

October to December 2011

Teens RPG Series on

“Serving God”

Do pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance before you begin your devotional time, for unless the Spirit reveals the meaning, we cannot understand scripture (1 Corinthians 2:10). Then you must read the scripture text; please don't be tempted to read the devotional alone without reading the Bible. Memorizing the scripture text will help you meditate upon it (Psalm 1:2), even long after you have finished your devotional time. After reading the devotional, always end with self-reflection: compare yourself against the standard of God's Word, and humbly yield to the Holy Spirit to direct you towards that standard (James 1:23-25). Be ye doers of the Word, not hearers only!

At the end of this series, may you be able to say as David said “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.” (Psalm 63:1)

May all glory be God's alone!

Dn Milton Ang

On behalf of the Teens RPG committee

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1

1 Thessalonians 1:9
Memorise 1 Thessalonians 1:9
“...serve the LORD with all your heart”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SERVE GOD?

We have studied throughout this year how to become a child of God, how to seek after God, and how to obey God. This quarter, we will be focusing on another important aspect of Christian's life – service.

What does it mean to serve God? In today's reading, Paul commended the Christians in Thessalonica for their excellent testimony in how they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”. In the past, they used to be engaged in idolatrous, heathen worship. After their conversion, though, they gave themselves over wholly to serve God. Their lives were now committed into the service of God. All that they did, their motives, goals, thoughts and actions were all carried out as unto the Lord, and not to self.

Often, we tend to compartmentalize our lives and think of service as just one aspect of it. For example, someone might say, “I serve God by singing in the choir”, or “I serve God by helping out in Sunday School”. While these are all good ways in which we serve God, this does not mean that all other areas of our lives can then be considered to be separate from service. Rather, think of service as something that our entire lives are committed to. For you, dear teen, do you realize that every single aspect of your life can be considered as service to God, if you truly use it to serve and glorify Him! For example, you can serve God through your studies if you truly study hard for His glory and keep up a good testimony among your classmates. Similarly, your home life can be an area of service to God when you honour and obey your parents and treat your siblings with love and kindness.

Dear teen, may you consider today how you have been serving God through your life, and strive to give your whole life over to the service of the living and true God!

THOUGHT: How can I serve God in every area of my life?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me what it means to serve Thee!

IN WHAT SENSE AM I A SLAVE TO GOD?

When we think about slavery, it tends to have a negative connotation, and be associated with ideas such as cruelty and wickedness. In Old Testament times, however, provision was made by the law for slaves to be treated gently and mildly. The law stated that slaves would be free to go after 6 years of service. However, a slave, out of love for his master, could also choose to voluntarily remain in his master's service forever.

It is in this context, therefore, that we consider what it means to be a slave to God. Because God has purchased us with the precious blood of Christ, Christians are often referred to as servants, or literally, slaves, of God. To be a slave means that we give up all our liberties and freedoms, and do only what we are commanded by our Master to do. But this is by no means a sorrowful and miserable state, for "his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). Furthermore, the liberties that we gave up were the liberties to sin and live in a state of ungodliness. Praise God that we have been delivered from such a state!

Let us remember also that it is not a cruel and wicked Master that we serve, but a loving, kind and compassionate Master who loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son to earth, to die on the cross for our sins. Hence, just as a slave in Israel who loved his master could volunteer to remain in his service forever, likewise we who have so much more reason to love our Master must surely be willing to be found in His service forever. Dear teen, the question is, are you glad to be a slave to God?

THOUGHT: To be a slave to God is to be free from sin.

PRAYER: Thank you, Lord, for purchasing me with the blood of Christ!

MONDAY, OCTOBER 3

Romans 6:20-21
Memorise Romans 6:20-21

"...were by nature the children of wrath..."

WHAT WAS I ENSLAVE TO IN THE PAST?

Think back on what you were like before you were saved. How did you behave? What were your motivations? What did you spend your time on? What sort of friends did you enjoy spending time with? What things fill your thoughts?

