

January to March 2011

Teens RPG Series on **“Salvation Q&A”**

God has blessed us with several years of this ministry that has been adapting the Read Pray Grow (RPG) series to the needs of Teens. It is God's Will that the Teens RPG now chart a new course in writing independent devotionals directly addressing Teens, just like the Junior RPG does. Please pray for all of us involved in this ministry as we embark on this new venture. May you who use these devotionals do so profitably, through much prayer, meditation, memorization, self-reflection, and above all, humility. Do humbly submit to the teaching and leading of the Holy Spirit and God's Word.

The first quarter of this new series is entitled “Salvation Q&A”. We hope to address some questions in the mind of some readers about their own salvation, as well as equip all readers to be able to answer questions that they encounter in witnessing to others, like:

- How can I be a sinner if I still do good?
- Why must Jesus be fully man?
- How come the gospel isn't updated?
- Are those in other churches saved?
- Can my sins be too many for God to forgive?

At the end of this series, may you

*“...be ready always to give an answer to every man
that asketh you a reason of the hope
that is in you with meekness and fear.”*

(1 Peter 3:15b)

May all glory be God's alone!

Dn Milton Ang

On behalf of the Teens RPG committee

WHY DO I NEED SALVATION?

There are many reasons why a person would come to church. It could be because of friends, family, trials that they face, or a tract that they receive. Whatever the reason, what they should soon realize, is their need for salvation. If they do not see that, then there would be no reason for them to stay at all. If at this moment, you have not seen your need for salvation, or do not find it important at all, then we must ask ourselves, why am I even coming to church for?

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:1-3, that we were all once dead in trespasses and sins. Just like a person who is physically dead cannot resurrect himself, one who is dead in sin can do nothing to come alive spiritually. We are like corpses headed to hell, and nothing we do by ourselves can help us. Being dead, we are in Satan's domain, and are walking according to the wicked ways of the world, and worse still, walking according to the desires of Satan himself, who is the prince of the power of the air. The Bible says that he is working in all the 'children of disobedience' – people who are unsaved! This is indeed a scary thought, for we would then be simply minions of Satan, doing his bidding.

It is therefore for this very reason that we need Christ. We need to be quickened, to be made alive. We need to find a way out of this bondage of sin that we find ourselves in, out of a life where we are simply living to fulfil the terrible lustful desires of the flesh and mind. We need a Saviour who can cleanse us from all our sins, and bring us into a relationship with God. Do you know who this Saviour is? Have you really put your faith and trust in Him, and repented of your evil and wicked ways? Or are you still the person Paul describes in Ephesians 2:1-3, one who is headed for destruction and condemnation?

THOUGHT: We are either walking according to the world and Satan, or we are saved and walking with Christ. There is no middle ground, we need to be saved.

PRAYER: Lord, I realize my need for salvation. May you give me the grace to understand the gospel, to help me realize that I am dead in sin, to repent of them, and to have true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"for God so loved the world..."

IS SALVATION FOR ALL?

Often times, when the gospel is shared to a person, he seems rather convinced, and does not dispute the truth of what is being told to him. However, he then gives a nonchalant shrug, and says something like 'well nah, I think this whole Jesus and salvation thing is not for me'. Or maybe he would commend you for your faith and zeal, but lament that he is too deep in the world to find himself out of it. Is that how you are feeling as well?

My dear friend, this God of the Bible, is the God who created the whole world. He created you and me, and each of us were made in the image of God. When He sent Jesus to die on the cross, it was because He loved the whole world. He has a care and concern for each and every one of His creation, and His desire is that not one of us should perish.

In fact, the very reason why the Lord has not yet returned to this world is because He is longsuffering, and waiting for more people to come to repentance. His promise is that He will return one day. But when Jesus comes in His second coming, He is no longer coming as a suffering servant, but He will be coming as the triumphant King, who would judge all sinners who have not yet repented. The whole earth will be destroyed, and only those who are saved will be enter into the new heaven and the new earth.

God's desire, as clearly stated in this verse, that He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. In fact, He has 'no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live' (Ezekiel 33:11). The gospel is freely given out to all who would hear. Anyone who simply receives the gospel by faith, who is convicted of his sin and would repent, will definitely be saved! This is the promise of God's Word. Note however that although this is what God desires, He still is the perfect Judge who would judge all who do not repent at the Day of Judgment. We are not to read this verse wrongly, and assume that since God does not desire for me to perish, then I am safe. No! God wants you to repent, and turn to Jesus Christ in faith, acknowledging that He is the only one who can save you from your sins.

THOUGHT: If salvation is for all that means salvation is for me!

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for salvation so rich, so free, and given to all.

“Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit...”

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?

If you were given a year’s worth of free time, and granted free license to do whatever you wanted, what do you think you would do? If you were told that there were no rules to follow, no obligations to be met, how do you think you would spend your time? Would you be playing computer games or sports all day? Going out with friends, or shopping to your heart’s content? Watching every single movie and TV show ever made? Your answer would be very telling, as to what you perceive your life’s purpose to be.

Often times, in today’s materialistic and pleasure-driven culture, we can seldom see beyond the here and now to find our purpose. We are told by the world to just enjoy this life and do as you please, for life is short.

However, as Christians, we ought to have a completely different perspective of our lives. 1 Corinthians 6:20 tells us clearly that we were bought with a price. That high price was the blood of Jesus Christ – a currency that cannot be valued by dollars and cents. It was a currency that could only be earned through the death of Jesus on the cross. That is indeed a supremely high price that was paid for your life. Therefore we must realize that the life that I now have, is not my own. It is not for me to do as I please, to just seek after fun and an easy life, wasting my time away with the sinful pleasures of this life.

Not, we must realize that our purpose instead is to glorify God! With all that we have, all that we do, all that we say, and even all that we think, we must glorify God! Is that your life’s purpose? Do you seek to live a life that is pleasing to God, that people would look at and glorify God? Or is your life no different from that of an aimless unbeliever, who does not know of God and eternity, who wastes his time away chasing after the things of this world?

THOUGHT: I was bought with a price, and therefore my life is not mine to live, but should be consecrated to God.

PRAYER: O Lord, help me to put aside the things of the world, and my carnal desires, but instead to glorify You in all that I do. Amen.

"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God..."

IS GOD REAL?

In 2008, a group of atheists in London raised some money to fund an advertisement campaign to put signs on buses throughout the city. The slogan they put up read "There's probably no God, now stop worrying and enjoy your life". Sad to say, this is the philosophy of many people in the world today. How about you? Do you acknowledge God to be real? Is he real in your life?

Those people who reject God, have rejected the clear signs that He has given us in this world, to clue us in to His existence. The psalmist clearly declares, that just by looking up at the grandeur of the heavens above us, and the beauty of the firmament spread about us, we would be able to see God. The simple but majestic splendour of the sky proclaim to us the glory of God, and His hand in creation. It is only corrupted men in recent times, with their arrogant discoveries in science, that they have concluded that God does not exist, and that this whole world came to be through billions of years and pure luck of evolution.

Truly, only the fool would say in his heart, that there is no God (Psalm 14:1). In the history of man, they have always had an innate knowledge of a being higher than they, of one who created them and controls their fate. Whilst they did not know the true God, by simply marvelling at creation around them, they concluded that God is real. Thus like the men of Athens in Acts 17, they devised pagan and heathen religion in an attempt to worship this 'unknown god'.

For us, we have the privilege of knowing the living and true God. And He has given us a whole book to teach us about who He is, how we can know Him, and live a life pleasing to Him. If God is indeed real in your life, then you would desire to live a life that shows you believe that He exists! Sadly, so many so-called Christians today claim to believe in God, but they too care nothing for His Word and His commandments, but instead like the atheists, seek to enjoy life the way they please. Are you one of them?

THOUGHT: Does the way that I live reflect my belief that God exists?

PRAYER: Help me O Lord to see Your presence and realize Your reality wherever I go, and in whatever I do.

WHY SHOULD I TRUST THE BIBLE?

We look at the religions of the world, and all claim to have a set of truths, or religious writings that they live by. What then sets us apart from the rest of the world? Why do we uphold the Bible and proclaim it to be all truth, without any error at all?

It is primarily a position of faith. Yes there are many undeniable proofs that do show the historical accuracy, validity and veracity of the Bible. One can point to the prophecies and show how every one of them was fulfilled down to the last detail. All these would convince one's mind of its truth. However only through faith can our hearts be moved to accept the message of the Bible, and embrace it with our lives.

This faith, will lead us to believe the Bible as it declares itself to be, the very Word of God! This is how the Thessalonian Christians recognized the writings and teachings of Paul the Apostle, for they did not receive it as the word of men, but as it truly is, they saw it as the word of God. All the other religions, believe in works penned by men, claiming to be oracles or prophets of a god. But they are all the fallible writings of men!

The Bible on the other hand is the directly inspired words of God Himself, written by holy men moved by the Holy Ghost. Yes the Bible is entirely trustworthy, infallible, inerrant, and applicable to all areas of our lives. We can confidently read it, and know that they are exactly the words that God has meant for us to read. He was personally involved in breathing out the very words, and then in preserving every one of those words, so that what we have in our hands today is exactly as what was originally given.

With such an amazing book in our hands, will we not take time to read it, to study it, and to love it? Will we not want to live it out in our lives, so that others will come to believe in the Bible the same way that you have?

THOUGHT: The Bible is none other than the Word of God, faultless, unerring, supreme.

PRAYER: O God, help me to love your word, to cherish it, read it, study it, and then live it out in my life.

“all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...”

AM I A GOOD PERSON?

What do you think? Do you think you are a good person? Think of everything that you have ever done in your life. And then try to balance them on the scales of what you think is good and bad. How do you think you would measure up? Be honest with yourselves, do not try to rationalize or justify your actions. Do not try to compare with others as well. Simply judge your actions objectively. What are your results like? Are you proud of it?

Now add God into the equation. When you first judged your own goodness, what was the basis of your judgment? Realize that there is only one absolute standard in the world, and that is by the standard of God. God is good, and it is to His goodness that we must live up to. If we were to base it upon our own ideas of morality and virtue, it can be easily disputed, and is very subjective. Our idea of good and bad is often decided by our culture, nurture and experiences in life. However, God's standards as given in His word never changes, and it is to that yardstick that we ought to compare ourselves. God's word is therefore like a searchlight, that shines into every deep dark corner of your life, that reveals every thought, word and action that you have ever had, and determines if it is good or not.

Sadly, when faced with such a standard, the verdict quickly becomes very clear. Romans 3:12 clearly states that “there is none that doeth good, no, not one” None of us are good. We are all innately sinful. No one ever taught us how to lie or cheat or throw tantrums. We did it naturally. Why? Because of the original sin. Because we were all born with a sin nature, inherited from our father Adam. Because he fell in the Garden of Eden, we all became sinners, and could not help but sin. There is nothing that we can do to make up for sin in our lives, and make ourselves good people. We can never match up to the ultimate standard of good. There is only one man who could have ever been described as a good person – and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why, our only hope is in Him.

THOUGHT: I may not be a good person, but Jesus Christ is, and therefore my only hope is in Him.

PRAYER: Lord, forgive me for my unrighteousness, and thank You for the blood of Christ that washes me and makes me righteous before Thee.

“and come short of the glory of God.”

WHAT IS SIN?

In our lives, we are surrounded by rules. Some are clearly spelt out to us, whilst others are more unspoken sort of guidelines that we understand are there. Everywhere we go, we know there is a sort of decorum that we must have, a certain sort of standard that we must conform to. If we do not obey these rules, there would also be penalties and punishments.

In the past few days, there has been mentioned of them the term ‘sin’ from time to time. But have we ever stopped to question, what exactly is sin? How do I define it? Based on the text for today, 1 John 3:4, the Westminster Shorter Catechism defined it as such: “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.”

Thus simply put, we have two broad overlapping definitions of what is sin:

1. When we fall short of the standards given in the law of God. When we do not meet up to the requirements set, when we are in want (meaning lacking) conformity to God’s law. For example when we do not love our neighbours as we ought, or not honour our parents enough, these are areas in our lives that are actually in sin. This is as Romans 3:23 says how we have all sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God.
2. When we transgress the law of God, when we break the commandments that God has set for us. This is when we do not do what we are told to do. For example when we lie, covet, practice idolatry etc. This is the clearer and more easily identifiable sort of sin in our lives.

Realize within these two categories, the scope of application is very broad, where there are indeed so many different ways in which we fall short of or transgress against the law of God. Thus as Christians we must be very careful of everything that we do, to guard our hearts, our mouths and our actions from sinning against the Holy God whom we love so dearly.

THOUGHT: To know sin, we must know the law of God.

PRAYER: O Lord, grant me the strength and courage to deal with the many sins in my life.

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.”

WHAT IS ORIGINAL SIN?

A few days ago, we explored the idea of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden. This is what we term original sin of man. Understanding this original sin would lead us to understand why we even sin in the first place.

When Adam was created as the first man, he was created perfect, without sin. However, he did have the ability to sin. In the Garden of Eden, he was put to a test. It was a Covenant that God made with Man. Adam was given a single law to abide by, that he was not to eat of a particular fruit. If he had obeyed, he would have been granted eternal life and fellowship with God. He would continue in his sinless state, and exist in harmony with God in the Garden.

However that was not the case, for Eve succumbed to the Devil’s temptations, took of the fruit and then gave it to Adam to eat. In so doing, they rebelled against God and experienced sin for the first time in their lives. Having sinned, they fell from their originally sinless state, and then all of mankind fell with him. He was a sort of representative for all men, and thus by this one man’s disobedience, many were made sinners (Romans 5:19). As a result, sin entered into the world, and with it, came the judgment of death. From then on, all men were born in sin, born in a state of spiritual death.

You may at this moment protest at the unfairness of such a situation. Should everyone not be given a chance you may ask? How can the whole human race be represented by just one man? Well that is God’s plan and we are never to question it. However, just as we had one representative through which we all fell into sin, likewise God has given us a second Adam, one man through whom many can be made righteous. That one man is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, for through His obedience the free gift of grace can be given to us. Just as we had no choice in receiving the sin nature from Adam, we also do not have to do anything to receive the righteousness through justification in Jesus Christ. Adam may have sinned the original sin and caused man to fall, but Jesus lived a life of obedience to redeem us!

THOUGHT: I cannot control the fact that I have a sin nature, but I can rejoice in the fact that I am made righteous through Jesus Christ.

PRAYER: O Lord, we thank you for the righteousness of Christ, and the free gift of grace whereby we can be justified!

"for all have sinned..."

AM I A SINNER?

People today really do not like being told that they are sinners. Instead they would label you as being judgmental, or a religious bigot, or call you all sorts of names. However, this is the cold hard truth that we must all face up to. We have all sinned, we have fallen short of the glory of God, and we will all have to receive the wages due for the sins that we have committed – that is death.

Though I may not know you, I do know one thing that is for certain about you, and that is that you are definitely a sinner. It might be a difficult fact to swallow, and we may not like it, but it is the truth. There is no denying the fact that in our lives, we sin daily. We transgress against the commandments of God, and do not do that which is required of us. We are all rebels, constantly grieving the Holy Spirit and show ingratitude for the God who created us and gave us life. Paul in his address to the Romans did not mince his words, in declaring that all have sinned, and have come short of the glory of God. He does not hold back at all as he tells them that everyone without exception is a sinner, whether you be a Jew or a Gentile.

Likewise for us, we must face up to sin for what it really is. We must understand the seriousness of sin, and God's absolute hatred for sin. We must realize how terribly we have offended God by being the sinners that we are, then come to repentance before Him. Yes we are sinners, but we are sinners who have been promised hope. Though we have sinned, God has provided for us a Saviour who has redeemed us from our sin, and made us righteous before God. Not to say we are no longer sinners, for we still do sin. But have also been given a freedom from sin, no longer captive to its terrible bondage, but we have the ability to be dead unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:11). Therefore treasure this freedom that you have, and daily endeavour to struggle to overcome the many temptations to sin that come your way. We may be sinners, but we can have victory over our sin, because we have Christ and the Holy Spirit with us.

THOUGHT: I may be a sinner, but I can choose not to sin.

PRAYER: O Lord, grant me the strength to overcome sin and be victorious in Christ.

“all we like sheep have gone astray...”

IN WHAT WAYS DO WE SIN?

Instead of asking in what ways do we sin, we should be asking, in what ways do we not sin! For if we were to place each and every aspect of our life under close scrutiny, and examine the thoughts and motives for each action that we do or word that we say, we would quickly become very ashamed of the many ways in which we actually sin. We would not go very far in our search, before we would discern yet another way in which we have allowed pride to rear its ugly head, or realize we have fallen into the clutches of laziness.

Romans 3:11 gives us 2 ways in which we do sin daily in our lives:

1. Our lack of understanding of God and His Word. Often times, the reason why we sin is because of our lack of understanding of the character of God. We seem to think that just because the Bible does not explicitly forbid a certain thing, then it is all right for me to do it. However, we fail to take into consideration the holiness of God, and that His standards are far higher than ours. Because we do not have a sufficient understanding of God's word, we carelessly swagger through life, thinking that we can do nothing wrong, when in actual fact we are sinning so much against God.
2. We do not seek after God enough. Many times, we also leave God out of the picture. We claim to be a Christian, sing songs about how Jesus is all the world to me, but practically speaking, God is just a tiny insignificant aspect in your life. Because we do not seek Him and try to do His will in whatsoever that we do, we often fall into sin. We solve our problems with our own human wisdom; we interact with family and friends with our own selfish attitudes; we abhor school and homework because we just desire fun and leisure. In all these things that we do, we do not seek God, place him first in our lives, or live to please and glorify Him. Instead we place our selfish wants and desires as first place in our lives, and live to please and glorify self and self alone.

THOUGHT: We need to know less of the world and more of Christ; seek less of self and more of God.

PRAYER: Lord, I realize I have indeed sinned so much against Thee. Help me to truly repent of my ways, and to seek Thee in everything I do.

“...there is none righteous no, not one.”

HOW CAN I BE A SINNER IF I STILL DO GOOD?

