thank the Lord for. Paul’s calling to salvation and ministry was clearly the work of God’s grace. He said we must give thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is need also of submission to one another in the fear of God. The filling of the Spirit yields these virtues.

THOUGHT: The filling of the Holy Spirit is desirable in God’s service.

PRAYER: Lord, may I have a sufficient portion of the Spirit in serving Thee.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24

EPHESIANS 5:22-24

COLOSSIANS 3:18-25

*“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily,
as to the Lord, and not unto men.”*

THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN WIFE

The text today commands wives to submit to their own husbands. This submission is possible only if the wife is a Christian. If she is not, she will not have the ability to do it. As a Christian, she has the love of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit helping her. This is a strength from the Lord given to her to let her know that the curse of Eve upon every wife has been lifted (cf. Gen 3:16). She will no longer usurp the authority of her husband. If the husband is not a Christian she still has to submit. The reason is she submits unto the Lord.

This means that her submission is within the confines of the Bible. The word *“everything”* in Ephesians 5:24 is qualified by *“unto the Lord.”* She will not need to submit if it is against the teaching of God’s Word. She acknowledges that her husband is the head of the home just as Christ is the Head of the church. By her holy witness in Christ prayerfully her unbelieving husband will come to believe in Christ. If her husband is a believer it is even better, for peace and holiness will prevail in this Christ-centred home.

She submits as if she is submitting to Christ. She will do so willingly and cheerfully because she is doing it for Christ’s sake. She continues to be a godly wife at home regardless of how her husband and children respond. Her conviction is one of doing it for her Lord’s sake.

This teaching is most timely as it is Christmas Eve today. Mary the chosen virgin is a godly example for all Christian wives to follow. She submitted to God’s will in her life and remained a virgin till the birth of Jesus. She continued to obey God’s will in her obedience to Joseph whom God appointed to be the adopted father of Christ. Throughout the upbringing of Christ, Mary did her due diligence in ensuring that Christ was ready to begin His ministry at the age of thirty years.

THOUGHT: The wife who honours Christ blesses the home.

PRAYER: Lord, may my home be a Christ-centred home always.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25

EPHESIANS 5:25-33

PSALM 40:8-17

*“I delight to do thy will, O my God:
yea, thy law is within my heart.”*

HUSBANDS ARE TO LOVE THEIR WIVES

The husband is given a heavy role in his marriage. His right of leadership comes with responsibilities. He has to give himself sacrificially to the duties that come with that honour. Love is the bond that will keep his family together as the husband follows the example of Christ who loved the church and gave Himself for it.

The Apostle Paul further defined the work of Christ thus, *“That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Eph 5:26-27). He added that men ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself also, for they are one flesh. Many marriages are broken because of the cruelty of the husband towards his wife. This is an expression of his lack of love. It ought not to be so, but it happens because of sin. The admonition is given here because of such transgressions. The family cannot stand if it copies the ways of the world. The Apostle said that no man hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it even as Christ does the church.

Paul had a high regard for the family unit, and more so for Christian families. He said that they were members of Christ's body, of His flesh and of His bones. He also cited the institution of marriage at the time of creation that a man should leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they should be one flesh. Again this compares well with the relationship of Christ and the church. Then Paul gave a last word in Ephesians 5:33: *“Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”* It is a worthy pattern for every family. Follow this and you will have a happy home.

THOUGHT: The duty given to husbands is their duty to God.

PRAYER: Lord, may all families look to Thee for happy homes.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 26

EPHESIANS 6:1-4

LUKE 2:40-52

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”

THE CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY

The fifth commandment is directed at the children. The Apostle here first gave the command to husbands and wives and then now to the children. He told them to obey their parents in the Lord for it is right. He cited the commandment: *“Honour thy father and thy mother”* (Eph 6:2). He observed that this is the first commandment with a promise.