Do not be surprised if the answers to those questions are things which you would be embarrassed to share with another person. For, in today's reading, Paul states in no uncertain terms that all of us used to be the "servants of sin". This literally means that we were slaves to sin, totally devoted to sinful things. We were in a state of total depravity, utterly incapable of any good or righteousness. Even if we seemed to be doing good things, these were still motivated by sinful motives and thoughts. We were under the complete control of sin. Verse 21 goes on to tell us that the things that we used to do should now bring us much shame. These were things that were completely unfruitful, and would only lead us to one end: death. What a terrifying thought indeed!

And yet, what a blessed thought it is, that we are no longer in such a state, only because of the precious salvation that Christ has worked for us. Truly how great and wonderful a salvation! Dear teen, may you therefore never forget the depths of sin from which Christ has rescued you.

THOUGHT: Through Christ, I no longer serve sin!

PRAYER: Thank you, Lord, for freeing me from the bondage of sin.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 4

Romans 6:22-23

Memorise Romans 6:22-23

"...let the God of my salvation be exalted"

WHY MUST I NOW BE SERVING GOD?

Imagine for a moment that you are in a life-threatening situation. Perhaps you are in the middle of shark-infested waters, too terrified to swim away. Suddenly, a stranger jumps in and whisks you off to safety, thereby saving you from what would have been an almost-certain death. How would you react to this stranger? Surely you would be filled with overwhelming gratitude, and would be willing to do anything and everything to show your gratitude to him.

Now, think about what God has done for you. Yesterday, we read about how we all used to be servants of sin. This state of total depravity is far worse than any life-threatening situation that you can find yourself in, for it is not our temporal bodies but our eternal souls which are at stake here. If you have been truly saved, though, you need not fear death or hell, for through Christ we have been "made free from sin". What a blessed thought! Now, we are no longer servants of sin, but instead, we have the privilege of becoming "servants of God". Surely, this is the only response we can have after all that God has done for us, in enabling us to bear "fruit unto holiness" and giving us the promise of everlasting life. In fact, to serve God with our whole lives is the least we can do in exchange for the wonderful salvation that He has given to us, so freely and graciously!

Dear teen, knowing how much God has done for you, are you not then willing to serve God cheerfully and wholeheartedly? Is it not a great privilege to serve the God who has rescued you from the depths of sin and promise you a place in heaven?

THOUGHT: "To think of His great sacrifice at Calvary, I know my Lord expects the best from me".

PRAYER: Lord, help me to show my gratitude by serving Thee.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5

1 Peter 1:19
Memorise 1 Peter 1:19

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

HOW DID GOD REDEEM US?

What things do you find precious? Perhaps to the girls, you are attracted by sparkly jewellery and other shiny trinkets. To the guys, perhaps the most precious thing to you would be the latest technological gadget on the market. And once you were to obtain one of these items that you find precious, it is unlikely that you would be easily persuaded to give it up!

Now, think about what God did for you and me. Far above and beyond anything that can be bought with silver or gold is the blood of Jesus Christ, which is described in today's reading as being “precious”. It is precious simply because it is the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, that bring about our redemption. So precious was this blood, and yet God did not hesitate to use it to pay the price for our redemption. In effect, He exchanged the blood of Christ – the most precious thing that the universe had to offer – for guilty sinners like you and me. How amazing is His love!

Dear teen, what, then, should be your response? As one who has been redeemed, the love and gratitude which you have towards God should be proportionate to the price which has been paid for your ransom. Knowing therefore how great a price has been paid for your salvation, and how costly it was to God to save you, can you do anything less than to consecrate your life wholly to the service of God?

THOUGHT: The blood of Christ is truly precious to sinners saved by grace.

PRAYER: Lord, help me never to take your sacrifice for granted!

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6

1 Corinthians 15:58
Memorise 1 Corinthians 15:58
"...always abounding in the work of the Lord..."

CAN I EVER SERVE GOD ENOUGH?

Although this is not something I am proud to admit, there are times when I have grown weary of service. The thought sometimes crosses my mind, "surely I've done enough for God, it's time to take a break and let others do the job!" Perhaps this thought has crossed your mind at some point too.