Jesus tells us “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19); these makes one unclean. Isaiah tells us all of us are unclean: for certainly none of us can ever claim we have never done any of the above sins at all. Uncleanness separates us from our Holy God.

Then Isaiah goes on to say that “all our righteousness are as filthy rags”. Firstly, this shows us that it is possible for sinners to act righteously, to do good works. For example, the wicked Herod the Great beautified the Second Temple. However, because of the above sinful nature all of us have, even these good works are unclean in God’s sight, all being tainted by sin. Therefore, no amount of good works can make up for or wash away our sinful thoughts and deeds, and therefore we will perish in sin, just as a leaf will eventually fade.

We can never be saved by combining faith and works, for any attempt to merge the robes of righteousness given by Christ with these filthy rags of works will render us unclean. We must be spotlessly clean, washed by the blood of Christ. Once we are saved, however, our good works are no longer filthy rags, but are as gold, silver, precious stones in God’s sight, fit for His reward (1 Corinthians 3:12-14).

If your sins are not washed by faith in Christ’s work alone, then you are not saved, no matter how regular you are at church or how much you serve God or other good works you do, so do make sure you confess to God that Christ alone saves you. If you already have this saving faith, then ask yourself if your good works are tainted by sin? Do you serve Him with ulterior motives e.g. to be close to your friends who are also serving? If so, realize that in God’s sight, some of your works are as wood, hay and stubble, to be burned up (1 Corinthians 3:15). Man’s good works can all be tainted by sin. Paul himself realized “... when I would do good, evil is present with me” (Romans 7:21). Search your heart to make sure all your thoughts and actions are clean and pure, or else they will not be accepted by God.

THOUGHT: Am I saved by Christ’s robes of righteousness alone?

PRAYER: O God, help me to check that my testimony is not tainted by sin.

“...that every mouth may be stopped...”

SO WHAT IF I HAVE SINNED?

Romans 3:19 says “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” Sin is breaking God’s Holy Law. When comparing ourselves with the Law, none of us can ever claim before our all knowing God that we have never broken any of the laws at all. We are thus guilty of breaking the Law. As long as we have broken one law, even if we have kept other laws, we are guilty of all (James 2:10).

Just as being proven guilty in a human court means being sentenced to the stated punishment for our offence; likewise being proven to be guilty of sin before the Great White Throne Judgment of our just God means being sentenced to the stated punishment for our sin. You might think that your sin is unnoticed, or others have sinned more than you have. Do realize that man is so depraved in sin, that many of us will rebel against the notion that we are sinners, trying to hide or defend our sin; but before our just God, “every mouth may be stopped.” In God’s court, there will be no doubt of our guilt.

The verse above starts with the phrase “Now we know”. Paul knew and admitted his own guilt before God, and thus came to be saved from his punishment before it was too late. The question is, do you know? Do you know this truth, that the Law shows your guilt before God? If you only know this when you are finally before God’s White Throne Judgment, it will be too late. Dear teen, may you realize that, young though you may be, death strikes at all ages. Repent today.

THOUGHT: Have I ever confessed to God I am guilty of sin?

PRAYER: O God, help me remember that it is my sin that sent your Son to the cross.

“...who were dead in trespasses and sins...”

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF SIN?

Ephesians 2:1 says “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins”. We do not seek God and His holiness, instead we seek the desires of our flesh and what the world offers us. Like a corpse that is dead to feeling, we who are dead in sin do not feel any remorse for our sin, and have no realization of the consequences of our sin. Indeed the theological term for someone who is dead in sin is “spiritual depravity”: we are so corrupt and our hearts so hardened as stone is, that unless God Himself makes us realize our sinful estate, we will never be able to realize it ourselves, and will continually do evil. When you evangelize to your unsaved friends, understand that you cannot convince them by your own efforts, but only if the Holy Spirit makes them receptive to the Gospel. Do not be discouraged: it is God’s will for you that you evangelize, but it is also God’s will whether your friend will be saved, that the glory may be God’s alone.

You might be tempted to think that surely even someone spiritually depraved must be capable of doing good deeds, but consider that even when one appears to be doing good, his motive might be to obtain the praise of man, or to give himself some personal satisfaction of having something worthy. In other words, when we are dead in sin, all our righteousness are as filthy rags in God’s sight. Consider that even someone as wicked as Judas Iscariot can feel sorry for his sins without confessing his need for a Saviour, and likewise everyone who is dead in sin can still feel remorseful but without true repentance. That is what sin does. Note the term is not dying in sin, but dead in sin: we are already spiritually dead, separate from God.

Unless we are made alive or “quickened” just as the Ephesians who believed in Christ as Saviour were quickened, we will suffer the consequences for our sin: after our physical death, we will experience the second death, which is eternal punishment in hellfire. God does not desire that you suffer these consequences: listen to the Gospel!

THOUGHT: Have I ever realized how far sin has affected me?

PRAYER: O God, thank you for revealing to me my sinful estate!

“...they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”

WHY DOES GOD HATE SIN?

In my travels to East Asia, I increasingly find meeting rooms equipped with handwash foam dispensers, as there are some people who feel the need to continually to be clean and free from all disease. Sadly, these people do not desire to be free from the disease of sin.

Romans 8:7-8 tells us “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” God hates sin because God is holy and free from all sin. Everything about God is holy, whether it is His thoughts, His words or His works. God cannot stand sin. In contrast, every unbeliever is living according to the desires of his flesh, and possessing a carnal mind that is full of sinful thoughts and words. Not only is this carnal mind totally against God, but it will forever be so, unless God causes the sinner to realize his depravity.

We must not compare man and man, for you might think you are law abiding and good in society’s eyes and are ‘saints’ compared to thieves and murderers! The focus must be instead on God: can you come before the thrice Holy God, and live?

Even if you profess you are saved, one proof of whether you truly are saved is whether you realize that every sinful thought, word or deed of yours displeases God? It is not to say that true believers will never sin; rather, true believers will never be casual with sin, but will always struggle with their sin, knowing fully well that God hates sin and He does not hear their prayers if they regard iniquity in their hearts. What is your reaction when your classmates around you have discovered the questions to the coming common test from other classes who have already taken the same test?

THOUGHT: Do I struggle with sin or do I willfully sin?

PRAYER: O God, may I not displease Thee by sinning!

“...the wages of sin is death.”

WHAT IS THE PENALTY OF SIN?

Death is called the wages of sin because death is what sin deserves, just like a worker is deserving of his wages for his labour to his master. To the unbeliever, sin is his master, and death his wages for serving sin. Besides spiritual death which we have considered, sin brings two other deaths: physical death, and the second death which is eternal punishment (as opposed to eternal life) in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). There may be some that think that a loving God surely cannot send His creation to hell, but that contradicts what our Holy God has justly stated in His perfect Word that death is what sin deserves.

That is why salvation must be a gift of God, for none of us in any way are deserving of being saved from this death nor can we save ourselves. For believers, if not for the Holy Spirit that pricked our hearts to see our need for Christ as Saviour, we would never have done so in our own depraved state. It is this gift of God that has made us spiritually alive instead of being dead in sin, it is this same gift that convicts us we need not fear physical death, it is this same gift that brings us eternal life rather than eternal death.

Bearing this thought that our sin deserves this terrible penalty of death, how can we then continue in sin after being saved? To do so is telling the whole world we take hellfire lightly, and that we take the gift of Jesus Christ for granted, and that we imply that sin is still our master instead of Christ! Nay, let us always remember that it is our sins that put Him on the Cross: it is we who deserve to be on the Cross, not Him. It is we who deserve to be punished for our sinful thoughts, words and deeds, not Him. If not for Him, we can only live our lives miserably looking forward only to eternal torment in hellfire that we justly and fully deserve as our wages for sin. Why do you prefer to have sin as your master that will eventually reward you with such a terrible end, instead of embracing Christ as your Lord and Saviour who has sacrificed Himself to save you?

THOUGHT: To unbelievers, who seems to be their master?

PRAYER: O God, may I give you my total service and allegiance!

"...thou shalt not eat of it..."

DIDN'T GOD CREATE SIN?

The above question is sometimes asked by unbelievers who do not want to admit their sinful estate; they think that if they can find some contradiction in the gospel, then the wages of sin do not apply to them, just like a lawyer might find some loophole in the law to get his guilty client off scot free on a technicality.

Genesis 2:16-17 says "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." God created man with the free will to choose to do good or evil. As long as Adam obeyed God's command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and instead partook of the variety of fruits that existed in the garden, he did not sin. However, once Adam and Eve did eat of the forbidden fruit, then sin entered into the world (Romans 5:12). It was our first ancestor's fault, not God's design. One can hardly blame the designer of the first knife for introducing killing by knife; the fault rests on who misapplied the use of the knife to evil instead of good. It is a travesty to accuse our Holy God of creating sin. It was man that chose to rebel against God's Law; God did not cause Adam to sin. In the same way, Lucifer fell: this angel created by God chose to rebel against God too (Isaiah 14:12-14). Sin thus originated with Satan, who then tempted Adam to sin; thus sin entered into this world.

Do you try to give excuses for your sin? Do you try to argue with God that you do not deserve to be punished, thinking that you deserve better? Do you tell God that you are still young and deserve multiple chances to make mistakes, that your inexperience somehow excuses you from penalty? Are you trying to argue with God? Remember, God is fully justified in His actions, and we breathe every breath we take by His mercies alone (Lamentations 3:22-23). Do not test God.

THOUGHT: Do I try to excuse my own sin?

PRAYER: O God, against thee, thee only, have I sinned.

“...there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth...”

WHAT IS HELL LIKE?

Matthew 13:42 is a succinct description of hell: “And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Hell is a furnace of fire: the word ‘furnace’ implies high heat and constancy of burning from much that fuels the fire. The Valley of Hinnom in Jerusalem was the city dump and incinerator for the rubbish of Jerusalem in ancient times, and Jesus used the same name for hell, in Greek Gehenna. This was apt because in both cases, the fire is unquenchable (Matthew 9:44), and in the Valley of Hinnom, the only living things were worms that fed on burning animal carcasses, and thus Jesus described hell as a place where “their worm dieth not” implying that the occupants of hell would suffer this torment forever without being burnt up.

There would be two reactions for every occupant of hell. Firstly, there will be wailing as a result of the intense suffering experienced; emergency room doctors will tell you that the worst wailing in the ER comes from burn victims. The rich man in hell implored for water to cool the torment he was experiencing (Luke 16:24). Secondly, there will be gnashing of teeth, indicating regret for past sins, rage at all that caused him to end up like this, and despair for no avenue of exit. Please do not believe those cartoons or jokes that portray hell as a place where one will meet friends or where you will enjoy yourself.

Dear teen, if you have not truly confessed Christ as your personal Saviour, please do so today. Nothing is more important in this life than this decision that affects your eternity. Nothing!

If you have unsaved friends or loved ones, do give them the gospel; for you are not truly a friend if you do not care about where this friend is going after death, and likewise you do not truly love your family member if you say nothing about their eternity. Can you live with the thought that your unsaved friend or loved one may one day be gnashing his teeth in hell at you for not sharing the gospel?

THOUGHT: Am I really a true friend if I do not share the gospel?

PRAYER: O God, give me a passion to rescue the perishing!

“...the judgment of God is according to truth...”

WHY DOES A GOD OF LOVE CREATE HELL?

There is an alarming number of professing Christian preachers who find it so difficult to answer this question that they begin to argue that hell does not exist as a place of eternal punishment, but only as a place where the sinner is separated forever from God!

While God is a God of love, Romans 2:2 reminds us that that is only one of God's attributes, for God is also a God of justice: “But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.” Remember it is we sin, God does not that cause us to sin, and sin must be punished, otherwise our God cannot be called a just God. Our God is perfect in His judgment. God's Law is the yardstick for determining sin. The punishment for our sins is be no more or less than what we deserve. While none of us who believe in the existence of hell would desire even our worst enemy to be forever punished there, the fact remains that sin is that heinous and grievous, and much evil abounds in this world of ours. Since God is holy, He cannot stand sin, and it is thus consistent with His character that sin must be severely punished, and we who are created in His image and who have been made holy by the blood of Christ must also view sin in the same light. We cannot join the world and overlook sin and its consequences as many Christian preachers do. Instead, we must point out to this dark world that the wages of sin is eternal death; for if it were not so, then surely even more of mankind would take sin lightly as they believe the punishment is light. Nay, just as God punished the past wicked world through flood and will bring Great Tribulation soon to our sin-sick world, God has reserved hell for those in sin.

Dear teen, be careful of those who preach love and tolerance, and who thus conform the image of God into one that fits their imagination. While many of you desire love and are appalled at acts of hatred, do remember that love rejoiceth in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6), and the truth is that sin must be punished. If you truly have love for others, then show them the truth of God's Word that their sin must be dealt with. Show them the truth that it is precisely because God is a God of love, that He then sent His Son to die on behalf of us sinners.

THOUGHT: Do I conform to the image of God in my thoughts?

PRAYER: O God, may I learn to be more like Thee each day!

“...between us and you there is a great gulf fixed...”

IS THERE ANY ESCAPE FROM HELL?

The episode of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 is not a parable but an actual incident. First of all, Jesus did not introduce it as a parable, and also one of the persons is named (Lazarus) which never happens in a parable. Thus, unlike a parable, we can see important truths in every verse of this episode.

In Luke 16:26, Abraham told the rich man who was in hell: “And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.” This verse tells us there is no escape from hell: the great gap between heaven and hell is permanent, and no one can travel from one to the other. The Greek word for gulf is *chasma*, from which we get the modern word *chasm*, meaning a huge gap between two elevated bodies. Lazarus was together with Abraham on the side of heaven, and the rich man on the side of hell, the latter staring at this chasm that can never be bridged and realizing that there is no escape from this eternal punishment.

The obvious question to you: which side will you be on? Realize that you can only be on one side, heaven or hell, eternal rest or eternal torment. There is no half-way, or movement in-between. Once you arrive on the side of hell, there is no more evangelism, no more gospel, no more opportunities to accept Christ as one’s personal Saviour. While we are still on earth, Christ is the bridge to heaven for all of us who know we deserve hell and call upon Him to save us. Once we breathe our last breath, which may happen in a flash before we realize it, we have no longer any opportunity to use this bridge.

If you are sure you have a place on the right side, then you must consider if you are living your lives on earth in preparation for your eternal stay in heaven, or are you living your lives as if you are preparing for hell instead? It is sad when Christians say they are citizens of heaven yet now live lust-filled lives like the rich man did.

THOUGHT: Am I on the right side? Am I sure?

PRAYER: O Lord, may I live with eternity’s values in view!

“...but after this the judgment...”

WOULDN'T I JUST DISAPPEAR AFTER DEATH?

There are some who believe in Annihilationism: the theory that after death, the soul just disappears. Usually this belief stems from the reluctance to accept the existence of hell as created by a God of love. They believe that while the souls of Christians go to heaven, the souls of those who aren't will simply vanish.

Hebrews 9:27 proves this theory is false: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” God has decreed that man will die once and at the time appointed by Him, and has also decreed that after this death man will be judged. There will be no disappearing of the soul or any other escape from this decree of judgment. As we have studied earlier, before that judgment throne, the penalty of sin is eternal death, not a vanishing away. This order of death being followed by judgment is the same for all men.

Christians will face the bema judgment of Christ, and the judgment will be one of reward in heaven for our faithfulness towards Christ while on earth (2 Corinthians 5:20). Unbelievers will face the Great White Throne Judgment, and the judgment will be the casting of body and soul into the lake of fire for sin and those whose names are not written in the book of life. Again the obvious question: which judgment will you appear before? Your decision while on earth to accept Christ as your personal Saviour and have your name found in the book of life will determine which judgment you will be at after you leave this earth. Remember, our God is a righteous judge, and He will make no mistake. The only mistakes would be yours alone.

THOUGHT: How clear the distinction is between heaven and hell!

PRAYER: O God, may I be found faithful to Thee!

"blessed are the poor in spirit..."

DO YOU SORROW FOR YOUR SIN?

This first beatitude is also the first step that anyone must take if he would find God. He must have poverty of spirit which is to sorrow over sin. This is a condition of heart which Jesus is referring to. It is definitely not about being poor. It is against a spirit of self-reliance and self-confidence.

When a person is poor in spirit, he distrusts himself and sees no good in himself. It is humility. He sees clearly how the sins he has committed brought sorrow not only to himself but also to those around him. When the prodigal son in Luke 15: 18 realizes that he had sinned against his father and against heaven, he realized that he was an unworthy son. Before that, he was careless about the way he treated his father and broke his father's heart when he took his inheritance (before his father died), departed far away from home and wasted his life in worldly and sensual pleasures. His utter selfishness destroyed his own life and brought sorrow to his father. That is what sin does. It is a downward path of evil living and evil results.

A man who is poor in spirit is sorrowful and has a broken and contrite heart. He is ashamed that he had been proud and vain, foolishly thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think. It is here that all true Christian experience begins. It is the absolute opposite of a self-assertive and self-sufficient disposition. He comes to know himself as he truly is. He is convicted of sin and to him God gives that first repentance which is needed to faith in Christ. In other words, poverty of spirit is the beginning to see oneself as God sees us.

Dear teen, are you conscious of your poverty of spirit? Do you know that you are poor, wretched and blind to the beauty and holiness of Christ? It is your sin that has nailed Christ to the cross of Calvary and He died in your place. Why have you rejected Him? If you are a believer, daily die to self and you will find yourselves growing more holy each day. This holiness will be marked by a lowliness of heart.

THOUGHT: Christ can only fill the heart which has first been emptied of self.
PRAYER: Help me O God for I am a sinner! Make me more like Christ my LORD and Saviour that I may glorify His holy Name.

IS THERE A SOLUTION?

The Beatitudes succeed one another, as St. Chrysostom, a famous early Church Father of the fourth century says, like links in a golden chain. There is a logical progression from one to another. After a person has seen the sin in their lives, they turn to God. This is the solution. A denial or a turning to the pleasures and vanities of the world would only lead to more heartaches and sorrows. No matter how hard we try by our own strength and wisdom, not to sin again, the sin nature in man will always surface and can never be rooted out, except by the blood of Christ.