All families, even unbelievers, value their children and would like them to grow up and become responsible adults. Education is in the forefront, among other things, that parents seek to provide their children. Parents do this to safeguard their children's future and to have a legacy. It is indeed their duty to fulfil their earthly obligation to their children. However, every responsible Christian parent knows that the fear of the Lord is far above everything that a child can achieve. In Proverbs 22:6 the wise king wrote, *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”* The home is the place where a child will grow and learn more about the fear of God. The church usually has a Sunday School program and other classes to instruct the children. However, apart from sending the children to church, responsible parents must monitor the progress of their own children in spiritual matters even more than they do in their secular education. Spiritual education is number one. This is what it means to *“bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”*

The promise annexed to this commandment is long life. A life of obedience will give a child the desire even to keep himself holy in spirit and in body. That child will flee youthful lusts and learn to live for the Lord. They are thus admonished to obey father and mother. Jesus, as a child in Nazareth, set a good example.

THOUGHT: Teaching children today is building tomorrow's church.

PRAYER: Lord, grant grace to our children that they may fear Thee.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27

EPHESIANS 6:5-9

PHILEMON 1-25

*“Not now as a servant, but above
a servant, a brother beloved ...”*

THE PLACE OF SERVANTS

Servants in biblical times were more bond servants than hired servants. In the context of today's text, it would apply to all servants, bond or hired. Servants may be hired on a contractual basis, or on a permanent basis. Those hired to work in the home will be domestic servants. The children in the family sometimes will call the female domestic servants “aunties,” and the little ones may not know that they are not family members.

The Apostle here gave instructions to these servants on how they might render acceptable service. They were to be obedient to their masters according to the flesh. They should do so with fear and trembling, and with sincerity of heart, as unto Christ. They were to be faithful and not do their work only when the master was around but to do the will of God in their heart. They were to do it as service to God, not to man. Paul gave reasons for this in Ephesians 6:8: *“Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.”* The Apostle might have had many experiences (besides Onesimus) of servants who were not faithful. This might be why he was very particular in his instructions.

Masters also take wrong actions and they need guidance in order to develop good relations with their servants. They are to forebear threatening and to remember that they have a Master in heaven. The heavenly Master is perfectly just. There is no partiality in Him. When the Apostle reconciled Philemon and Onesimus, he talked to the servant first to ensure that he knew the Lord and that he would accept his duty to his master as his duty towards God. Secondly, Paul told the master to accept his servant as a brother-in-Christ. Thereafter, their relationship would be pleasing to God.

THOUGHT: Servants need love as much as their masters.

PRAYER: Lord, may I testify of Christ in all my relations.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 28

EPHESIANS 6:10-17

JOSHUA 24:14-16

*“Now therefore fear the LORD, and
serve him in sincerity and in truth ...”*

THE ARMOUR OF GOD

Paul was good in the use of figures of speech. Students of the Bible also learn that illustration is one form of effective speech. Here the Apostle painted the picture of a Roman soldier and drew a spiritual lesson from it. Paul was about to conclude his epistle and he wanted his readers to stand in the faith. When he bid farewell to the elders at Miletus, he told them that grievous wolves would enter in among them and would not spare the flock (Acts 20:29). He was aware of such dangers when he wrote those words.

The example of a soldier is an effective object lesson. Such soldiers would be fully armed and would not fail in their duty. He mentioned each piece of armour and its spiritual equivalent. A soldier of the cross must be fully armed to stand against the wiles of the devil. Paul also specifically indicated that our warfare is not of flesh and blood, but ours are spiritual enemies. When believers put on this armour, they will be able to stand and withstand in the evil day.

The first piece of armour is a belt. It was used to fasten the clothes and to hold the sword. This is compared with the truth. True doctrine and true obedience are thus described. The second piece is the breastplate which represents righteousness, a required character of the believer. The third piece is shoes for firm footing (in those days they wore sandals). These represent the gospel of peace, which should not depart from a Christian's life. The fourth is the shield, representing faith that will protect the believer from the attacks of the evil one. The helmet is the fifth piece which represents salvation that comes upon accepting Christ as Lord and Saviour. The last one is the sword, which is compared with the Word of God. The Apostle urged his readers to be thus armed. This armour is also needful today.

THOUGHT: A faithful soldier of Christ is ready whenever Christ calls.

PRAYER: Lord, give me victory over all the enemies of the gospel.

PRAYER FOR BOLDNESS

The Ephesian Christians could do everything within their ability according to the instructions that Paul had given them. However, it is God who brings everything to completion. The Apostle reminded them that they had to speak to God. They must not cease to pray. There could not be a church without prayer. And prayer is the main part of any worship.