What does God's Word teach us, though? 1 Corinthians 15 is a truly amazing chapter which speaks about the work of Christ in conquering death and sin through His death and resurrection, thereby winning for us the victory. In light of these, Paul commands us in verse 58 to "therefore" always abound in the work of the Lord. The phrase "always abounding" here means that we are to continually and at all times increase and excel in the Lord's work. To remain at the same state is not even enough; to decrease in or to completely cease from service is completely unthinkable! God's Word is clear - we are to be engaged in the work of the Lord for as long as we live on this earth. And this is only what is reasonable, after all that Christ has done for our sakes. Even if we were to serve God for the next 1000 years, it would still only scrape the surface of what would be enough to repay Him for His great love and mercy towards us. Yet, we continue to strive to do all that we can within our lifetime, to repay a part of the gospel debt we owe.

Dear teen, may you thus never think that you have already done "enough" for God. Instead, think of what God has done for you, and serve Him with much joy and gratitude.

THOUGHT: There is no such thing as serving God "enough".

PRAYER: Lord, help me to serve thee with all that I am, for as long as I can.

BUT I DON'T LIKE TO SERVE?

A common sight that I often witness during mealtimes is a big group of young people sitting down and eating and chatting together, while only 1 or 2 people would be cleaning the tables or in the kitchen washing the dishes. Of course, given the choice, who would prefer to wipe tables and wash dishes, when he could be sitting down comfortably and enjoying the time with friends?

Our Lord Jesus Himself was not unaware of this fact too. Hence, He pointed out in today's reading that “he that sitteth at meat” is certainly greater than “he that serveth”. Yet, the amazing thing is that He then went on to say that “I am among you as he that serveth”. In fact, we read in John 13:4-17 that He backed up His words by His actions, by girding Himself in a towel as if He was indeed a servant and then washing the disciples' feet. Through His words and actions, Christ has set the supreme example for us to follow. No matter how demeaning and humiliating the task, we are to humble ourselves as servants and serve one another.

Dear teen, can you then still give the excuse that you don't want to serve because you don't like to? It was probably not an enjoyable task at all to wash the smelly, dusty feet of the disciples – yet, He did it willingly. And it was definitely not fun at all for Christ to go to the cross and die a sinner's death – yet, He did it willingly. Service is not always about whether we “like” it or find it “enjoyable”. Rather, it is about humbly submitting to the Lord's will and doing whatever it is that He commands us to do. Dear teen, may you be willing to serve, whatever the circumstances and however difficult it may be.

THOUGHT: We serve not self, but God.

PRAYER: Lord, humble me for Your service.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8

Luke 16:13
Memorise Luke 16:13
"No servant can serve two masters..."

WHAT IF I DON'T SERVE GOD?

Back in my secondary school days, my social studies teacher often used to repeat this phrase to us: "If you sit on the fence, you will get impaled". Of course, she was referring to the necessity of taking a stand on issues, and how it was no good at all to remain neutral.

When it comes to whom we serve, though, this principle applies too – there is no such thing as remaining neutral. And in the spiritual realm, as today's reading teaches us, there are two masters between which we must choose: God, or mammon (which refers to all that is worldly and sinful). "Either" we hate God and love mammon, "or else" we hold to God and despise mammon. In fact, those who are servants of mammon are otherwise known as the servants of Satan, for Satan is known as the "prince of this world" (John 12:31). Therefore, if a person does not serve God, there is no such thing as "remaining neutral" – he would then be serving the devil.

What a terrifying thought indeed! To have Satan as your master, to do the things that please him, to be motivated by his glory, is surely a most miserable state to be living in. Yet, there are so many people who willingly choose to rebel against God and to serve mammon and the god of this world instead.

Dear teen, what about you? Do you realize what it means to turn away from serving God? To serve God, or to serve mammon – which do you choose?

THOUGHT: If I don't serve God, I am a servant of Satan!

PRAYER: Lord, I want to serve Thee and not the devil.

ISN'T BEING A SERVANT DEMEANING?

A few years back, I went on a community service trip to Cambodia, and one of the things we did was to help build a road. This involved working under the hot sun for hours, clearing big rocks and stones one by one from the path and digging up heaps of soil from the ground. This was certainly a humbling and somewhat demeaning experience for me, but yet I was happy to do it because the road would help to improve the lives of the villagers.

Compared to what Christ went through, though, my experience is nothing at all. Christ who is King and Lord over the whole universe "took upon him the form of a servant", a most lowly and humiliating state. He was also "made in the likeness of men" – the God of all Creation was clothed in the rags of human nature and became a creature that is so weak and poor. From King to servant, from God to man – this is the great depth of Christ's love towards us.