Thus with a conscious poverty of spirit, there is a mourning over our sinful state. We see that our sin had nailed to the cross the Lord of Glory. This mourning in spirit is the “godly sorrow which worketh repentance” (2 Corinthians 7: 10). This repentance towards God will point us to “faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” This, it must be pointed out, is also the work of the Holy Spirit. When the three thousand were converted on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, it is recorded that they were pricked in their heart and cried out (Acts 2: 37). This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

For such mourning and sorrow over our sin, there is always divine comfort as we turn and seek the Lord. We will receive the blessedness of being instructed with wisdom from on high. We will know the blessedness of the presence of the Holy Spirit and receive abundant grace for all our need.

Were you ever ashamed of a selfish act you have committed? Did you earnestly seek the Lord to forgive you of that sin? Did you experience God’s love, forgiving you and then blessing you with many loving favours like precious friendships and kindness from friends? You also experienced His grace to overcome that sin! Give glory and thanks to God. Imagine what would happen if you had continued to live a life of selfish acts.

THOUGHT: We mourn too when many are dying without Christ.

PRAYER: Lord, may the Holy Spirit give us strength and grace to take the sorrows in our heart as many dishonour our Lord.

“blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.”

HOW CAN I BE SAVED?

Hunger and thirst are the ever present physical needs of the human body. The one who is hungry yearns for food; the one who is thirsty yearns for water. The one who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness is a man who is yearning for God within his own soul. Therefore he sets himself eagerly and avidly to seek after God. He is prepared to do what God demands of him and to do it with his whole heart.

This desire is what salvation is about. When you are awakened to your sinful state, you are drawn also to the Saviour who can save you from your sins. When you learn that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for your sins and died for you, you come to Him for salvation. He is your righteousness. He can cleanse and He can make whole. He will save those who come to Him with broken and contrite heart, mourning over their defiling sins and realizing their poverty of spirit. This sinner wants to be right with God.

Such a person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness shall be filled. There is only one truly righteous One. He is the Son of God, the Saviour of men. It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ which God gives to the soul that seeks its Saviour. This is the glorious gospel. Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, offered Himself for us. By that infinite sacrifice, He opened a way of salvation to all who are poor in spirit and who mourn over their sin.

Dear teen, have you experienced this hungering after God? When you see the awfulness of your sin, you will see your great need to come to God for cleansing and purity in your life. Once you are saved, you will still have such experiences for sin is ever with us and daily you need to come to Jesus for His cleansing. You still need to hunger after Him for Jesus is the fullness and joy of living.

THOUGHT: Blessed are all those who have received God's gift of righteousness.
PRAYER: Lord, ever more give me this thirst and hunger for Thee and I shall be filled and satisfied.

“And the Word was made flesh...”

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

This grand majestic verse of John 1:1 proclaims unequivocally that Jesus is God. His existence was before all time. Before His incarnation when He came to earth as a baby and then growing into boyhood and finally a man, He already existed. At the beginning of the book of Genesis, when we read about how God created the heavens and the earth and all the creatures, Jesus, the eternal Word, exists. “In the beginning”, in eternity past Jesus exists, affirming Jesus’ deity.

Jesus Christ also co-existed with the Father. He was with God from eternity and never separated from Him. All the attributes of the Father are found in the Son, Jesus Christ. One of the most famous descriptive definitions of God is in the Westminster Confession of Faith. “God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” That also exactly describes Jesus Christ who shares the same attributes of God. Although Jesus Christ is a Person distinct from the Father, He is of the same essence and nature with the Father. He is God, being of one substance with the Father. The Word was with God and was God.

What you have learnt above is the revelation of God given to John the Apostle. He received this divine revelation that no man can know or understand and he wrote it down for our understanding. The eternity and deity of Christ are to be believed and received with joy and gladness. You and I worship Him with our hearts and minds by faith. We worship the Son even as we worship the Father (John 5:23).

THOUGHT: The finite mind accepts the infinite wisdom and revelation of God.
PRAYER: Lord, how great Thou art. How deep are the riches both of Thy wisdom and knowledge. I praise and worship Thee.

“...lamb without blemish and without spot.”

WHY CAN JESUS SAVE?

It is impossible for the mind of man to fully grasp the miracle of redemption through Jesus Christ. This miracle of redemption is how He saved us, giving up His life in order to buy us back, paying for our redemption. The price paid for our redemption was not silver or gold. All the silver and gold of the world can never pay for our sins and free us from the bondage of sin.

Our sins were paid in full at Calvary's cross, when our Lord Jesus Christ shed His precious blood for us. Exodus 12 records for us an event that was a foreshadowing that this would happen. There in Exodus 12:29, there was no blood on the doorposts and lintel of the Egyptian dwellings and so they were unprotected from death. At midnight, the LORD smote all the first born in the land. In the houses of the Israelites, the blood of the Passover lamb smeared on the side posts and lintel protected them and they were safe.

Jesus saves for He alone died on the cross for our sins and it was accepted by God the Father for Jesus was the perfect Lamb of God, without spot or blemish. Thus if you believe in Jesus, that He died for your sins and His precious blood cleanses you of your sins, you are saved. His precious blood is effectual to take away your sins and God will remember your sins no more “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Psalm 32:1).

Since you cannot buy your salvation and a place in heaven even if you have all the money in the world, think and appreciate what love the Father has for you that He sent Jesus to die to save you. What love it was too that Jesus, the Son of God, was willing to lay down His life and shed His precious blood to save a sinner like you. It is love so amazing that it is described as beyond degree and beyond measure. If you have already trusted in the Lord and asked for your sins to be forgiven, rejoice! But if you have not, will you not do it today?

THOUGHT: God chose me before the foundation of the world.

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for salvation through the precious blood of your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

“This is the true God, and eternal life.”

IS JESUS THE SON OF GOD?

Jesus is not God’s Son in the sense of a human father and a son. Jesus is God’s Son in the sense that He is God made manifest in human form (John 1:14). Jesus is God’s Son in that He was conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit. “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee: and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35). Jesus is God, having the same nature as God.

Salvation means we understand that Jesus Christ was both fully man (when he dwelt on earth in the flesh) and fully God – for only God could make full atonement for sinners and only a man could be a substitute for man. We ought to accept this truth for our finite minds could not possibly begin to hold or comprehend the truth about Jesus. We can fully accept both fact that Jesus is 100% man and 100% God, trusting and believing what God’s Word tells us. Faith clings to Scripture alone.

1 John 5:20 tells us that the Son of God has already come into the world. This was clearly taught to us in John 1. His birth and life has been recorded for us in the four gospels. Not only that, in those gospels, He has taught us and given us much revelation about the nature of His kingdom and the way we ought to live if we are truly His. Truly He has given us understanding that we may know Him. If you are in Him who is the true God, even His Son Jesus Christ, you will enjoy eternal life.

Are you in Him who is the true God, even His Son Jesus Christ? Do not delay if you are outside Him. Seek to know Him who is the living and true God. There is no other to save you. “Neither in there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Only Jesus, always Jesus. He is the perfect sacrifice that God accepts to take our place as sinners condemned and destined for hell and destruction.

THOUGHT: Jesus Christ – the image of the invisible God.

PRAYER: Lord, make me to know Thee more fully, to glorify Thee and enjoy Thee forever.

“...in him dwelleth all the followers of the Godhead bodily.”

IS JESUS FULLY GOD?

Which verse, in recent weeks in Teens RPG, has already taught us that Jesus is fully God? Yes, it is from John 1. It clearly teaches us that “the Word was God.” There are many other verses that teach this great and central truth about Jesus Christ. Today, we shall consider Colossians 2: 9, clearly declaring that in Jesus Christ “dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”

When Jesus became man and walked the streets of Jerusalem, He had all the attributes of God in Him too. Jesus was not lacking in any one attribute of the Godhead. He was not merely endowed with the knowledge, or the power, or the wisdom of God; but all the complete attributes so that Jesus is fully God.

Thus as God is to be worshipped, so Jesus is the proper subject of worship. “And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him” (Hebrews 1:6). As God is omnipotent, omniscient, immutable and eternal, so is Jesus. The divine works of creation attributed to God is also attributed to Jesus. “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30).

Dear teen, can you see now the error that many in this world hold when they say that Jesus is a very great man and they stop at that? They do not see the divine nature of Jesus – that He was fully God. Philippians 2:6 reminds us, “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” Jesus was certainly not a lesser God but equal with God. All the fullness of the Godhead was in Him. And all of His fullness comes into our lives when we receive Jesus – everything we need for life and godliness. We need to discover more of what it means to have Jesus in our heart. This is the lifelong process of spiritual growth that lies ahead for you.

THOUGHT: “Ye are complete in him...” Colossians 2:10

PRAYER: Lord, ever more teach us to know that we have a wonderful Saviour and a great God whom we ought to praise and magnify continually.

“...tempted like as we are. yet without sin.”

WHY MUST JESUS BE FULLY MAN?

We have already established the fact that Jesus was fully man as He was born in a manger, grew into boyhood and then manhood in his home in Nazareth. He was acquainted with tiredness, hunger, thirst, sorrow and grief. When He heard that His friend Lazarus died, He wept.

It was only as a high priest that Jesus was able to intercede on behalf of man and thus represent man before God. In Old Testament times, the high priest was the only one who entered the Holy of Holies, once a year, to atone for the sins of the people of Israel. But first, as sinful man, he had to atone for his own sins by sacrificing a goat.

Without being man, Christ could not be man's sin-bearer. Thus Jesus had to be fully man and fully God in order to be the perfect sin-bearer and sacrifice that can atone for our sins. Our text tells us that He was “without sin.” Jesus Christ acts both as high priest and sacrifice. When He died on the cross, He took your place, and made His own pure soul and innocent body an offering and perfect sacrifice for sin.

Jesus is like us in every aspect but without sin. How amazing that the divine Son of God would not just take on part of our humanity but all of it – body, mind and emotions. He became man in full so that He might save us in full. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

My friend, there is no one who can take your sin away, there is no mere human being, no church, no system – the Lord Jesus Christ is the only high priest. He understands, sympathizes and succors those whom He represents. As you go through distress and struggles with your sin, you are represented this morning in heaven. Jesus the high priest has paid the price for your sin and brings your problems before God the Father in heaven.

THOUGHT: No ordinary priest but Jesus the perfect high priest can take away our sin.

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for Your unconditional love that You went all the way to the cross for my sin.

“Being ignorant of God’s righteousness...”

WHY DID JESUS NEED TO LEAD A PERFECT LIFE?

The law or the Ten Commandments were given so that the man who is able to perfectly obey them would be deemed as righteous in God’s sight. The law demands complete obedience but sinful man is unable to keep the commandments perfectly and live a perfect life. Therefore all are condemned and unrighteous before God.

The above verse teaches us that faith in Christ obtains for us this righteousness for Christ was able to perform perfectly all the demands of the law as He lived a perfect life. Such a perfect obedience to the law as Jesus manifested accomplished justification before God, secures His favour and eternal life. In other words, Christ, by His perfect life, gained for us righteousness before God.

The end of the law, which was to justify men if they obey perfectly, is now accomplished by faith in Christ. To everyone that believed in Jesus Christ, it is as if they have perfectly obeyed the law. God sees them as having performed all that the law required for God sees Christ in them and He led a perfect life of obedience to the law. If Jesus did not lead a perfect life, how can He be said to have fulfilled the requirements of the law? The law demands perfection and every one of us falls short of it. But Christ is able to give the law all it requires. Jesus makes us righteous, and therefore we are saved if we believe on Him, even as Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Dear friend, do you believe in Jesus? There is no more important question in this world. It is not mere mental assent. It is not just going with the flow. To believe is to trust with your heart and mind, to confide, to depend upon, to rely upon, to rest in. Do you believe that He is able to save to the uttermost them who come to God by Him? Then look to Jesus for righteousness.

THOUGHT: Submit to God’s plan of righteousness.

PRAYER: Lord of my righteousness, thank You for Your full and perfect obedience that secured for me righteousness, even eternal life.

“Let this cup pass from me...”

WHAT WAS THE CUP OF MATTHEW 26:39?

What was it that made Jesus to be in the deepest anguish and the most earnest entreaty? Here in the Garden of Gethsemane, He kneeled and then fell with his face on the ground, in deep agony of soul and fervency of prayer. This was the usual posture of prayer in times of great earnestness. Spiritually speaking, Jesus was engaged in an encounter with the powers of darkness.

His prayer was that if it be possible, that is, if the world can be redeemed; if it be consistent with God’s justice, that men should be saved without this extremity of sorrow, let this be done. Alas! It was not possible. It was not consistent with the justice of God that men should be saved without the awful sufferings of the atonement that Jesus undertook on the cross of Calvary.

The bitter cup of sufferings included bearing the iniquities which the Father laid upon Him. These sufferings and iniquities were for our sins. As we are sorry for our particular sins, so was He grieved for the sins of us all. Jesus submitted cheerfully to the will of God, in all His trials. He was strengthened in His soul to endure all the sufferings (Psalm 138:3).

Dear teen, as you go through dark days and needs drink of the bitter cup which God puts into your hands, learn to submit to God’s will. As you struggle, God’s all sufficient grace will see you through. Be resolved, as Jesus was, to do the Father’s will. Jesus triumphed over death and the grave and brought joy and salvation to all by His submission to go the way of the cross. That, my friend, is the secret of victorious Christian living.

THOUGHT: Christ’s sorrow is the foundation of our joy.

PRAYER: Lord, amazing love that it was for me that Christ bore the cup of suffering.

“he humbled himself...”

WHAT HAPPENED AT CALVARY?

The Apostle Paul tells us the depth of Jesus' condescension to become man. He says of Him, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." You and I have no idea how high an honour it is to be equal with God! How can we, therefore, measure the condescension of Christ.

Jesus lived humbly with Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. He associated Himself with lowly men like the fishermen around Galilee. But, with awe and reverence, we see Him in His death at Calvary. He needed not to die, yet He was willing to surrender His life. He said, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18).

Jesus died as a criminal upon the cross of Calvary. He was made a curse for us! Crucifixion is the worst kind of death. It was a violent and excruciatingly painful death. The nails pierced His hands and feet. The weight of the body was made to hang upon these tender parts of the body. He was made a spectacle, as He hung there with the thieves by His side, in view of the general public. Our Lord, the King of Glory was in the Valley of Humiliation.

Jesus, by dying has vindicated law and justice. His precious blood has washed away our sins. Have you applied it to your sins and asked for His cleansing flow? Cultivate a great hatred of sin. Learn to love, trust and obey the Lord more and more. Wean yourself from the love of the world and the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15-16).

THOUGHT: Rejoice if you are counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake.

PRAYER: Lord, King of my life, I crown thee now, Thine shall the glory be.

“...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO DIE ON THE CROSS?

What is the greatest pain that you have ever suffered? A broken bone, a toothache, or perhaps cuts from a bad fall? For me, the worst injury I ever suffered is probably a sprained ankle – nothing very major, but painful nonetheless.

Few or in fact none of us, therefore, can even begin to imagine the horror of death by crucifixion. Basically, the person being crucified is nailed by his hands and feet to a large wooden cross, or sometimes to a horizontal beam that is then attached to a tree trunk. For every breath that the person takes, he has to lift up his body by pushing up on the feet and arms; however, this would cause a searing, fiery pain because of the nails pierced into the hands and feet. Eventually, when the person no longer has the strength to lift himself up to breathe, he would die of suffocation. What a slow, agonizing and painful way to die!

In today's reading, we read that Christ was “wounded” and “bruised”, and that he suffered “chastisement” and “stripes”. Amazingly, even though this prophecy was written 700 years before the crucifixion of Christ, the description is so minutely accurate! The wounds that Christ suffered were the piercing of His hands and feet, and also of His side after He was dead (John 19:34). He was bruised, or crushed, by the weight of the sorrows that He bore on His shoulders. He suffered chastisement, which was the punishment for our sins. And He endured stripes, which refers to the beating and scourging He was given (Matthew 27:26). Besides the physical torment, there is also the humiliation involved. Christ had to carry his own cross to Calvary, while the crowds mocked and jeered. In the depth of His sufferings, He was stared at and spat on by the onlookers. He was stripped of all dignity, and died the death of only the most wicked criminals.

Dear teen, do you realize that all that Christ had to endure was for your sake? It was because of our “transgressions” and “sins” that Christ had to die this cruel death, in order we might have “peace” and be “healed”. Will you carry on in your sins and take Christ's sacrifice for granted, or will you live a consecrated life for Him today?

THOUGHT: All that Christ suffered was for me!

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for Your great sacrifice.

“...and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

WHAT WERE THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST?

Have you ever experienced the anguish that comes when you know that you have sinned? It is certainly not a pleasant feeling, for the weight of guilt feels almost physically heavy in our hearts, and there is a feeling of separation from God.

How do you think Christ felt, then, when He bore the guilt for our sins? In today's reading, we read that God made Christ “to be sin for us”. Certainly, this does not mean that Christ was at any point a sinner or guilty of any sin. The next phrase makes this very clear – Christ “knew no sin”. Rather, it refers to the fact that Christ was made to bear the guilt for our sins. Christ, the perfectly holy and sinless Son of God, who hates sin with His entire being, took on Himself all the sins of the world! All that He hated most deeply was poured out fully upon Him – and this He did voluntarily, for our sakes. What amazing love, what wonderful compassion! Because of this, Christ was also made to suffer the punishment and consequence of sin. In that moment the weight of the sins of the world was on His shoulders. And as He bore the guilt of our sins alone, God the Father poured out on Jesus the fury of His wrath – the anger of a holy, righteous God against the filth and wickedness of the sin of the world.

To what end? Why did Christ willingly put Himself through such intense suffering and agony? The second part of the verse gives us the answer – “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”. Because of what Christ did for us on the cross of Calvary, we are now declared righteous in the sight of God. Christ who was holy and pure was made sin, that we who are wretched and sinful might be made righteous. Truly, how marvelous the whole plan of salvation is!