Paul gave them directions in prayer in these words: "*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints*" (Eph 6:18). This is a fitting prescription for our prayer meetings. The exhortation to pray means there must be time and place set aside for prayer. It also requires faithfulness.

The Apostle was soldiering on in preaching the gospel. Even though he was in prison, this did not deter him from speaking for Christ. He needed prayer to fulfil that duty to make known the gospel boldly. He did not ask for prayer that he be released from prison but he gave priority to the success of the gospel. He said he was an ambassador in bonds. He represented Christ in the Roman palace and his consulate was the prison. Elsewhere he testified that even those of Caesar's household heard the gospel (Phil 4:22). He wanted to speak boldly.

A soldier of Christ having on the full armour cannot fulfil his duties fully without following the heavenly command to pray. He must speak to God and listen to God. One important characteristic of a soldier is discipline. This makes him ready whenever a need arises. This was the Apostle's desire for the Christians at Ephesus. Pray that you may follow these steps.

THOUGHT: God's house is built by prayer and faithfulness.

PRAYER: Lord, make me a prayer warrior for Thy kingdom.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 30

EPHESIANS 6:21-24

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

*“That ye might walk worthy of
the Lord unto all pleasing ...”*

PAUL'S FAREWELL TO THE EPHESIANS

The Apostle told the Ephesian Christians that they were blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. He wound up with the need of spiritual warfare as their daily experience while in the world. This communication was his means of shepherding while being physically away from them.

He affirmed the continuation of their fellowship in sending Tychicus to brief them of his welfare. He called him a beloved brother and a faithful minister in the Lord. He was the bearer of this epistle to the church. He said this of Tychicus: *“Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts”* (Eph 6:22). When that brother came, he must have given the believers more information about Paul and what he was doing.

Paul did not mention anything about his personal needs though it was stated in Acts that he lived in his own rented house while he was a prisoner in Rome. He preached the kingdom of God and taught those things which concerned the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:30-31). Earlier when he bid farewell to the elders of this church, he told them that he had coveted no man's silver, or gold or apparel. He had worked with his hands (as a tent maker) to earn a living. He reminded them of the words of the Lord that it was more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:33-37). He knew the mind of the people in Ephesus. When he wrote to the Philippians he identified that church as the only church that had supported him in his personal needs (Phil 4:15). He knew how to say a word in season and their fellowship did not cease.

Lastly, Paul wished them peace and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. That common faith was the bond of their relationship, and he wished them grace.

THOUGHT: “What a fellowship, what a joy divine!”

PRAYER: Lord, may my love for my brethren be always sincere.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31

REVELATION 2:1-7

REVELATION 3:7-13

“... I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it ...”

THE EPHESIAN CHURCH CHALLENGED

The testimony of the Ephesian church surfaced again many years after Paul was gone. The Lord Jesus Christ through John the Apostle examined this church together with the other six churches in Asia. The Lord Jesus was described as He who held the seven stars in His right hand and walked in the midst of seven golden candlesticks.

The church was commended for her labour and her patience and for reproving evil and false apostles. The church had stood patiently and laboured for Christ's sake and had not fainted. The other commendation was that she hated the works of the Nicolaitans which the Lord also hated. It was about forty years since Paul departed and a new generation of Ephesians had emerged. Timothy and John had served in this church and their influence was still felt. That was the reason for the commendable stand.

Meanwhile, compromise had crept in and the Lord said, *“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love”* (Rev 2:4). Love for one another was absent, and love for Christ was also lukewarm. The warmth of the spirit was missing. Love for Christ is truth and the Apostle taught them that truth. However, yielding to temptation came easily. The Lord also prescribed a remedy that they must remember where they had fallen from and repent. They must be restored to their original position. They had laid aside their spiritual armour. They needed to repent and to keep on fighting. The church today must learn a lesson from this church and not repeat their errors. This is the warning that is given in the refrain to all the seven churches. The Lord said, *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ...”* (Rev 2:7). Are you listening?

THOUGHT: “Yield not to temptation for yielding is sin.”

PRAYER: Lord, may my church keep the light of the gospel shining.

Notes

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