Was it demeaning for Christ to come to this earth as a servant? Yes, of course! Certainly, absolutely, without a doubt. And yet, He did it, willingly and voluntarily. And yet, so often we forget the great sacrifice that Jesus made for us. We think that serving others is a demeaning job, and shun especially the tasks we deem to be beneath us. Think about it – if Christ had thought the same way as most of us do, we would most certainly be doomed to eternal suffering in hell! How thankful we must be, then, that Christ was willing to "make himself of no reputation", to live a perfect life on this earth as a man and to die on the cross for our sins.

Dear teen, what should your response be? May you no longer think that being a servant is demeaning, but instead rejoice at each and every opportunity you have to serve your Saviour who loves you so.

THOUGHT: After all that Jesus has done for me, can there be anything I will not do for Him?

PRAYER: Lord, humble me for Your service.

WHAT IF I SUFFER FOR SERVING GOD?

In recent years, many terrorist attacks have been carried out by men who were driven to it by their intense religious zeal and fervor. These men, misguided though they are, count it their greatest honour to be able to die for their god. While I am definitely not in any way at all advocating them or their work, their intense devotion to their God, though expressed in the wrong means, is something that I actually find quite admirable. Perhaps when we compare their zeal with ours, we would be ashamed by how little we love our God!

In today's passage, we read of the great boldness and courage of the apostles. How strange it may seem to us, that they were "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name". Because of what they preached and taught to the people, they had endured a night in prison, threats of death, as well as beatings at the hands of the Sanhedrin council. What a great deal of suffering – and yet they could still rejoice! Certainly, it is not because they actually enjoyed the sufferings which they had been through, but they rejoiced simply because they had been "counted worthy" to suffer for the sake of Christ. They had shown so much zeal and faithfulness through their testimony, that the Jewish council went to the extent of punishing them in such an extreme manner.

Dear teen, are you willing to suffer for serving God? And is this something that you would rejoice in? To endure suffering is the mark of one who is living a godly life. Truly, how blessed it is to be counted worthy to suffer for His name's sake!

THOUGHT: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution".

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the grace to endure the sufferings that I face for Your name's sake.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11

Colossians 3:24
Memorise Colossians 3:24

“...ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance”

WHAT IS THE REWARD FOR SERVING GOD?

For most children, when they are told to do something by their parents, they may choose to ignore it and not obey. However, if the instruction is coupled with a promise of some sort of reward, the child will most likely to obey.

In fact, it is not just children who are like that – most of us know that we ourselves are like that too. Perhaps this is why, throughout His Word, God has placed in it promises of the reward that awaits those who serve Him faithfully. Though we are undeserving, God in His infinite grace and mercy has promised to reward His servants, and He has placed in His Word multiple references to this, as an encouragement and hope to us. In today’s reading, we read that we shall receive from the Lord “the reward of the inheritance”. What is this inheritance? It is a most wonderful promise that, as the children and heirs of God, we will one day inherit His kingdom. Even as we were serving Him faithfully on this earth, we can look forward with much joy and anticipation to the heavenly kingdom that is prepared for all those who are His children.

Of course, and I cannot stress this enough, this does not mean that we serve God in expectation of a reward, or that we obey His commands because we want to receive a reward. We ought to serve God simply because He has commanded us to do so, and because we love Him. We ought not also to expect any reward at all, for we are but unworthy servants! “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Luk 17:10).

Dear teen, as you continue to labour on on this earth for God, may you thus look forward to the eternal heavenly reward that awaits you!

THOUGHT: A heavenly inheritance for my earthly labours – how blessed!

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for this blessed promise.

HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO SERVE GOD?

Over the years, I have observed a trend among some teens around me. When he is first saved, he is always so fervent and passionate, full of zeal for the Lord's work. Sadly, though, this passion and fervour die out after a while. Perhaps after a camp or a particular trial, the person might have a mini spiritual revival, but soon enough that spark of zeal fizzles out again.