Dear teen, what is your response to this wonderful truth? Do you realize that Christ went through all these sufferings in your place? That, because of Christ's sacrifice, you have been saved from the wrath of God? Or have you become dulled to sin, that you no longer view it as horrid and vile? Dear teen, come with a repentant heart to Jesus today.

THOUGHT: God treated Christ as the guilty one, so that He could treat us as right in His sight.

PRAYER: Lord, help me never to take Your sufferings for granted.

“For in that he died, he died unto sin once...”

HOW IS CHRIST THE SACRIFICE FOR SIN?

When you went to church last Sunday, did you go with a lamb or bullock in tow? Or perhaps a bird cage containing a pair of pigeons, or a turtledoves? ‘How absurd!’, you may think.

For God’s chosen people living in the Old Testament times, this was not a strange practice at all! God instituted the Levitical system of sacrifice as the means by which the Israelites could be cleansed of their sins. A chief requirement for the animals which they presented as their sacrifice was that they had to be “without blemish” (Leviticus 22:17-25). Imagine this – every single time you commit a sin, you would have to buy or otherwise obtain a specified animal that is physically perfect and flawless. You would then have to bring it to the priest who would sacrifice it on the altar, according to a set of rules and guidelines. Perhaps you would really think twice before sinning!

Today, however, we no longer have to carry out such a tedious process, for the “one sacrifice” offered by Christ has been offered “for sins for ever”! This sacrifice is none other than Christ Himself, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). In order to satisfy God’s requirement, Jesus had to be the spotless and unblemished Lamb of God. This, He fulfilled, by living a perfect and sinless life as a Man on this earth in complete obedience to God’s holy law (called His ‘active obedience’), as well as by taking on Himself the sufferings necessary to pay the penalty for our sins, even submitting to death on the cross (called His ‘passive obedience’). Christ’s sacrifice was so perfect and complete that it was sufficient for all the sins of the world. Unlike the priests in the Old Testament who needed to offer up sacrifices daily, Christ only needed to do this “once, when he offered up himself” (Hebrews 7:27). The word “once” in this verse carries the idea of “once, for all” – one and only one sacrifice is necessary.

How wonderful it is, dear teen, that Christ’s single act of sacrifice is sufficient to bring salvation to you and to me! Do you treasure this wonderful gift? Will you not live for Christ today, and tell a friend of the wonderful Saviour that you have?

THOUGHT: Christ’s sacrifice is once and for all!

PRAYER: Lord, lead me to some soul today.

“...and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

ARE WE SAVED BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS?

What is so significant about blood? It runs throughout your entire body, delivering oxygen to all the parts of your body in order to give you life. Without blood, no human can possibly live.

In Leviticus 17:11, we find a very clear explanation on the significance of blood: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul”. Therefore, for every animal that was brought as a sacrifice before God, the priest had to slay it and pour out its blood, and sprinkle its blood on the altar. While sometimes things were purified by water or fire, in general, “almost all things are by the law purged with blood”.

That is why, in today’s reading, we read that “without shedding of blood is no remission”. Blood represents life, and when blood is shed, it is evidence of the fact that a life is being given. In the Old Testament times, the sprinkling or pouring out of the blood of the sacrificed animal signified that its life was given to God instead of the sinner’s life. That is why, for Christ to be our Saviour, He had to shed His blood. His precious blood which was shed for us on the cross of Calvary is the clear evidence that His life blood was poured out when He died a sacrificial death to pay for our redemption. This blood therefore has the power to cleanse us from all our sins.

Dear teen, are you thankful for the blood that Jesus Christ has shed for your sake? The writer of Hebrews puts this point across wonderfully – “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:13-14). Today, we no longer have to rely on the blood of bulls and goats to cleanse us from our sins, for the blood of Jesus alone is sufficient. The question that remains is, has this blood been applied to your sins yet?

THOUGHT: What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

PRAYER: Lord, cleanse me with Your precious blood.

“But it shall not be well with the wicked...because he feareth not before God.”

WHAT IS GOD’S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT?

I know of many young people who have a very blasé attitude towards sin. They like to think, “Even though I sin, my life is good! God isn’t punishing me in any way, so I can carry on sinning as I like”.

Is this the right attitude to have? In today’s reading, Jesus Christ said to the Pharisees, “my judgment is true”. Though the judgment time was not yet come during Jesus’ first coming, this served as a warning to the Jews that He had the same authority as God the Father to judge them “according to truth” (Romans 2:2). This was a rebuke against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees – though they focused so much on the outward appearance, God would one day judge them according to truth, according to the inner motives of their hearts.

So what exactly is the righteous judgment of God? The Word of God tells us very clearly that God is a holy God who hates sin – “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Habakkuk 1:13). In His eyes, sin is so vile, so wicked, so evil. As He is holy, He demands that we be holy too. Sinners, falling short of this standard, will therefore one day be judged and punished by God. And the punishment is clear: “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) – not just a physical death, but an eternal one. Though they might seem to go scot-free in this present life, they will definitely be judged “according to their works” in the next (Revelation 20:13). God is also a just God whose righteousness must be satisfied. There is thus no way that God could ever allow a sinner to go unpunished, outside of the salvation achieved through Christ’s death.

Dear teen, do you have a similar attitude towards sin? Do you not realize that God delays in judgment not because He will not judge, but only because of His longsuffering and mercies? Will you not repent, before it is too late?

THOUGHT: All sinners will have to face God’s judgment.

PRAYER: Lord, save me from the judgment to come.

“...Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.”

WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION?

Recall the last time you did something wrong. Did you try to make excuses for it? Perhaps you did not complete your homework, and you tried to justify yourself to your teacher by saying that you had no time. Or perhaps you got into a fight with your sibling, and you tried to justify yourself to your parents by saying that it was your sibling who started the fight. Most of the time, though, you will still be punished for your wrongdoing, no matter how hard you try to justify yourself.

How comforting it is, then, to know that when it comes to our salvation, we do not need to justify ourselves before God. Indeed, if we had to, we would never be able to, for we are indeed guilty of every single sin that we commit! Instead, we who come to Jesus for salvation are “justified by his blood”, as today’s reading tells us. The word “justify” here means to declare or to regard as just, innocent or righteous. Through the blood which Jesus Christ shed for us on the cross of Calvary, we have been declared innocent in the sight of God. We are pardoned of all our sins, and accepted as righteous before Him, not because we really are that good, but only because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Do note that being justified does not mean that we instantly become perfectly righteous, or that we will never sin again. While we remain on this earth in our mortal bodies, we will, sadly, still fall into sin. But the assurance we have is that, in God’s eyes, we have been declared righteous, and He will forgive us each time we come to Him in repentance.

There is therefore no reason at all for us to boast or to be proud of our salvation, for it is entirely through the grace of God and through Christ’s sacrifice! Dear teen, may you therefore thank the Lord daily for His wondrous gift of salvation, that you may even be “saved from wrath through him”. May you also not take His grace and forgiveness for granted, but instead strive to lead a pure and blameless life.

THOUGHT: Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to lead a pure and blameless life.

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:”

WHAT IS RECONCILIATION?

Is there anybody in your life whom you regard as an enemy? In my teenage years, I recall having some people in my life that I really did not like. Looking back, it all seems so childish and petty, but those feelings of intense dislike were very real at that time.

But what are these, compared to how God regarded us when we were still unsaved? Today’s reading tells us that, before we were saved, we were enemies of God! It may seem such a strong word, but it perfectly describes the relationship that used to exist between God and us. On God’s part, His holy and just nature give Him a hatred for sin, such that He regarded us sinners as His enemies. And on our part, we had no love for God at all. We hated His laws, broke His commandments and lived according to our own lusts and desires. Ephesians 2:2-3 describes us as “children of wrath” and “children of disobedience” who “walked according to the course of this world”.

Praise the Lord, that we can be reconciled to Him “by the death of his Son”! Through Christ’s death on Calvary’s cross, we are justified, such that we are no longer alienated from God. We are brought into a relationship, friendship and love with God, and we now enjoy blessed harmony and unity with Him. Dear teen, have you experienced the blessedness of this relationship? Have you been reconciled to God? Or are you still His enemy, alienated from Him and living a life of disobedience and rebellion? And if you have been reconciled to Him, 2 Corinthians 5:19 says that God has now “committed unto us the word of reconciliation”, which means that we are to make known to others this message of how they can be reconciled to God. This includes even those whom you regard as your ‘enemies’, for what wrong can they have done to you that is greater than the wrongs that you did against God in the past?

*How many are the lost that I have lifted?
How many are the chained I’ve helped to free?
I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus,
When He has done so much for me?*

THOUGHT: Nobody can have wronged me more than I have wronged God.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be a peacemaker.

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation.”

WHAT IS ATONEMENT?

The word “atonement” here means “reconciliation”, or “restoration to favour”. Literally, it comes from the words, “at one”, hence it has the idea of two parties being at one. It is the only time that this word appears in the New Testament, and it refers to the work Christ did in His life and death to earn our salvation. It encompasses the entire work of Christ – from His birth in a manger in Bethlehem some 2000 years ago, to His life and ministry during the 33 years He spent on this earth, to His death on the cross at Calvary.

From His birth, Christ had a singular purpose for coming to this earth: to earn salvation for us. That is why He had to be born as a man, so that He could be our Representative. At the same time, His supernatural conception and birth ensured that He was not born in sin, but was sinless at birth. Throughout His life on this earth, though He was “in all points tempted like as we are”, yet He never succumbed to temptation and remained “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). And in His death, He remained sinless and perfectly obedient to God’s law. He “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). He had to die, because this was the penalty for sin which He paid to God on our behalf.

One thing we must realize is that, without Christ, we would never be able to save ourselves. As the words of the beautiful hymn Rock of Ages go,

*Not the labours of my hands can fulfill thy law’s commands;
Could my zeal no languor know, could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and thou alone.*

Dear teen, do you realize that Christ has done in your place what you could not do for yourself? No longer will you have to suffer God’s wrath and pay the penalty for your sins, for Christ has already accomplished it all! All that is left for you to do is to recognize that you are a sinner in need of a Saviour, confess your sins and accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour. Will you not do that right now?

THOUGHT: How wonderful the plan of salvation is!

PRAYER: Lord, save me, for I cannot save myself.

“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity...”

WHAT IS REDEMPTION?

In my secondary school days, I remember how everyone wanted to get their hands on the latest iPod and Crumpler bag. Now, people around me are always talking about branded bags, shoes and clothing. I am sure that you have similar experiences – perhaps with your friends in school, or maybe even you yourself! The materialistic world that we live in indeed puts great weight on such possessions.

But what are all these material goods, when compared with the greatest gift that one can ever receive? In today’s reading, we read that we are redeemed not “with corruptible things, as silver and gold”, but “with the precious blood of Christ”! The word “redeemed” in this verse also means “ransom”, and refers literally to a price paid for the redemption of captives, for example, people who have been kidnapped. For us, we are all by nature captive to sin, “subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15) to sin and to Satan. Under the curse of sin, we would have been condemned to eternal death and suffering. Because of Christ, though, who came to this earth “to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28), we have been redeemed from this bondage. Jesus died in our place, that we no longer need to pay the penalty for our sins.

Dear teen, do you treasure this wonderful gift of salvation? Silver and gold and all the material possessions that this world can offer are but “corruptible things”, things that cannot last beyond the grave. The blood of the Christ, though, is more precious than anything else in the world, for it has the power to save and to grant eternal life. The question is, is it precious to you?

THOUGHT: “Sing, O sing of my Redeemer, with His blood He purchased me!”

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for the precious gift of salvation.

“And he is the propitiation for our sins...”

WHAT IS PROPITIATION?

Recall the last time you made someone very angry. How did you appease him? Probably, you had to apologise, or perhaps you did something nice for the other person before he forgave you.

In a way, this is how things are between God and us too. Our sins have caused Him to show His wrath and righteous anger toward us. In our unsaved state, we deserved nothing but eternal damnation for all our sins. Because He is holy and just, God cannot forgive us just like that – His wrath had to be appeased. This, Christ achieved by being a “propitiation” for us. The word ‘propitiation’ here means a sacrifice that bears God’s wrath, such that God’s wrath toward us is changed into favour. By giving His life on the cross and shedding His blood, Christ was able to turn away God’s anger and restore us into a right relationship with Him.

This does not mean that God Himself is changed. Rather, His wrath toward us was appeased by Christ’s sacrificial death, such that He can now show His favour toward us. Indeed, the entire plan of salvation declares to us God’s righteousness – He is a just God to whom we can come only if we have faith in the blood of Christ.

Dear teen, do you acknowledge the fact that you are entirely deserving of God’s wrath, and that there is therefore a need to turn away this wrath? Christ has already turned God’s wrath away in your place, by being a propitiation for you. This sacrifice will be of no use to you, though, unless you accept Jesus as your Saviour. Will you not do so today, “through faith in his blood”?

THOUGHT: Christ bore God’s wrath in my place.

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for being a propitiation for me.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BORN AGAIN?

What does it mean to be born in the first place?

Consider Nicodemus's question in the preceding verse. "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews. By his birth and the life he had led, he was somebody. Not only was the concept of being born again alien, why would he indeed need nor want to be born again? Could anyone have a better birth than he? Surely not? Born again? No thanks. Not necessary.

Oh no! Birth marks the beginning of all new life. Without a new birth, there cannot be a new life. Our first birth is of the flesh but this second birth is of the Holy Spirit (John 3:6). The "water" in verse 5 also refers to the Holy Spirit, water signifying cleansing, refreshing and purification.

Nicodemus had great knowledge; and admired and acknowledged Christ's teachings and miracles, and that He was a teacher sent from God. You and I may be like Nicodemus – with the outward forms of Christianity. We are born into a Christian home, have many Christian friends, knowledge of the Bible, attend church diligently. We have knowledge, great knowledge; but like Nicodemus, no understanding. Many people today acknowledge the works and the exemplary life of Christ. They admire the principles of Christianity. Many strive to live good, moral lives. But this is not being born again. This life remains in the flesh. It is like patching up an old building here and there when what is required is a new building –of a different kind, with new principles, new affections, new purposes built on a different foundation – a spiritual one.

Today, are we all that different from the Pharisees who focused and placed great importance on the externals? But the work of the Holy Spirit goes to and touches the very heart of us, what is hidden – our souls. Without the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we cannot see the Kingdom of Heaven. How is your heart?

THOUGHT: Am I living a new life in the spirit or simply patching up the old one with good works and knowledge? How do I know?

PRAYER: May I be in Christ a new creature: where old things are passed away and all things are become new.

WHAT DOES ADOPTION MEAN?

In our natural sinful state of unbelief, we are enemies of Christ. We have no relationship with Christ. We are strangers. Even under the law – the spirit of bondage which the Jews and Gentiles alike could not fulfill, we remained condemned strangers. It could not reconcile us to Christ.

In the act of adoption, a parent is to take a stranger into the family, as one's very own child, and treat and consider him as one's flesh and blood. It is the prerogative of the parent, not the child. So it is with the Holy Spirit who has adopted us through the gospel. We as strangers – spiritual orphans brought into God's family. Consequently, we are accorded the privileges and rights of a child. One of these is to call God Abba Father. "Abba" is the Aramaic word for Father. God is the Father both of Jew and Greek (Gentile). We as His adopted children can now cry unto Him, Father, father. And He will answer us. Furthermore, we who are strangers are now heirs of God's kingdom and joint-heirs with Christ! We have complete assurance of our place as His children and need no longer fear as we did under the law.

Now that you are adopted, are you living as a child of God, as an heir of His Kingdom, or as a spiritual orphan, a child of the world? Oh an orphan has no rules and regulations to abide by and restrict. He is his own master. An orphan has no one to care, teach and provide for him. No one who loves him. We have a heavenly Father whom we can turn to, who will never disappoint, punish unjustly nor leave us. You have been given the privilege of prayer, of reading His Word and of fellowship with fellow saints. Are you making the most of these privileges which are given to only believers? What does the double emphasis of Father, father? Do you have such a close relationship with the Lord that you can call upon Him such as Christ did in the Garden of Gethsemane?

THOUGHT: With privileges come responsibilities. Consider what your responsibilities as a child of God are to Him and to your fellow mankind.

PRAYER: May I strive to live a life as an heir of my Heavenly Father's kingdom, fully utilising the privileges and blessings bestowed, and fulfilling my responsibilities.

HOW DID CHRIST GAIN VICTORY OVER DEATH?

What is the fate of mankind if God had not sent His only begotten Son to earth? "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law." (1 Corinthians 15:56) Christ being sinless, fulfilled the law by His birth, ministry and work on the cross. He died for our sins paying the penalty for our sin. It is through His life and death that He gained victory over death for us who were condemned to death. We are no longer condemned to death under the law which we could not fulfill. By His death, He gained victory over death for us. What is this victory? Eternal life, through Christ, and Christ alone. Nevertheless our present corruptible bodies will all die, because they cannot as flesh and blood inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50). When we are raised from the dead, our corrupted bodies will be transformed into glorified ones and death will be swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Do you think you are a basically good person? Sure, you think the occasional mean thought; or are sometimes prone to a bout of jealousy or pride however momentary. Maybe you were impatient with a loved one or friend just today. Failed to keep your word last week, but it was no big deal. Okay, so you are not perfect, who is? You are only human! It is normal. Anyway, at the end of the day there is way more good stuff in you than bad, right? What did the Apostle Paul say about himself? "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." (1 Timothy 1:15) As I grow older and strive to mature in my faith, I become more sensitive to sin. Perhaps I sin less in absolute terms, or perhaps more. Nevertheless, I feel more wretched. I can see all the more clearly just how dead in sin I am. Me, fulfill the law? I fail miserably, continually. Even the best of men, is a man at best – a sinner. So, thanks be to God who has given us victory over death! When was the last time you thanked the Lord for the gift of salvation? We are forgetful creatures, and prone to ungratefulness. Are you also thankful for the salvation of loved ones and friends? Do you have a burden for those who have not claimed the promise of victory over death? Time is running out.

THOUGHT: O death where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?
(1 Corinthians 15:55)

PRAYER: Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

IS IT IMPORTANT THAT CHRIST IS RISEN?

- Christ's death, burial and resurrection on the 3rd day is according to the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). It has been prophesied. Christ's death and resurrection was the fulfillment of Scripture. Is scripture then not true?
- The disciples and Paul (and others) testified to seeing the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). Were they mistaken? Or worse still, are they liars?
- If Christ our Lord, the Son of God did not Himself have power over death, what of those who have already died in the faith? Have they perished for all eternity? (1 Corinthians 15:18)
- Christ Himself said He would rise again (Matthew 16:21, Luke 24:7). Can we not trust the very words spoken by our Lord?
- If Christ is not raised, we are still dead in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:7).

If Christ is not risen, our faith is vain! It is futile. Christianity leads nowhere. Do you believe the Bible is true and that Christ indeed is risen? The firstfruits, are exactly that, the first fruits of the harvest that were offered to God by His people. It is the best. Christ is the first in respect of honour as Lord and Saviour, the only begotten Son of God. Christ first rose from the dead by His own power and will not die again. He is immortal.

Today, medical and scientific knowledge have and continue to advance in leaps and bounds. People are living healthier and longer lives. There are cures for diseases that would have killed countless in the past. Man is so clever, so powerful. Whilst these can be use for good, they are to be viewed with discernment by Christians and ultimately with a different perspective. An eternal one. Make no mistake they are ultimately in vain, they postpone the inevitable – death, whether you are rich, poor, young, old, intelligent or simple. As Christians we have a hope, in the risen Christ. A hope that will be realised. How do we know? Christ has conquered death and by doing so has done so for us and all those who have already died in faith. We are most blessed to have a faith that is not in vain, but rests on a risen Christ.

THOUGHT: What is your perspective on life and death?

PRAYER: May I not become preoccupied and obsessed about prolonging my physical life here on earth. May I run the race that I may obtain, rather than prolong.

“...now faith is substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

WHAT WAS CHRIST’S RESURRECTED BODY LIKE?

When Christ spoke these words to His disciples, it was to allay their fears. He had just appeared all of a sudden in their midst. They thought they had seen a spirit and were afraid. Christ speaks to them. Listen! Look at My hands and feet, it is Me; touch Me and see! Does a spirit have flesh and bones as I do?

Later, Thomas who was not with the other disciples insists “...Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” (John 20:25) The Lord appears and condescends to fulfill Thomas’s faithless request, leading him to respond: “My Lord and my God.” (John 20:28)

The resurrected body of Christ was the same body of Christ that was crucified. It was the Lord Himself, who had risen from the dead. He was not a spirit, nor a re-incarnation – a new or different body. The resurrected body bore the scars and the marks of His crucifixion and death on the cross. His resurrected body that was same one that had lived and ministered on earth, died and was now alive – it was a living body which ate broiled fish and honeycomb (Luke 24:42).

The nature of Christ’s resurrected body proves that Christ did indeed rise from the dead. Jesus who was fully man, was crucified and died. His resurrection was physical and literal. And this same Christ rose from the dead. Furthermore, if the resurrected Christ was a spirit, could it be said He had truly conquered death? Is the work of Christ complete?

What blessed assurance we have that Christ lives and is seated at the right hand of God interceding for us. But do you believe? Or are you like doubting Thomas? What does Christ say of those who believe without ever seeing?

THOUGHT: See: John 20:29b.

PRAYER: My Lord and my God... may my faith be worthy of a risen Saviour.

WHAT IS ETERNAL LIFE ALL ABOUT?

What indeed is life all about here on earth? Is its purpose different from what it will be in heaven? The chief purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (Westminster Shorter Catechism). To glorify God, is to praise; to elevate and honour Him in worship; in thought, in songs of praise or words. We also glorify God by the godly lives we live – testifying of the Holy Spirit in our lives. What are the ways in which we enjoy God or someone for that matter? Talking to and about them, being in their presence, thinking about them, finding out more about them. Can we ever know too much about the Lord, do enough for Him if we truly love Him? Thus, our main purpose in heaven will remain unchanged – to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This is what eternal life will be all about. However, in eternity, the circumstances in which we do so will be different. There will be no tears, no death, no sorrow, no pain, no worries, no hurt, no disappointments, no anger, no jealousy! And it will be God Himself who will wipe away our tears one final time.

What are the things that make you sad and hurt you? Make you toss and turn and keep you up at night? Envious of and wish you were someone else? Can you imagine what it will be like to not experience nor fear all these things ever again? Whilst we can and do enjoy God and glorify Him here in this world, it is terribly imperfect. We often serve the Lord with mixed motives, become easily discouraged, hurt, complain or tired. Ever sung a hymn but your mind was elsewhere? Listened to a compelling sermon that touched your heart only to remember it for all of a day or two, whilst simultaneously thinking about what you are going to be having for lunch afterwards! Our prayers are prone to repetition, to be narrow and selfish in scope, small in faith, and all too often ending prematurely when we drift off to sleep. Our relationship with the Lord becomes lukewarm or cold. Or we forget Him so easily. In eternity, sin will have no place. Our relationship with God will be perfect. We will enjoy Him and glorify Him perfectly. With each passing day, I know I look forward to that day even more. What about you?

THOUGHT: What will it be like to see God face to face?

PRAYER: Time to do some spiritual and practical housecleaning - may I examine my heart and my life and rid the things that hinder me from enjoying and glorifying God.

WON'T HEAVEN BE BORING?

Path of life... This is the way to heaven. Heaven is where eternal life is. This world is just our temporary home – it is a path leading to death. In thy presence...we will be in His presence. We will see Him face to face – in person. Imagine what that will be like? What did Moses face look like after he saw God on Mt Sinai? (Exodus 34:29-30) Fulness of joy... is perfect joy. Joy that lacks nothing, it is complete. At God's right hand the place of highest honour there will be pleasures evermore. Pleasures that go on and on, without end. Thou wilt shew me... Thou, is none other than God Himself. We will see it. We will experience it. No longer will heaven be something we sing and read about. Heaven will be realised!

Ever thought to yourself, if only I achieve this or obtain this possession, I will be happy. So you got it and were happy and content. But for how long? Are you only as happy as the next possession, achievement or experience you are planning for? Relationships, even the best bring their grief and disappointments, and none lasts forever. There is only so much one can eat of the most decadent chocolate cake. If you had an endless supply and ate it day after day, how long before you are sick of it? In stark contrast to the imperfect and temporary pleasures of the world, are the perfect and endless pleasures of Heaven. In Heaven will you tell God, please, no more pleasures? I do not wish to live in the mansion you have prepared for me nor walk down streets of gold! Indeed, in this world, have you prayed for God to stop blessing you? Perhaps you do not have many cares and worries at this time. But be sure, these will only multiply as you get older. What do I look forward to in heaven? Rest, sweet and perfect rest from all my labours. Release, from all the cares of the world. Do you wish to go on studying and working forever? In heaven, we will receive our inheritance and be with fellow saints. Is there a particular saint you look forward to meeting? Nevertheless, the most compelling reason why Heaven will not be boring, is because, in paradise I will be in the presence of God. I will see Him and enjoy Him face to face, at His right hand. Finally.

THOUGHT: Is this world really so exciting and pleasurable?

PRAYER: May I grow to love the LORD more and more with each passing day, looking forward with great anticipation to the day when I see Him face to face and spend all eternity in His presence.

HOW LONG IS ETERNITY?

Night marks the end of day. In the dark, without light from the moon and artificial sources, we cannot see. Children are often afraid of the dark that night brings. What can we do in pitch black darkness? We need light to mitigate the power of darkness to continue to function. Even the great power of the sun in contrast to the small light a candle sheds does not last 24 hours as the Earth rotates on its axis. Without light, there would be no life. Yet, this light can also destroy life. The light in Heaven will be perfect, as it comes from God.

It is hard to imagine eternity. Even a second can be a very long time – a split second can make all the difference between an Olympic gold medal and a silver. Our lives here on earth are marked by time – seconds, minutes, hours...days and nights. Time both flies and it crawls, but mostly it flies. Examinations drag by painfully and indeterminably. Yet, there does not seem enough time to study. When doing something we enjoy, time flies.

I have never experienced midsummer nor midwinter in the Arctic where there are days of 24 hours of daylight and 24 hours of darkness respectively. Where I grew up though, in the middle of winter it would be dark by the time I got home from school at 5:30pm and dark when I left in the morning. I would look forward with great joy to long hot summer days, shedding my winter layers for light summer clothes and basking in the sun. Think of our life here on Earth as one long night, and eternity in Heaven as one endless day after a long night. Everything will be clear and bright as we will be able to see and experience everything perfectly as we reign with the Lord forever.

James describes our lives here as a vapour, that appear for a while then vanish. Our lives here on earth have an ending. But our lives in Heaven have no end. Make the best use of your time here. Whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. Be the best student, daughter, son, friend, servant of the Lord. What we do here for the Lord, in the fixed amount of time given to each of us, will count for eternity.

THOUGHT: As your life here is but a mere vapour, how then should we face trials and difficulties in the light of eternity?

PRAYER: Read 2 Corinthians 4:15-18.

CAN'T HEAVEN BE FOUND ON EARTH?

In Heaven, in the presence of God, in the holy city of New Jerusalem lit by the glory of God - it will be perfect. Nothing or no one that is sinful can enter Heaven. Only born again Christians whose sins have been cleansed by the blood of Christ will be able to enter. Sin is the antithesis – diametrically opposed to everything God, who is Holy, is. Sin is an abomination to the Lord – He hates sin with an absolute and perfect hatred. Imagine if it were indeed possible for sin to enter Heaven. What would be its effect? Even a tiny, minute speck of sin would taint and corrupt Heaven. 99.99% pure is not pure at all. Heaven would no longer be Heaven!

Conversely, in this world, do you see more of God's holiness or man's wickedness? Even in the universal church, the beloved bride of Christ, is there sin? What about your local church? In the Bible and through prayer, worship and fellowship with saints we do have a glimpse and foretaste of Heaven, but can we say Heaven is well and truly here? Moreover, are there unbelievers in the midst of your church? So if Heaven is not in the church, what of the world that rejects God? Is Heaven to be found there?

Heaven is not here on earth and can never be because of sin. Sin contaminates everything. A newborn child, seemingly innocent and pure cannot help but sin. Examine just the past day of your life. How pure were your thoughts and actions? Would you have been able to enter Heaven based on them? Likewise, would Christ and others have been able to see in your life a little slice of Heaven? What is the effect of sin in your life? Sin is not harmless and neutral. We need to be constantly sensitive and on guard to it.

If your concept of Heaven is living a life enjoying the things and pleasures of this earth, then yes, heaven for you is right here. Or could it be that you wish to take things of this world to Heaven? What exactly here in this world would you like to bring to heaven, that is worthy of it?

THOUGHT: Is your perspective of this world different from friends and family who are unbelievers?

PRAYER: May I be the salt and the light for Thee in this sinful world.

WHAT IF I ENJOY THIS WORLD MORE?

There are two things of value here. One is your soul, and the other, the things of the world. The things of the world are bewitching and beguiling; there are so many things to do, achieve and experience: knowledge, reputation, wealth, comfort, beauty, popularity, power. Who in their right mind would not desire at least some of these things? Perhaps you do not wish to gain the whole world, just a slice of it, or just a taste. Well, you will have to work for it. Furthermore, there is another far greater price to pay for these things. The things of the world will last a lifetime at most and you cannot take them with you to Heaven. In contrast, your soul is eternal, and you only have one. The entire world even if you were to attain it, is not worth the price of your soul! So then, is even just a taste of the world for a lifetime worth trading your eternal soul for?

When I was younger, my goal was to travel to every continent before I turned 30. This would be fulfilment for me. I did see a fair bit of the world and did enjoy it, but it did not accord me complete and lasting fulfillment. Like the woman at the well, I was seeking for things that could not satisfy. Reflect upon all the things you ever desired and/or worked for thus far. Have they satisfied you perfectly?

At the end of your life, will you look back on your life and regret that you did not enjoy this world more and are leaving it? It is not wrong to desire to nor to enjoy travel, or to go to university and earn a good living. But as Christians, we now have freedom not to lust after them, to be enslaved in the wholehearted pursuit of them believing they are the be all and end all. What did King Solomon have to say? “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 2:11)

Can you truly love the Lord yet love this world more? There is also a price to be pay if you wish to follow Christ. To spend all your time, money, talents enjoying the world will be at the expense of the things of the Lord and His Kingdom. To take up His cross and follow Him, you will need to deny self (Mark 8:34).

THOUGHT: Have you counted the cost of following Christ? Is it too great?

PRAYER: May I have great ambitions for Christ!

WHAT IS OUR BLESSED HOPE?

“They had done all that they could and all they could do now was hope for the best.” This is how the world views hope. It sees hope as a rather desperate uncertainty. Christians, on the other hand, define hope as “confident expectation”. It is not merely wishing that something will happen but knowing that it will definitely happen and thus looking forward earnestly to it.

In Titus 2:13, we see that our hope centers on a person – the Lord Jesus Christ, and His second coming. Just as how the people of the past waited in anticipation for Christ’s first coming, we now wait with bated breath for “the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”. It is not a remote event that may or may not happen but it is a definite day in the future, confirmed by the testimony of God’s Word and His Spirit to our hearts. It is also called our “blessed hope” showing how precious and uplifting it is to us.

Without the Christian’s hope, it is extremely difficult to find meaning in our lives. This is especially so in this day and age where sin is so rife and desire for God so scarce that our souls are vexed from day to day like Lot’s was when he lived in Sodom. Hope in Christ’s second coming helps us to see past the present state and know that the things that are happening today are signs that the day of the Lord “is near, even at the doors” (Matthew 24:33). This knowledge that Christ is coming again soon spurs the Christian on in his/her walk. Does the thought of Christ’s second coming fill you with hope? Are you living with the excitement of the future God has promised us or just building your life on this earth as if you do not have an eternal home that awaits you?

THOUGHT: How important is hope in Christ’s return to you?

PRAYER: Lord, let me not be despaired by this current world and my current circumstances but enable me to have hope in Thy promise that Christ is coming again soon. Let this hope uplift my heart and spur me on in my walk and service for Thee.

“God himself shall be with them and be their God.”

DO I WANT TO BE FOREVER WITH GOD?

During their journey to the Promised Land, the Israelites had the very presence of God with them, a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night (Exodus 40:34–38). Revelation 21:3 alludes to this time in history when God was present with His people in a visible physical form. The other time this happened was when Jesus Christ lived on earth as God taking on the form of a man and it is Christ who will dwell with us in the New Jerusalem after He comes again.

How wonderful the description in Revelation 21:3 of how God will dwell with us. How we will be His people and He will be our God. How we will see Him everyday and enjoy being in His presence for eternity.

Does the idea of eternity with God excite you? It is no doubt difficult to imagine what eternity is like as we are finite beings who live in time and space. Many Christians are so caught up with their lives on this earth and the cares of the present that they forget that their lives now are only temporary. When we are living with Christ in the future, our lives on this earth will be such a distant memory that it will seem that they never existed. How then should we live our lives on this earth, seeing that it is but a transient abode?

Christ warns us in Luke 17:26-33 that “whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.” Are we so consumed with building up “kingdoms” on this earth that when Christ comes again, we would turn our heads back in longing like Lot’s wife as she fled from Sodom, revealing where our hearts and affections truly lie? God forbid. Let us watch ourselves and each other as we sojourn on this earth as it is often a gradual slipping away as a Christian loses sight of his eternal home. Let us remind ourselves of where our home truly is.

THOUGHT: If God calls you home today, will you be ready to leave?

PRAYER: Help me to examine my heart honestly, O Lord. Do I truly look forward to a life of eternity with you? Or have I become too caught up in this present world?

“if thou shalt confess with thy mouth and shalt believe in thine heart.”

SO HOW EXACTLY CAN I BE SAVED?

Romans 10:9 tells us plainly how one is saved. It involves our hearts and our mouths. Our hearts need to believe the salvation work that Christ has done for us. How He is the Son of God, “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), and how He, “the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14). Our hearts need to believe His life on earth, His death on the cross and “that God hath raised him from the dead”. We need to believe that we are “justified by his blood” (Romans 5:9) and it is through Him, and Him alone, that we are saved.

When we truly believe in our hearts the Gospel, we will naturally open our mouths and proclaim what we believe. Romans 10:9 states that we need to confess with our mouths what we have believed in our hearts before man. We need to stand up for our Saviour and state our belief in Him and His work to the rest of the world. We should never be closet Christians who are ashamed of the Gospel for that might mean that we have not truly believed in actual fact.

You may have been coming to church with your parents since you were a baby or perhaps, a good friend may have invited you along for Worship Service. You have heard the Gospel and know in your head very well what Jesus did. But is that where it stops? Does your heart believe what your head knows? Does your mouth confess that you believe and that you are born again? These are pertinent questions that you must answer honestly today. For no one else can judge whether you are really saved. Only you yourself and God know for sure. If you realise that you have not believed, do not delay any further. Believe in thine heart and confess with thy mouth that Jesus is your Saviour and you shall be saved. It is that simple.

THOUGHT: Have you truly believed in your heart and confessed with your mouth that Jesus is your Saviour?

PRAYER: O Lord, I believe in Jesus Christ and that He is the Son of God. I believe that He lived on earth, died on the cross and has risen from the dead. I believe that salvation is through His work on the cross alone. O Lord, help me to confess through my mouth and my life that Jesus is my Saviour.

“Grace, grace, God’s grace ...grace that is greater than all our sin.”

WHAT IS GRACE?

Grace is unmerited favour. It is given to someone who has done nothing to deserve it. It requires much generosity, love and forgiveness on the part of the giver. It is through God’s grace that we are saved.