Should this always be the case? Will there come a point in a Christian's life where it is time to stop serving God? Today's reading gives us the answers to these questions. Revelation 22:3 allows us a glimpse of what it will be like in heaven. God will be there, reigning on His throne, "and his servants shall serve him". Who are these servants? None other than you and me, and all who have been saved by the blood of the Lamb! We shall be "before the throne of God", where we will "serve him day and night in his temple" (Revelation 7:15), through all eternity!

The service that we now do on this earth is hence a good way of preparing for eternity in heaven, where we will serve God forever. If you have already grown tired of service, though, can you say that you are prepared for an eternity of service in heaven?

Dear teen, God willing, you still have a long, long life ahead of you. May your love for service thus grow and not wane, day by day. May your faithfulness in service also be constant, and not be like a rollercoaster that goes up for a while and then down again. If you truly love the Lord, the thought of an eternity of service will bring nothing but joy and gladness to your heart!

THOUGHT: "The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows".

PRAYER: Lord, prepare me for an eternity of service to You.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13

Matthew 25:21
Memorise Matthew 25:21

“...it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”

WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE OF OUR SERVICE?

When approached to serve in certain areas, I have often heard some teens say, “but I’m not good enough at doing this!”, or “I don’t have any talents to serve!” Are these good excuses to prevent us from serving?

Today’s reading takes us to the familiar parable of the talents. What I would like to focus on, though, is the servant who was given two talents. He was able to use his two talents to earn two more talents. Though this was less than what the servant with five talents had earned, yet he received the same commendation from his lord – “Well done, thou good and faithful servant”. His master recognized that he only had two to start with, and so his effort in earning the two more talents was just as commendable as the first servant’s. Ultimately, what his master was looking for was not how much he was able to earn, but whether he had been a faithful servant.

Likewise for us, service is not about whether or not we are able to achieve great and glorious things. Rather, what the Lord requires of us is that we are faithful in our service. For example, if you have been reaching out to a fellow teen for a long time but he is still not attending teenz activities, this does not mean that you are a failure, for God still sees your faithfulness. Dear teen, may you thus seek always to be faithful in your service to God.

THOUGHT: A good servant is one who is faithful.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be a faithful servant!

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14

2 Timothy 2:24
Memorise 2 Timothy 2:24
"O LORD, truly I am thy servant..."

IS THE TERM "THE SERVANT OF THE LORD" SPECIAL?

The phrase "the servant of the Lord" can be found more than 20 times in the Bible. In the Old Testament, it was used in relation to specific individuals, namely Moses, Joshua and David. In the New Testament, though, it is found only once, in today's reading, and is used not in reference to any particular individual.

Does this phrase therefore have any particular significance? In 2 Timothy 2:24-26, Paul is speaking mainly of the qualifications of the Christian minister. However, this does not mean that only ministers need to be "gentle unto all men", "apt to teach" and "patient". Certainly, all Christians should strive to possess these traits too! Hence, the term "the servant of the Lord" is equally applicable to all Christians who would profess to be the servants of the Lord.

Dear teen, this includes you too! So long as you have been born again, you are a servant of our heavenly King. But the more important question is, can you live up to this title? The great men who have gone before us, Moses, Joshua and David, were given the greatest honour of having their names forever immortalized in the Word of God as being the servants of the Lord. Today, you and I can likewise call ourselves as such. Dear teen, will you be a servant who brings glory to your Master? Or will He be ashamed to have a servant such as you?

THOUGHT: Am I worthy to be called a servant of the Lord?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be a worthy servant of Yours.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15

Romans 12:4-5
Memorise Romans 12:4-5

"we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

MUST I SERVE THE LORD FULL TIME?

As a child, I used to think that being a missionary meant that one needed to travel far away to exotic countries, preaching the gospel in places that were both exciting and dangerous. It was only when I learnt the song "A Little Missionary" in which the line goes, "I can work for Jesus in my homeland", did I understand that every one of us can be a missionary in wherever God has placed us, sharing the gospel to those whom God has placed in our lives.

Similarly, serving the Lord doesn't mean that one needs to go into the ministry and serve Him full time! While it is certainly a great honour to serve the Lord full time, this is not something that every Christian is called to. We learn from today's reading that, just as the body is made up of many different parts which each have their own purpose and use, likewise the body of Christ is made up of many different believers who each have their own function and work. Hence, each Christian will have his own calling from God to serve in whatever area God has called Him to, and this calling is not necessarily (in fact it very rarely is!) a calling to serve Him full time. Think about it – if all were pastors, who would make up the congregation?