Romans 5:8 sums up the essence of grace completely. We are sinners and totally undeserving of any love or forgiveness. We are in fact deserving of death for “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). However, although we are undeserving and filled with sin which God hates, God loves us and He took the first step to reach out to us and reconcile us to Himself. He died for us. He gave His life to people who hated Him and rebelled against His will with their sin. Only our God who is so full of love for His creation could have shown such grace to us fallen creatures. There are no appropriate superlatives to describe such grace. All we can do is fall on our knees in gratitude and awe and worship the Giver of this wondrous grace.

Do you remember any instances where someone has shown you grace when you did not deserve it? It could be someone who showed you kindness even though you often gossip and speak ill of this person to others. It could be your parents who showed you love and forgiveness even though you disobeyed them time and time again. Remember how sorry and yet grateful you felt when you received such grace. Now multiply that an infinite amount of times and you might perhaps just get an idea of what it means for God to show us grace.

Have you grasped how amazing God’s grace is? How unbelievable that the Creator of heaven and earth would love such insignificant and filthy beings as us? And yet He does. Spend some time meditating on how marvelous His grace is.

THOUGHT: “Grace, grace, God’s grace. Grace that will pardon and cleanse within. Grace, grace, God’s grace. Grace that is greater than all our sin!”

PRAYER: Thank you, Lord, for Your amazing and matchless grace. Let me everyday be filled with awe and gratitude for Your grace towards me.

“our saving faith is the gift of God it is purely by His grace.”

WHAT IS SAVING FAITH?

We are saved by grace through faith. It is through faith as it is the belief in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross that brings salvation. However, it is by grace as without the Holy Spirit's enabling, we would not have the faith to believe. Our sinful hearts would otherwise never look for God and yearn to be reconciled to Him. By His divine predestination, the elect are given this saving faith to believe and be saved. Therefore, in Ephesians 2:8-9, this saving faith is called the “gift of God” that is given to us freely.

Paul also makes it clear that because this saving faith of ours is given to us completely out of the free will and grace of God, no one can boast that he earned his salvation. It is not because we built up our faith such that it is stronger than others that we are saved. It is not through good works that we have done that we are saved. It is purely by His grace.

All other religions practise some form of salvation by works. This is because all their founders are humans. Somehow, human beings have this idea that we need to earn our salvation and that more good works will give us hopefully enough points to secure a place in heaven. In reality, our sin is too deep and our works too small to ever obtain salvation on our own strength. Sadly, a vast majority of people have not realised this and they continue to plod on uselessly trying to earn favour with God. Only Christianity whose founder is God Himself has the right way to salvation.

Yet even though we know that salvation is solely through grace, Christians sometimes still fall into the trap of pursuing a salvation through works. They lack assurance of their salvation through grace and look to attendance at church, service in ministries and more generous offerings to earn their way into Heaven. If you find that you too are believing in a salvation through works, you need to examine your faith as it is not the saving faith that the Holy Spirit gives.

THOUGHT: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”

(Philippians 2:12b).

PRAYER: O Lord, if I am relying on a salvation by works, forgive me and grant me the saving faith to believe that it is through Christ and Christ alone that we are saved by grace through faith.

“for if ye believe not that I am He ye shall die in your sins.”

WHAT IF I DON'T BELIEVE?

Jesus did not mince His words as he spoke to the Jews in the temple about His identity as the Son of God and the promised Messiah that the Jews had been waiting for. The group he addressed was antagonistic and defiant. The Pharisees in the group called Him a liar at the start and it was clear that they did not truly believe even in God the Father although outwardly they deceived others that they did. Jesus exposed their unbelief when He said, “Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also (John 8:19)”.

Jesus then told them outright that if they did not believe that He was the Messiah and that salvation came through Him, they would “die in [their] sins”. Christ did not hide the harsh truth from them. He did not play down the fatality of not believing in Him. It was simple. Believe that He was the Messiah or else, it was eternal death.

We should definitely learn from Christ. We should not brush over the reality of hell and the fact that if one does not believe in Christ, one will “die in [his] sins”. The stakes are eternal life and death as we proclaim the Gospel. We owe it to the people we love to tell them the dire consequences if they do not believe in Christ. If they do not know about hell, they will not see the urgency of accepting Christ. We should not be afraid of offending them and hiding this fact from them. It is lying to them if we do not tell them the whole truth.

THOUGHT: Have you been guilty of not telling the whole truth of the Gospel to a loved one? If so, you owe it to them to tell them the Gospel in its entirety.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, it is indeed true that if we do not believe in Christ, we will die in our sins. Thank you, Lord, for saving me from this certain death. Lord, help me to proclaim this truth without the fear of men to my loved ones so that they may also be saved from dying in their sins.

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

HOW CAN SALVATION BE SIMPLY BELIEVING?

It is impossible to work your own way into Heaven. Even if someone were to devote his whole life to good works starting as a child and persevering on into old age. Our good works and “righteousnesses” are only “filthy rags” when contrasted in the light of a thrice holy God (Isaiah 64:6). Even Abraham who was called the “Friend of God” (James 2:23) could not boast of his works before God. Romans 4:2 says that indeed Abraham’s works were worthy of praise before Man but before God, they did nothing to earn him a place in Heaven.

So how did Abraham attain his place in Heaven? Simply by believing. Romans 4:3 says that “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness”. Likewise, for us too, if we “[believe] on him that justifieth the ungodly, [our] faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5). It can only be simply believing as there is completely nothing we can do to obtain salvation. By simply believing, we acknowledge this and accept God’s full work and plan for salvation. Only the blood of Christ is good enough to be accepted by God as payment for our sins.

If you find it difficult to accept that salvation is simply believing, it could be due to a number of reasons. Perhaps you have not truly understood the Gospel and the doctrine of sin. Perhaps it is pride that prevents you from accepting that there is nothing you can do to save yourself. Or it may be the lack of faith in the power of Christ’s blood to wash away your sins.

If a man so great in faith like Abraham could not boast of his works before God, how can you? And if Abraham could simply believe in God’s plan for salvation, you too can simply believe and be saved.

THOUGHT: How would you convince someone that salvation is simply believing?

PRAYER: Dear Lord, I thank Thee for the example of Abraham and how his faith was counted for righteousness. I thank Thee that our faith in Thee and Thy work of salvation is also counted for righteousness. I thank Thee that salvation is simply believing in Christ and what He has done for us on the cross.

“as Thou hast been, Thou forever will be the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

HOW COME THE GOSPEL ISN'T UPDATED?

Immutability is an attribute of God. It means that He is unchangeable. It is impossible for Him to change His character or any of His qualities. Indeed, as the hymn writer puts it, “there is no shadow of turning with Thee; Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not; As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be”. He is not like a temperamental human being who can change with the seasons. He is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8).

As God is immutable, so is His salvation work. From the beginning of time when He first promised Adam and Eve that He would send them a Saviour, through the period when He called Israel as His chosen nation, to the time when His promise was made flesh in the person of Jesus, to the beginning of the New Testament Church, and to our present era in the last days, His Gospel has remained unchanged. There is no need to change it. In every era, all men have sinned and need the Lord. Christ’s atoning work on the cross is a complete work, a one time event. The Christian faith was “once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). The Gospel is timeless and always current to the needs of Man.

We live in a world of persistent and ruthless change. The landscape is constantly changing as new buildings are erected. Products become obsolete after a few months when new, upgraded versions of themselves are released. Events in various parts of the world can impact the whole face of the global political and financial scene in a moment. Perhaps it is this same need for change that makes some Christians think that the Gospel needs to be updated for the new generation. They feel that it needs to appeal to them more and should be presented in a more interesting and entertaining way. As a result, the Gospel becomes distorted and false gospels such as the health and wealth gospel are born. Also, by appealing to the carnal human nature, many false believers are brought into the church. Some of these false believers sadly not even knowing that the “truth” that they were told had been tempered with.

THOUGHT: How does the immutability of God and His Gospel bring assurance to your soul?

PRAYER: O Lord, help me never to fall into the trap of changing the Gospel message to try to appeal to my friends or to the people I reach out to.

“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness...”

IF GOD HAS CHOSEN ME, ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?

Romans 8:29 explains that it is God who has chosen from eternity past whom He would save, but this does raise the question of human responsibility with regards to a person's salvation. The Bible makes it clear that though it is God who does the choosing, this does not in any way absolve a person from the responsibility of responding to the Gospel in faith. Neither can it be used as an excuse to disbelieve the Gospel on account of not being one of God's chosen ones.

Responding in faith to the Gospel and accepting the Lord Jesus as Saviour is just the first step of a Christian's journey from the point of conversion to glorification when we shall see Jesus face to face. Being a Christian is also growing in the faith and confessing the Lord Jesus as Saviour not merely in word but also in deed.

Romans 10:10 says that the genuine believer confesses with his mouth what he truly believes in his heart, and lives a life consistent with such a belief. Once we are saved, we do not continue living as if nothing has happened. Rather, we respond in love and gratitude to Jesus who gave Himself for us by hating sin and loving holiness. Indeed, the Christian's entire life should be a confession of faith in Jesus as his Lord and personal Saviour to the world.

There may be many a time when we could get ourselves out of trouble by simply telling a lie or being dishonest in some way. Unbelievers will laugh at our silliness for not taking the easy way out, but we must remember that we no longer live self-serving lives but God honouring lives instead. We should therefore do what is right before God in every situation. Only then can we use our lives to glorify Christ.

THOUGHT: If Jesus were to return right now, would He be pleased with the way I have been living my life?

PRAYER: Help me Lord to please You in all that I do, and forgive me in times of weakness when I have failed You.

"So then it is ...God that sheweth mercy."

IS GOD FAIR TO ELECT SOME AND NOT OTHERS?

God is sovereign and shows favour and mercy to whosoever He pleases. He has the authority to do so and this is the way He deals with man in all matters, even that of salvation. Some people may find this hard to accept and think that perhaps God is being unfair to exclude others while choosing some to be saved.

The way to dispel this misconception is firstly to realize that as sinners, none of us deserve anything but God's judgment, and secondly, that all of us were already under condemnation and on the way to hell if not for God's intervention (John 3:18).

If you had some spare change and chose to give it all to a starving beggar, none of the other starving beggars would have the right to ask why you had given money to one and not the others simply because the money belonged to you. You do as you please with it. This is the same with election. God does as He pleases, and no one can accuse Him of being unfair.

To get the right answer, one has to ask the right question. So often we ask for fairness when what we really need is mercy. It should not amaze us that God had not elected every sinner to be saved, but that any have been elected at all!

You may have observed that some self-professing Christians behave terribly and wonder how they could possibly be saved. Conversely, you may have known wonderful people who are not believers, and wonder how they could possibly not be saved. We should remember 4 things: (1) God makes no mistakes. (2) We cannot tell if someone will eventually accept Christ in the last few moments of his life. (3) People are saved because of God's mercy and not because of their own goodness. (4) God's standard for salvation is not goodness but sinless perfection which Christ has already achieved on the believer's behalf.

THOUGHT: It is God's amazing mercy and grace indeed that even one sinner's soul is saved.

PRAYER: O Lord, You are the Potter who does as You please with Your clay. Help me to trust that You are perfect in all that You do.

“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness...”

DIDN'T JESUS DIE FOR THE SINS OF ALL?

Ephesians 5:25 helps us to understand why not everyone is saved in spite of the fact that the Bible claims that He died for the sins of the world. After all, did John the Baptist not proclaim publicly in John 1:29, “...behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” upon seeing Jesus? It is indeed true that Jesus’ work of salvation, including His death on the cross, is sufficient to save every man, woman and child that has lived and will ever live.

The question really is whether God’s plan of salvation was designed to do this. The answer lies in the description of a husband’s sacrificial love for his wife in Ephesians 5:25 as a relationship likened to that of Jesus and His Church (which is made up of believers). For Christ’s work of salvation on the cross to be effective for us, we have to enter into a relationship with Him, and we do that by repenting of our sins and accepting Him as Lord and Saviour.

It would be ridiculous to expect a man to claim that he had given up everything for the benefit of a woman who is a complete stranger to him. However, when we change the scenario such that he does the exact same thing for the love of his life to whom he is about to wed (his bride), then it makes complete sense. So it is with Jesus. If the whole world were to repent in Him, no one would be left unsaved. This is not the case because only the elect will respond in faith to the Gospel even though salvation through Christ’s atonement is offered to all. Therefore even though Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), not all are saved.

There are times when our unbelieving friends may question the goodness of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. They may scoff at the fact that an all powerful and loving God cannot save the whole world from condemnation. Understanding that our God who is also holy and cannot tolerate sin has devised a way for sinners to be saved in spite of their wickedness, you can help them to understand the depths of God’s love for the sinner and point them to Jesus.

THOUGHT: Understanding the depths of our own depravity, we can appreciate the depths of God’s love for us even more.

PRAYER: Lord, we love You because You first loved us. Fill us with Your Spirit that our love for You will grow deeper every day.

“...the world through him might be saved.”

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO’VE NEVER HEARD?

Believers sometimes get anxious when they are unable to adequately explain to their unbelieving friends how God could be so “unreasonable” to condemn those who have never heard the Gospel. Likewise, unbelievers are reluctant to put their faith in an “unreasonable” God. Is God being unreasonable?

Romans 1:20-25 explains that because of sin, the natural man is unable to know God in spite of creation pointing to the existence of an all powerful Creator. Instead of seeking Him out, they indulged in idolatrous practices. God’s Word says that they are without excuse.

Furthermore, even a person who has never heard the Gospel has some knowledge of right and wrong; he feels offended when someone cheats, lies or steals at his expense even if he does not know God. Yet he is guilty for committing those very sins against others at one time or another. Honest self-examination would inevitably lead to the fact that he is guilty of doing what is wrong in spite of knowing what is right. Everyone is accountable to God for wrongdoing whether or not they have ever heard of the Gospel.

Since everyone is already in a state of condemnation, God could not have sent Jesus to the world to condemn them but rather, to save them. This is an act of grace and mercy on God’s part.

The fact is that most people would look for any excuse for not believing in the Gospel; they are not actually concerned that people who have never heard the Gospel could be condemned. What is important is how they personally respond to the Gospel once they have heard it, therefore let us continue to preach Christ to the lost.

THOUGHT: If ignorance is bliss we would be doing the world a great disservice by evangelizing to them, and Christ would have died in vain.

PRAYER: May Your Spirit, O Lord, move the hearts of sinners to believe in the Gospel unto salvation.

“...one mediator ...the man Christ Jesus.”

CAN'T OTHER RELIGIONS BRING SALVATION?

Pertaining to salvation found exclusively in Jesus, someone once asked if Christians were the only ones who “got it right”, and that the rest of the world is deluded.

It is certainly a sobering thought that of all the many religions in the world, there is only one which is true and which can save the sinner’s soul and that is Christianity. During His earthly ministry, Jesus claimed to be “the way, the truth and the life”. There is no salvation apart from faith in Him, but this should not surprise us. After all, the Bible explains that the way to destruction is broad with many going down this path compared to the narrow way to salvation that few would choose (Matthew 7:13).

If most, perhaps even all, of the other false religions teach their followers to do “good”, why then can they not bring salvation? The problem with “doing good” is that it will never be good enough for heaven because a perfectly holy God demands not mere goodness but perfect holiness. Only Christianity points towards Jesus, who lived a perfectly sinless and holy life on our behalf because we are powerless to do so. He alone lived for us, died for us and rose again for our justification. He is therefore the one and only Mediator between God and men.

We cannot earn our way to heaven through doing good deeds. While there is nothing wrong with doing good (and we ought to do as much good as God enables us to), this alone cannot save us. Good works should be a result of believing in Jesus and not the other way round. After we are truly saved, our desire to perform good works for Jesus’ sake is evidence of our salvation.

THOUGHT: If salvation can be earned, then how much good works is enough?
PRAYER: Heavenly Father, teach us not to trust in our own effort for salvation but rather in Jesus who is our sufficiency.

“Neither is there salvation in any other...”

IS THERE NO OTHER WAY TO SALVATION?

Living in this age, we have a culture of wanting to have “options”, “individualism” and “self-determination”. By and large, while it is good to have options to give us the flexibility to achieve a certain objective in various ways, to do this in a way which reflects our individualism and to have control over how we want to perform a certain task, we soon find that matters pertaining to spiritual truth cannot be approached with this attitude.

Believing that salvation lies in Jesus alone would seem narrow-minded, intolerant and even bigoted by those who do not know Christ, but truth is not determined by popular opinion, votes or consensus. Some people who reject Christ as the one and only Saviour of the world do so because they either cannot accept that the Gospel is absolute and non-negotiable in nature or that they are reluctant to be seen as an intolerant bigot. To reject the Gospel in the former instance is to be intentionally ignorant. To do so in the latter instance is plain vanity. Neither is good as both lead to damnation (Matthew 12:31).

God sent Jesus to the world as the only way in which any sinner can be saved and not one of many. God makes no allowance for alternative options, individual opinion or human input into His plan of salvation. Either take His narrow way to heaven, or the broad way to hell.

We sometimes worry about offending others or feel embarrassed for standing up for Jesus and proclaiming that only Jesus saves and none other. We would never fail to publicly acknowledge a dear friend who risked his life to save ours no matter how shabby he looks, so why should we treat Jesus any differently?

THOUGHT: If I am ashamed of Jesus, then Jesus shall also be ashamed of me on that great Day of Judgment before God.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, give us the strength and courage to witness for Jesus and glorify His name in every circumstance.

“...for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.”

WHAT IS THE COVENANT OF WORKS?

A covenant is a promise, an agreement or a contract. When two or more individuals sign on a contract, they are acknowledging that they agree to abide by the conditions that are set out in the contract and failure to do so constitutes an infringement of this contract. Action can therefore be taken against the offending individual for such an infringement.

The Covenant of works is like a contract which involved Adam (representing the entire human race) and God. The difference is that this agreement and its conditions were dictated by God. Adam had no input. God would agree to grant Adam eternal life on one condition - he is not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Put simply, Adam was promised life and blessedness in return for his obedience to God.

In Genesis 2:17 Adam was still an innocent and sinless creature. The promise of eternal life was based on the condition of total obedience (good works) by Adam to God's command. The Covenant of Works is therefore simply God agreeing to graciously bestow eternal life upon Adam on the condition of his obedience. Had Adam passed the test of obedience, God would have kept His word and granted Adam eternal life as promised.