Hence, do not be misled into thinking that the only way we can serve the Lord is to serve Him full time. There are countless other ways in which a teen like you can serve Him. If you are not currently serving in any area, why not speak to a church leader today and find out how you can play your part as part of the body of Christ?

THOUGHT: How can I serve the Lord where He has placed me?

PRAYER: Lord, show me how I can serve You.

WHAT DOES THE GREAT COMMISSION ENTAIL?

The Great Commission is given to all believers and not only to pastors and preachers. Of course pastors and preachers will be greatly involved in carrying out this Great Commission but all believers have a role to play too.

First, the Great Commission is evangelistic. God commands us to go forth to bring the gospel to all. The key word to note is the word "go". It is not only a word of command but also a word of encouragement for Jesus reminded that His almighty power accompanies them wherever they go.

This commission is also extended to all nations. The gospel must be brought far and wide. Like light, the gospel must be diffused wherever men may be. The salvation by Christ should be offered to all, and none excluded. Thus, just as disciples are to go everywhere, to the uttermost parts of the earth, they are also to "teach" all nations.

The third part of the commission is to "baptize" believers in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Thus those who believe must be baptized, in obedience to this command and undergo the sacrament of holy baptism by water. It is an outward sign of an inward faith. It is public confession of this inward belief, thus identifying with Christ.

Have you invited someone to church? Have you given someone a tract? Have you ever witnessed to a friend about the way of salvation? All these are the evangelistic ways in which a believer would reach out to the lost. As we mature in Christ, we are able to go further and even become a Sunday school teacher, teaching children and perhaps youths in other countries more of our Christian faith. Though we may not baptize, except ordained pastors, we can explain, encourage our loved ones and friends who have been saved that they ought to seek baptism in obedience to the Lord's command.

THOUGHT: Untold millions are still untold.

PRAYER: Lord, remind me always of the part I must play to bring the gospel to the untold millions who are still outside thy fold.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 17

1 Corinthians 15:3-4
Memorise 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

"I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you... wherein ye stand"

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Paul emphatically prefaces his explanation as to what is the gospel by saying that it was received from God and not of his own device.

The first thing to note is that the gospel is about how Jesus Christ died for our sins. He died on account of our sins, not because of any sin of His own. He was "the just" dying for us the unjust. We caused His death and for us He shed His blood, to wipe away our sins. That He died is thus an atoning sacrifice, or as a vicarious offering.

Paul then referred to the Scriptures so that all may know that the writings of the Old Testament had prophesied of the Messiah who would die for the sins of the world. Christ came in fulfillment of the Scriptures, which foretold of Him and His death.

After Christ died, He was buried and He rose again the third day. Thus the gospel should not only mention the death of Christ but also the fact that He was physically buried. It was a real death. Jesus did not swoon. It should not stop there but continue to mention that Christ triumphed when He rose from the dead. Again, this was according to the prophecy of Scriptures. One example is Psalm 16:10 which tells us, "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

Dear teens, when you witness, the gospel you present should always include the death, the burial and the resurrection of Christ. A complete gospel presentation should include all these three elements. They show the love of Christ in dying for our sins and taking our place for we have sinned, not Christ. It should also include the fact that Jesus' body lay in a tomb and He was buried. But after three days, He rose from the dead, thus conquering death and the grave. That is the gospel that we should faithfully present.

THOUGHT: What a privilege to present the glorious gospel which is the power of God unto salvation.

PRAYER: Lord, teach me and grant me opportunities to bring the gospel to friends and loved ones who are still outside thy kingdom.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18

1 Corinthians 9:16
Memorise 1 Corinthians 9:16

"...woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"

WHY SHOULD I EVANGELIZE?

The Great Commission commands and encourages us to evangelize. It is the greatest message of God's infinite love for mankind – the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Mankind is lost in sin. Without the Gospel, they would perish. Only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can rescue them from certain death. How are they to hear the Gospel? Someone must tell it to them. That someone is you and I. You were saved by the gospel and surely you would want to reach out in compassion to the lost and perishing.