We may sometimes wish that we were Adam living in the pre-fall Eden because it somehow seems “easier” to rely on our self effort to “gain” eternal life than on God's grace through faith in Christ. However, even the Covenant of works is grounded on the grace of God, and we must not forget that.

THOUGHT: God is sovereign and He did not owe Adam anything in return for perfect obedience. Yet, He chose to deal with Adam graciously.

PRAYER: O Lord, the depths of Thy amazing grace knows no bounds.

"I will put enmity between thee and the woman..."

WHAT IS THE COVENANT OF GRACE?

The first instance of the Gospel appearing in the Bible is found in Genesis 3:15. Here, God tells Satan that the seed of a woman (the Saviour) would be sent to bruise his head (save man from the bondage of sin by destroying Satan's power). This is once again mentioned in Galatians 4:4 whereby the identity of the Saviour is revealed as Jesus, the Son of God. At a time of God's own choosing, Jesus would be sent to live among man and to die on the cross for the sins of man to save him from the consequences of sin.

Man sins because he is born a sinner. This is because all of Adam's descendants inherit the sin nature which he acquired after giving in to Satan's temptation to disobey God in the Garden of Eden. Every person is subsequently already born in a state of condemnation and on the way to hell unless he chooses God's simple plan of salvation: believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved.

This is God's Covenant of Grace which was offered to man from the time of Adam's fall onwards. Just like the Covenant of Works, it is God who dictates the conditions, and here God decides to bestow unmerited favour to man by sending Jesus to pay the awful price for their sins because man is incapable of doing anything to counter the effects of his own sin. God agrees to grant salvation on the condition of faith in His Son, Jesus, as Saviour. Once again, man had no input into the design of this covenant.

Though we cannot be saved through performing good works, salvation by grace through faith in Christ is not a completely passive exercise on our part. We are still accountable to God in terms of human responsibility with regards to choosing how we respond to the Gospel. We can either choose to reject it and lose all hope of salvation, or accept it and be blessed with eternal life.

THOUGHT: That God even bothered to provide a plan for our salvation is proof beyond doubt of His infinite grace and mercy.

PRAYER: Thank you, Lord, for granting me salvation so richly and freely through Jesus my Redeemer.

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

Regret, guilt and sorrow. We all understand these words. We know their meaning and have experienced them personally one time or another. But what about repentance? Do we also know and understand what repentance really is, and most importantly, have we truly repented in Christ and enjoyed peace and joy through the forgiveness of sin?

Regret is not repentance. A feeling of guilt for wrongdoing is not repentance. A worldly kind of sorrow whereby a person feels terribly saddened for something that he either did or did not do is not repentance.

True repentance is described by Paul as godly sorrow, and godly sorrow always results in an irreversible change in the person. This involves a change of heart. Where a person used to enjoy sinning, he now makes a rational, intentional and determined choice to shun sin and honour Christ instead. His entire way of thinking and living are now at odds with the world. This cannot come about unless he is empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so through accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. This is why 2 Corinthians 7:10 says that "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation".

When we were unbelievers, we merely felt guilty for our wrongdoing until God revealed to us the true state of our sinfulness and a need for His forgiveness. This was when we truly repented of our sins and accepted Christ. Now, as believers who have the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are given the ability to recognize it when we inadvertently fall into sin. When this happens, we pray for God's forgiveness out of a desire for holiness. Thereafter, we make a conscious effort to avoid falling into sin again. This, too, is true repentance.

THOUGHT: To simply reject the ways of the world avails to us nothing unless it is done for the love of Christ.

PRAYER: Thank You Lord for empowering me to be holy through the marvelous inner workings of the Holy Spirit.

“...I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

WHAT IF I DON'T REPENT?

Honesty is a rare commodity in this world because of sin. Tainted by sin, man cannot fully appreciate his own fallen state, so God in His mercy had to intervene and send the Lord Jesus to the world to save sinners. Sinners do not repent because they do not see a need to do so. Judging themselves by the standards of the world, they pat themselves on the back and comfort themselves by thinking that they do not deserve condemnation because they are “better” than the crooks, thieves or criminals that are locked up behind bars.

However, this is flawed thinking as it is God who decides who deserves to go to heaven or hell. It is therefore God's standards by which we must abide and not that of the world. The Bible says that besides Jesus no man is good enough for heaven, but those who hear this do not accept it because they are unable to examine themselves with complete honesty on account of their own sinful minds unless the Holy Spirit opens their eyes.

This was the problem that the scribes and Pharisees had in Jesus' day. What Jesus said in Mark 2:17 indicated that He would not have come to deliver the world from sin if man was capable of being righteous on their own, but this was lost on the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who thought too highly of themselves to repent. Not wanting to repent, therefore, is evidence that a person is not saved.

Whenever a child of God commits sin, he should become so acutely aware of what he has done that he will repent and pray for God's forgiveness as soon as possible. This is because sin comes in between his relationship with the God he so loves. Only a person who does not know Jesus would feel no need to be forgiven for sinning as the love of God is absent from his heart. Do you repent and seek God's forgiveness with urgency whenever you have sinned?

THOUGHT: We sin even as believers because of our sin nature. How wonderful it would be to finally have our sinless glorified bodies!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I yearn for the soon return of Thy Son when we shall all be transformed, never to sin again!

WHAT IS “BAPTISED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT”?

John the Baptizer has been described as the greatest prophet of all. This is because of the fact that he was the one chosen by God to herald the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ; the long promised Messiah. God prepared John's way in the form of prophesy found in Malachi 3:1 foretelling his coming. John's ministry was unique in that he baptised with water those who came in repentance which was symbolic of the cleansing of sin of which we know as baptism. His call was for all to come to repentance of their sins and to receive forgiveness from God.

John was a faithful prophet. His work was never about himself instead he pointed to the coming true Saviour; Jesus Christ. Today's reading was an example of this. John declared that there was one who will not only baptise them but will also transform their lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. John was referring to Christ who Himself can impart the Holy Spirit to the believer. Every believer is baptised with Holy Spirit upon conversion (Romans 8:14, 16). We know from scripture that the Holy Spirit indwells the believer (1 Corinthians 3:16). In fact, the Holy Spirit “communes” or fellowships with the believer (2 Corinthians 13:14). The Spirit helps us to pray (Romans 8:26). Helps us to say the right things for God (1 Corinthians 2:4), changes our hearts to love and to be wise. (2 Timothy 1:7, Romans 5:5), gives us joy, peace and hope (Romans 15:13), helps us to understand our relationship with God better (Romans 8:15). In short, the Holy Spirit helps us in an intimate way towards becoming more like Christ.

The work of the Holy Spirit is obviously very important in the life of a believer. The spiritual life of a believer is dependent on how much the Spirit works in him and we know that the thing that prevents this from happening is sin (Ephesians 4:30). Hence, a life of holiness is required for the Spirit to bear fruit in us. Another thought is whether you have ever experienced the work or the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in your life at all. If not, it is possible that you may not be a saved. Check your heart today, do not delay, come to believe Him before it is too late.

THOUGHT: God's love is poured out to us by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).

PRAYER: God, I want to experience a closer walk with You through the Holy Spirit.

MUST I FEEL SAVED?

What is the feeling of being saved? Is it possible to feel saved and yet not be? Will I know if I am truly saved? These are frequently asked questions and to find the answer will require personal soul searching and God's Word. Romans 8:16 tell us; "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God". The Spirit works in all believers and imparts to them the assurance that they are indeed the children of God. Further to this, 2 Corinthians 1:22 says; "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." The "earnest of the Spirit" is a promise or a seal, and this is placed in our hearts; meaning the Christian will know and feel deeply about his salvation. Hence we learn that Christians do actually have an assurance or loosely put; a "feeling" that they are saved. Taking this one more step we can ask; "is there something outward that show us if we are saved?" 1 John 2:5 says; "But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him." This passage tells us that believers will keep God's Word and this is an indication of salvation. Psalm 4:3 also says; "But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him." God will also answer your prayers if you are saved.

That said, some truly saved Christians, may sometimes still doubt their salvation. This is often because of a life not fully committed to serving and living for God. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Corinthians 13:5). Search your hearts, examine it and find out if you are truly Christ's. It may be that in your search, you will find that you are after all a son of God. Praise God then. However, in your search, you may also find that you are not actually saved. You have lived in the delusion of salvation. If so, you cannot stop there, you must seek the end of the matter by quickly coming to accept the Lord as your Saviour. Recognize that you are sinful and you are doomed for judgment and the only way is that Christ saves you from your sins. Believe today!

THOUGHT: Do you know if you are saved?

PRAYER: Lord, please open my eyes to see the reality of my salvation.

WHY NOT FAITH + WORKS = SALVATION?

The author knows of people who possess a passion for the disadvantaged in society. They would set aside personal time to visit and help strangers who have difficulty looking after themselves. They would help to clean up homes including washing poorly maintained toilets despite the stench. They would remain to cheer up the old folks by talking and listening. Some would even set aside limited work leave to visit less developed countries to assist in the building of schools or hospitals. We also read and hear of great “saints” in places like India, dedicating their entire lives to help the people there. Would it surprise you if none of these works will help them gain acceptance with God and gain eternal life? Romans 3:10, 23 tell us that there is none righteous. All are guilty of despicable sin in one form or another. The sins we have committed overwhelm any good works that there may be. Jeremiah 17:9 states truly that our hearts are desperately wicked. Although one may not have killed anyone, but in the heart, murder has been committed many times. Sin is so grievous that all it takes is one sin to justify hell for all eternity. None of us are free of sin. This is why Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 64:6 that our righteousness are as filthy rags. What good we do is useless because of the evil we have consciously and deliberately committed.

But God in His great love and mercy, through the sacrifice of Christ, made it possible for us to be washed of all sins. Through Christ, God forgives us of our sins and makes us fit for heaven (Ephesians 2:4-7). God saved us from eternal damnation by grace; salvation is given to us as a gift. There are no conditions and there is nothing we can do to be deserving of this gift (Ephesians 2:8,9). It is given to us by God’s mercy and love toward us. We deserve hell, but God chooses to save us. For those who have believed, we must be grateful. For those who have not, God offers this salvation to you today. Will you not receive it?

THOUGHT: There is nothing we can do to deserve salvation.

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for saving me despite my unworthiness.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW OF GOD?

“If following God’s law does not save us, then why do we bother?”, one may ask. God’s word is clear that the law cannot save (Romans 3:20). The heart of man is evil, no one is able to keep the law perfectly (James 2:10). Another question that may follow is; “What if there was no law, would there still be sin? Is it not because of the law that sin exist?” Paul addressed this exact question in Romans 7:7. “God forbid” was his answer. Sin exists with or without the law. Instead, the law made sin made known to us. Because the law says “Thou shalt not covet”, we able to recognize it when we ourselves covet. Galatians 3:24 tells us that the law is our schoolmaster, our teacher. The law shows us our sins and hence our need for the Saviour (Romans 3:20). The law points out our faults and we cannot escape from the guilt. Because of the law, you and I are able to recognize that we are sinners.

If this is true, what must we do? If you see that you are truly a sinner according to the law of God, what is the consequence of that? Romans 1:32 is clear that as sinners, eternal death awaits us. That is the fair and deserved judgment for sin. But God is merciful. Despite man’s unwillingness to keep the law, God reached out to man, and by grace, save man from their sins (Romans 6:14). He achieved this by placing the judgment of our sins onto Christ Himself. Instead of you and I who rightfully deserve eternal damnation, Christ became the sacrifice for us by bearing the punishment of our sins. The Just for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18). Therefore, keeping the law will not save you and you cannot keep it perfectly. Believing and accepting the work of Christ for you is what will save you. Christ has already paid for your sins. Will you continue to reject what He has done for you?

THOUGHT: The Law tells us that we are sinners.

PRAYER: God, help we to recognize that I am a sinner.

DOESN'T COMING TO CHURCH SAVE ME?

Some believe that if I do the things that Christians do, it would make me a Christian and I would have a place in heaven. If I go to church faithfully, attend every prayer meeting, give of my tithe, all this would please God and secure me a place in heaven. This idea is actually the foundation of many major religions. The leaders of these religions form elaborate ceremonies and rituals that require followers to adhere to in order to enter heaven's gates. Many of these followers cling onto these rituals believing that they are their ticket to heaven. Paul described the Jews as such. The Jews were very zealous and claim great love and faithfulness to God. However, Paul describes their situation very well; “...they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge”; their faith and actions are not based on what God requires of man; it is not based on God's Word. Instead, their fervour is based on man's principles and ideas. They may have great zeal and yet they may not know the true God at all. Their faith is man-made. This is very possible and the Apostle Paul himself was such a man before his conversion (Acts 26:9, 10). He thought that persecuting and killing Christians was in obedience to God!

Are you guilty of serving God the wrong way? Do you believe the God of the Bible or a god of your own ideas and imagination? Jesus tells us that many will say to him on the Day of Judgment that they did many mighty things for Him, yet Christ will deny having ever known them (Matthew 7:22, 23). This is so possible and you must check yourself and see which are you? You must check your heart and ask if your faith is based on God's Word. Are you correct in accordance to it? Or does God's Word point out error in your ways and are you repentant or stubbornly persisting in incorrect understanding and sin? You have to continue to be a diligent student of God's Word and the more you discover and obey, the more you can check your faith.

THOUGHT: How do I know that our faith is true? Only by God's Word.

PRAYER: Lord, give me a humble seeking heart that I may know if I am right with Thee.

ARE THOSE IN OTHER CHURCHES SAVED?

In general, the Christian churches today are divided into denominations; some of them include; Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists and so on. Some of these are further divided into the Reformed Baptists and the Bible-Presbyterians. Charismatics considered themselves a Christian Church too. We know from God’s Word that the Church of God, often referred to as the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12) consists of Christians from any church, past, present or future. It even refers to all believers in the Old Testament. Hence, the Church of God is not confined to a building or country or even time. It consists of all believers. Titus 2:11 tells us that salvation is offered to all. Anyone who is willing to accept God’s gift of salvation can be saved. Hence, the answer is “yes”, it is possible that members of other churches are indeed saved. However, we would be cautious as to state that not all members of churches are saved and not all churches are faithful in the teaching of God’s Word. Unfortunately, there is no straightforward answer to this question as it deals with matters of the heart and only God can judge the hearts of men, only God can say if any person is truly saved.

What we can do is to be discerning and wise. We have to be able to tell if a church is teaching and practicing God’s truth or not. We are instructed to “...try the spirits whether they are of God...”(1 John 4:1). We have been warned that in the last days, many false prophets will go into the world and lead many astray by telling them what they want to hear (1 Timothy 4:1). Many will be led astray. We can conclude that there will be many churches that will be unfaithful and that few churches that will stay true. Although, true Christians will continue to exist in different churches, however, their number will be fewer and fewer (Luke 18:8). Therefore, we have to be sober and to watch and pray (1 Peter 4:7). We have to be serious and alert, we have to pray that God will give us wisdom to be discerning.

THOUGHT: If I find that my church is not faithful, what must I do?

PRAYER: Lord, give me wisdom to discern and give me a true church to worship in.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE THEN?

The Charismatic movement believes in a doctrine known as “Experiential Theology”. What is believed is that God speaks to us not only from the Bible but may add onto it by speaking “new” truths to the believer directly. The believer may see visions, or claim he heard God spoke to him or may even simply have a “feeling” that he has been imparted with some special truth. Hence, it is not uncommon to see individuals standing up unexpectedly in the middle of a Charismatic worship service declaring; “Thus said the Lord...” If asked why he did that, he would profess that he had a “feeling” that that was to be said and often attributed the action to the Holy Spirit. While we may not share the beliefs of the Charismatics, we may sometimes wonder if we should act on a feeling within us that we sometimes experience. Perhaps it is a sudden feeling of passion, or excitement and we think that it may be Holy Spirit prompting. Some of us call it a “gut feel”. Or, it may be a sickening feeling of distaste and think perhaps that too is a prompting from God to avoid something.

Feelings or experiences can sometimes be used by God. In Acts 2:37, when Peter preached, the listeners were pricked to the heart and were converted. It describes a feeling of pain, that cannot be ignored and it was used by the Holy Spirit to move them into conversion. Hence, it is possible for God to cause an experience in the hearts of man. It is also possible for the Holy Ghost to impart a sense of uneasiness when we are confronted with sin, so that we may be discerning to avoid committing it. However, certain feelings can also be very wrong and do not originate from God but instead from a desperately wicked heart (Jeremiah 17:9). We should not always trust it and instead must always counter-check an experience or feeling with God’s Word (2 Timothy 3:16). Only if God’s Word confirms what we feel is from God can we give it credit. Hence, we have to humbly check ourselves and perhaps, possess a healthy skepticism about our experiences. In addition, God will not add more truths to His Word as the Bible is completed and this is confirmed by John in Revelation 22:18. Any experience must definitely be within the confines of the Bible.

THOUGHT: Can a wonderful feeling be completely sinful?

PRAYER: Lord, please help me to trust you more than myself.

HOW CAN I BE SURE IN BIBLE INTERPRETATION?

Many inter-denominational fellowships believe that a single Bible passage can have different meanings and applications to different people. It is believed that the Holy Spirit can move in a person and reveal different truths that are applicable to that person and reveal other truths useful for another person's needs all from the same passage of scripture. This belief is unbiblical and wrong. God's Word can have different applications but can have only one meaning. It is possible for a Christian to understand a passage more and more over time and hence, see deeper truths in that same passage, but the meaning does not change. 2 Peter 1:20, 21 tells us this. The interpretation of scripture is not different for different individuals, but is the same because it comes from the same single source; the Holy Ghost. Hence, one source = one meaning. A natural question one may then ask next is; "how do I ensure that my interpretation is the correct one?" There are some basic steps that will be shared shortly. Before that, it is also noteworthy to mention that in the author's experience, God's Word can have different levels of difficulty. There are simple truths that all believers can understand and there are some truths which are harder and seem hidden, to be discovered only by the most diligent, humble and persevering of Christians (Proverbs 2:2-5).

Studying God's Word correctly is a spiritual exercise, hence, must be approached spiritually. 1) Understanding God's Word correctly needs God's help and hence an important first step is to be right with the Lord. 2) Have the highest view of God's Word recognizing with humility that our ideas and those of others must submit to its authority. 3) Pray and ask for Holy Spirit guidance and a love for God's Word. 4) Studying God's Word is not always easy. Be ready to put in time and effort. 5) Always check your understanding by seeing what other parts of scripture says. 6) Collect a library of bible study helps. Ask your pastor for advice on what to obtain. 7) Consult your teachers and pastors. 8) Attend theology school if you can.

THOUGHT: How can I know if my interpretation is wrong?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to love your Word.

“...therefore fear least ...that any of you should come short.”

WHY CAN'T I DELAY ACCEPTING CHRIST?

The parable of the rich man and his harvest in Luke 12:16-20 comes to mind. Christ shared a parable about a rich man who was busy planning and organizing how he could amass his wealth in the most effective manner so that he could be set for life. He had great plans and his hopes were high. Things were going his way and he could see his profits rolling in. Everything was very bright indeed and he was naturally looking forward to a comfortable life ahead. But unknown to him, God was going to take him from this world that very night. His life shall be required of him. All that he planned and was looking forward to would have been in vain. The thought of death would have been far from his mind, but a tragic surprise awaited him. Death is a certainty. Except for those who have been or will be raptured by God into heaven, all will meet with death. However, what human beings do not know with certainty is when they will die. No one knows the time that he will have to face God to give an account for his life. Even so, we will not know in advance how we will die. Whether it be a long drawn fatal disease or a sudden unexpected accident that takes away life in an instance. We do not know if we will have a chance to first believe before dying. This is something completely beyond our control.

If you know this fact, would you then delay in accepting Christ? Do you know when and how you will die? Can you plan to do all necessary before that time? Do you know if you will wake up again when you next sleep? Do you know if there will be a tomorrow for you? We know none of this. Only God knows. What we do know is that we have the time now. We know we have the opportunity to come to believe in the gospel this very moment. Not later, not tomorrow, now. If you neglect this opportunity, you cannot be certain if there will be another. So why wait? Do not be as the rich fool who thinks he knows he will have a future while in the meantime neglected his soul. Do not lose this great opportunity to be saved. It is a decision of eternal consequence. Accept now!

THOUGHT: What if I missed my last opportunity to be saved?

PRAYER: Lord, I want to believe, help me to believe now.

HOW DO I KNOW I AM TRULY SAVED?

At the point of conversion, some Christians doubt their salvation because they did not feel or witness anything spectacular. There were neither visions nor miracles of any kind and neither did their lives change instantaneously. In our reading today, Christ was sharing the famous parable of the sower. In the parable, God's Word was likened to seeds while the ground represented the hearts of man. Some seeds fell on stony ground, others among thorns, and none of these grew. This is symbolic of the hearts of those whom the gospel had no effect upon. No salvation took place. Hence, the seed did not progress into a tree and no fruit was produced. There was, however, one type of ground that did bear fruit. The seed flourished into a tree and fruit was produced; some 100, others 60 and 30 fold.

The parable illustrates that in the life of one who is truly saved, there would be fruit. What are these fruits? These are changes in one's life brought about by the Holy Spirit working in the soul of the believer. These are fruits that only a soul that is made alive can produce. There are many aspects of this, and we can try to name some here. Some of these include an understanding and love for God's Word. The believer can now truly echo the words of the Psalmist when he says God's Word is sweeter than honey (Psalm 119:103). The ability to understand God's Word is also the work of the Holy Spirit which no man can replace. Another fruit is a changed life; one that is now inclined towards obeying God's Word and abandoning the old and unrighteous ways. There is also now a love for God's people and a burden for the unsaved. There is also a burden to serve the Lord in any capacity as He calls us to. Even simple joy and peace in the heart can be one of the fruits of salvation (Galatians 5:22). One thing to take note is that the amount of fruit can vary between individuals and how one has been a Christian. For instance; some have a greater understanding of God's Word than others, but it does not mean then that the one with poorer understanding is not saved. In time, that understanding will grow with God's help. So for some, spiritual fruit may appear few or weak, but they should at least exist in the life of the believer. However, no fruit, can mean no salvation.

THOUGHT: What can slow the growth of a Christian?

PRAYER: Lord, help me bear more fruit for Thee as I seek to obey You more.

WHAT IS SANCTIFICATION?

Certain words may sound rather forbidding to the teens!

Do words "holy" and "sanctification" sound forbidding to you? They do not have to be! They come from the same root words ("sanctus" is a Latin word meaning "holy"). Many people have the impression that to be sanctified (meaning to be holy) means that you must go around looking solemn the whole day long, and saying no to the things that young people like to do like having a good basketball game or outing, or simply good humour!

But we should rather think of sanctification as being "set apart". This means that, as children of God, we should not be "conformed to this world", but "transformed by the renewing of your mind".

There are two different types of sanctification taught in the Scriptures. One is positional sanctification. The other is practical or progressive sanctification.

In positional sanctification, God sets us apart by Himself, to Himself, and for Himself. All this takes place instantly when a person is saved by the grace of God. Practical Sanctification is simply the process of us living out in practice what God has given to us positionally in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You may have been asked to memorise Romans 12:1-2. If not – do so! In the earlier chapters of Romans, Paul explained the wonderful plan of God – justification, sanctification, assurance of salvation, and glorification. Then he said, "by the mercies of God" – these mercies are His loving acts of salvation and daily blessings for us. Do you feel God's mercy for you? If you do, then do you love Him in turn? If you do, then "sanctification" comes naturally! If you love Him, you would want to identify with Him, think and act like His child, and separate yourself from the sins of those who do not know Him.

THOUGHT: Christians are "strangers and pilgrims" on this earth!

PRAYER: Lord, may I, by my everyday conduct, be a worthy witness to your love.

“...be not conformed to this world.”

MUST I BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT?

Yesterday we learned what sanctification is. I hope you are not intimidated by this “big word”! It is true, in a sense, that this is a big word – it expresses God’s “BIG ambition” for us! The Apostle Peter means the same thing when he wrote: “Be ye holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16, quoting Leviticus 20:7).

I can understand you if you are scared! How can human beings be holy! But, if God commands it, He will give us the “power” to be holy!

How does He give us this “power”, this ability to be holy? The answer is in the verse for today, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit”.

How do you know you are filled with the spirit? Read; the following verses (Ephesians 5:19-21): “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” Can you see the contrast with somebody “drunk with wine”? A drunkard is under the influence of alcohol – we should rather be under the influence of the Holy Spirit! Somebody who loves God will naturally love to sing praises to God! He thanks God everyday for blessings, big and small, even when things go badly (from a human point of view). He will not be proud (how can we be proud when all that we have comes from God?), and he is always ready to “esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3) – not because he is timid and fear other people, but because he fears God (not with cravenly fear, but the fear of offending a holy loving God).

THOUGHT: Must I remember the exact date and time of my salvation before I am truly saved?

PRAYER: Help me O God for I am a sinner! Make me more like Christ my LORD and Saviour that I may glorify His holy Name.

“...Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.”

AM I A NEW CREATURE?

I must confess – this verse used to bother me. Paul wrote: “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). I was converted in 1980, but, for many years afterwards, whenever I read this verse, I felt guilty! Frankly, even though I attended church regularly, I did not feel myself “a new creature”! Sometimes I even wondered whether I was truly converted.

But, thank God, I have come more and more to feel that I am a “new creation” (the word “creature” can also mean “creation” in Old English). You would remember that there are two types of “sanctification” – positional sanctification (when we were first converted), and progressive sanctification. So, I was “a new creature” when I came to believe in God, but I was still living life very much in the old ways – that was why I did not “feel” like a “new creature”. But God did not give up on me! The Holy Spirit worked in my heart (remember yesterday’s message about “filling of the spirit”?) and I was “progressively sanctified”, and I felt more and more like a child of God. Now, indeed, I can say that the old has passed away; behold, the new has come!

Do you feel like you are God’s new creation? Do you have the love for the same things as your non-Christians friends? – I am sure you can think of plenty of things like watching TV programs and films and reading books which depict worldly passion, having the same “lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”?

THOUGHT: Christians are “strangers and pilgrims” in this world. They are no longer citizens of this world, but are citizens of the Kingdom of God.

PRAYER: Lord, you have promised that your compassions are “new every morning”. So help me to be more and more a new creation day by day.

“...How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein.”

SINCE I AM SAVED, CAN I ENJOY SIN?

The answer to the question is, in a way, simple – NO! In the past 3 days, we have learned that a Christian is a person who has been sanctified (separated and righteous), the Holy Spirit is in him, and he is a new creature! So we are aliens and pilgrims in this world of sin – we just do not belong here! We are “in the world but not of the world”.

However, it is obvious that Christians do continue to sin. The Apostle John wrote: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). However, he also added: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Our sinful human nature often want to have it both ways! – to have salvation, and continue to enjoy sin at the same time! But if we truly love God, we would not even think of such a thing!

In fact, this wrong thinking is such a big headache for Apostle Paul that he wrote the whole chapter 6 of Romans to refute it!

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:2-4).

Have you ever felt very guilty over an unconfessed sin? Read Psalm 32 by King David, and share his experience! “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long ...I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”

THOUGHT: Thank you Lord, for being such a merciful and forgiving God.

PRAYER: Help me O God for I am a sinner! Make me more like Christ my LORD and Saviour that I may glorify Thy holy Name.

“...Not every one ...Shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

WHY IS OBEDIENCE CRITICAL?

Matthew 7:21 reads, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

You would remember that the Sermon on the Mount was recorded in the Gospel of Matthew from Chapter 5-7. So Matthew 7:21 is part of the conclusion of the sermon. Earlier in chapter 7, Jesus said, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat”

Both verses tell us that there are many who claim to be Christians (they call Jesus “Lord, Lord”) and expect to be saved, but they refuse to obey Him (they do not do “the will of my Father which is in heaven”, and they continue to walk in the “broad way” (living a worldly life of sin) that “leadeth to destruction”.

But how do you know whether you are “in” or “out” (in the Kingdom of heaven or out of it)? Listen to our Lord in the same passage (Matthew 7-18-20): “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

You may wonder why it is that our church is rather small? – compared to the mega-churches in Singapore. What attract people to these churches? Is the true gospel taught in these churches? Are these Christians obeying and doing the will of God? Do you see the fruits of salvation in them?

Now, back to you! – Are you producing fruit for the Lord? Can your friends, your parents see the fruit in you? What fruit? “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23a)

THOUGHT: Am I a child of God? Am I sure of my salvation?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to produce fruit for You and glorify You in my life.

WHY DO I STILL SIN?

Why do I still sin? Are you troubled by sin? Are you troubled by this question “Why do I still sin”? You may ask yourself, “am I really a Christian? Since we learn that the Holy Spirit lives in me, why do I still sin? Does this mean that I am not a Christian, that I am not saved?”

We may not be able to answer the question “why”? But the Bible tells us very clearly “what”.

First, the “what” – the Bible tells us that even after we are saved, the sin nature is still in us, and we continue to sin – but that does not make us lose our salvation.

Romans 7:21-22 reads, “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

So, we have “another law” in “our members” (our mortal body, which will only be changed when we are resurrected to an immortal body), which cause us to continue sinning.

This is indeed a great mystery. Why does God not abolish sin entirely in us while we are in this mortal body? Could it be that He wants us to be tried, so we can be purified? Is this life still a battleground for us so that we can develop our “spiritual muscles”.

Though we may still sin, but we should focus on God’s gifts to us to overcome sin! Read the next few verses and be encouraged! “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.” (Romans 7: 24-25). Then Romans 8:1. Read on!

THOUGHT: “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).

PRAYER: Help me O God for I am a sinner! Make me more like Christ my LORD and Saviour that I may glorify Thy holy Name.

“...I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.”

CAN I LOSE MY SALVATION?

Yesterday we dealt with the sin nature that is still in us. So we continue to sin, though we should always repent, and “be transformed by the renewal” of our mind, so that we sin less and less as we mature in the faith, as we know God better day by day, and love Him more and more.

However, you may wonder sometimes, especially when we sin, whether you can lose your salvation. The bible’s answer is very clear: NO! There are many reassuring passages in the bible to convince us of this. One of these is from John 10:28, “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”

But we should also read verse 27: ‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me’.

So, first, you must know that you are saved. Ask yourself – are you His sheep? If you are His sheep, you will hear His voice, and you will follow Him. Then – how do you know your salvation is secure? Jesus says, “I give them eternal life” – so the security comes from Jesus! He is the one who created the heaven and the earth. He is the one who give us eternal life! Our security (eternal life) comes from Him, not by our own works!

The joyful Christian is the one who no longer worries whether he is truly saved, who no longer worries whether he will lose his salvation, who can best glorify God. Remember the Westminster Shorter Catechism? “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever”!

THOUGHT: Once saved, always saved. What a glorious assurance!

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for your great salvation, and the assurance of the “perseverance of the saints”. Help me to be always thankful, and to live a life worthy of Thy great salvation!

“...he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin.”

CAN MY SINS BE TOO MANY FOR GOD TO FORGIVE?

The Apostle John wrote the Epistle of 1 John when he was very old! Why did he write the Epistle? In 1:4 he explains, “And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.” It’s obvious that God wants us to be joyful as the Apostle Peter wrote, “joy unspeakable and fully of glory”!

Better yet, read the whole of 1 John 1, and learn from the Apostle John.

In verse 8, he wrote, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”.

Then we come to the verse for today, “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).

God’s word is full of reassurance like these!

Look to the Lamb of God! There is a place for introspection in the Christian life, but too much introspection just produces a Christian who is morbidly depressed! Focus on God rather than yourself. Remember David – remember Peter? Have you committed the sins of adultery and murder like David? Have you openly denied Jesus like Peter? God forgave them. Can He forgive you of your many sins?

THOUGHT: His love is greater than our sins!

PRAYER: Lord, you forgave David, as you forgave Peter, since they had genuine repentance. Help me not to sin; but when I do, help me to have this tender conscience, that I will repent and come back to you.

“...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.”

HOW DO I DEAL WITH BESETTING SINS?

In Hebrews 12:1, Paul looks at the Christian journey in life as a race. What do you do to win a race? You throw away everything that you do not need (“let us lay aside every weight”) and especially things that slows you down (“the sin which so easily beset us”), so you can run freely and win the race!

The word “beset” means literally “to place around or to stand around” – something that is placed around us so we can barely move! So, it is not something that pops up in front of you now and then, but it is always there – a habitual sin!

Do you have besetting sin? Of course, we all have, but we may have different types of besetting sins. Mine could be laziness, yours could be impatience. The danger is that it can be so much a part of us that we excuse it away by saying, “it’s just me, I was born with it, I can’t help it”. But if you say so, you are in practice blaspheming God. Remember Philippians 4:3 (“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”) or Matthew 19:26 (“with God all things are possible”).

How do I deal with besetting sins? Look to Jesus, “the author (founder) and finisher of our faith”. Read His words, understand them, and obey them daily, pray to know Him better and to ask Him to help you in your walk with God, and grow. When you know God truly and love Him, sins becomes abhorrent. They will melt away, they will no longer “surround” you and slow you down in your race, and you can see God at the finishing line!

THOUGHT: As I learn to love God more and more, worldly sins would be less and less attractive to me.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to glorify you daily by not sinning.

“...we are now servants to God.”

HOW CAN I LEAD A HOLY LIFE?

Romans 6:22 says, “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”

I must confess that certain parts of the bible are difficult to understand. Do you not think so?

Among the 21 books of the New Testament, the book of Romans must be one of the toughest! In fact, many bible scholars dare to preach or write on this book when they are in their 50s! I recently heard a famous preacher say that he took a sabbatical, a break from his routine work and study, just to study the 9th chapter of Romans!

But do not be frightened off – consider it as one of the glories of God’s words! The reformer Martin Luther said, “The Bible is like a river, so deep in some places an elephant can swim in it, and so shallow in other places a child can wade in it.”

The passage above tells us many things – that we are longer servants of sin, but are now servants of God; and so we should produce fruit! We should live holy lives. But how? We must immerse ourselves, like the elephant swimming, so much in God’s word that we know His will well and live according to it!

Are you “scared” of the word “holy”? It just means that we are no longer citizens of this world – we are separated unto God, citizens of the kingdom of God. This is “positional holiness”. God will give us the ability to live a life of “practical holiness”.

THOUGHT: To live a holy life is such a logical thing to do! Since God has paid such a high price to save us (the cross of our Lord Jesus), it is only our “reasonable service” to “offer our bodies a living sacrifice”.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1).

“...blessed are the pure in heart.”

WHAT IS PURITY?

In this last letter of Paul before he was executed by the Romans, Paul wrote to Timothy: “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

Timothy is a gentle, timid person (somewhat like me!) However, he loves God so much that he dedicated his life to God as a pastor.

In this verse, Paul encourages Timothy to:

1. Flee youthful lusts (passions that are common to the younger generations – like impatience and sexual sins)
2. Follow (pursue) the Christian virtues of righteousness, faith, charity, peace
3. Do these with “them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart”
Purity means a single-minded dedication to God. Our Lord says, “blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”. God himself is the epitome of pureness, and it is only with pure heart, pure eyes that we can see (know) Him!

Why did Paul ask Timothy to do these with other Christians of like mind? I think it is because, as Christians, we all need mutual support in our walk with the Lord. The Roman world during the time of Paul and Timothy was a very sinful world (eg adultery, fornication and homosexuality were all rampant) and it is difficult for a timid person like Timothy to stand firm alone.

How do we have pure mind, pure thoughts, glorying to God? Listen to Paul: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

THOUGHT: We should not be conformed to this world.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to immerse myself so much in Thy love, help me to live each day in the consciousness of Thy love, and fear of Thy majesty, that I will always be pure, and thus glorify Thy name daily.

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