For Paul, it was a necessity. He was called into the ministry of God's Word. He had a direct commission from heaven. He had an irresistible call which left no room for hesitation. His zeal in preaching the Gospel was such that he would be miserable and wretched if he did not preach.

Paul had been called to a full time ministry of the preaching of the Word and the Gospel. We might not have been called in the same way as Paul but to all believers is given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5: 20). As ambassadors for Christ, we are to bear the message of the good news of salvation to others. God did not commit such a vital mission and responsibility to angels. Angels have greater power than us and yet God did not use them. Yet it is to the saints that God has committed this task of evangelizing the lost. What everlasting joy it would be if we could bring some souls to Him.

Dear teen, the gospel is dynamite. The saving power is not in us. It is in the message entrusted to us. Don't be afraid to give the gospel to your friends. Don't be ashamed of the gospel message for God would do a work of faith to those who would believe and hear the gospel. Your duty and joy is to proclaim it faithfully, in its entirety. Sow abundantly. Do not be discouraged when no one seems to have received God's Word. Just go forth, allowing God's Word to take root in His own good time.

THOUGHT: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

PRAYER: Our Father in heaven may I be a faithful witness, leading the lost to Thee.

IF IT IS GOD WHO SAVES, WHY EVANGELIZE?

It is undeniably true that it is God who saves. 1 Corinthians 3:6 tells us clearly that you and I might have planted and watered but it is God who gives the increase. But how can sinners be saved, except there are those who are sent to preach the good news of salvation to them? All of us are sent to be witness by call of the Great Commission. The pastors are those who are specially called to preach God's word but all believers also have a part to play, in our own personal circle of family and friends, in obeying the Great Commission.

The importance and necessity of evangelizing is underlined when this verse describes the "beautiful feet" of those who not only preach the gospel of peace but also bring "glad tidings of good things." The image is that of a messenger running through distant hills and valleys to bring glad tidings to those who are in captivity. The feet are emblematic of his coming. Their coming would be beautiful from the desire to hear the message which he brought.

The world of lost souls needs us. Without us, they will die in their sin and spend eternity in hell. Who has the gospel of salvation to tell? Who has been saved to evangelize? How can we not evangelize when God has given us this glorious message of the gospel to bring peace and joy to those who are in darkness? Our coming to proclaim it is joyful to the world. It will fill the anxious sinner with peace; and he will experience joy at the same time. This is an illustration of the proper feeling with which we should regard all those who bring the gospel and witness to us. Therefore, to evangelize is an honoured and delightful task.

Dear Teen, do not hesitate to evangelize any longer. Pray for opportunities to evangelize and thank God if such opportunities are given to you. Do not be discouraged if you are rebuffed or unsuccessful. When the gospel is rejected, the blessings will return to you. Soon you will experience the joy of seeing a sinner come to Christ as you witness and God gives the increase.

THOUGHT: We are ambassadors for Christ, bringing the news of reconciliation with God by the gospel.

PRAYER: Lord, may I sow abundantly for Thee.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20

2 Corinthians 4:3-4
Memorise 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

“the light of the glorious gospel... the image of God, should shine unto them”

WHY IS IT DIFFICULT FOR OTHERS TO BELIEVE?

Paul, in this passage, gives the reason why it is difficult for some to believe in the saving gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He explains that it has nothing to do with the gospel itself. If the gospel seemed “hid” and unclear to some, it is not because God had purposely concealed its meaning or from any lack of clearness in itself. It is to be traced to other causes.

It is “hid” to those who are lost or those who deserve to perish. This class of people will not see the truth which condemns their sins. They are like the blind who cannot see the sun. It is not the fault of the sun when people shut their eyes and will not see it.

Tragically, the “lost” condemn themselves for they are lost to virtue, to piety, to happiness, to hope. They reject the Saviour who died to take away their sins and so they have lost all hope of being saved from hell. Instead, they have sought the “god of this world” which is Satan and all that he stands for. He rules in the hearts and lives of wicked people. They obey him and submit to his will in executing fraud, even murder, and immorality, in falsehood and dishonesty. The dominion of Satan over this world has been, and is still almost universal. He blinds the minds of these people and they are unable to see the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Dear teen, continue to pray for these group of people who have rejected Christ. They may be your loved ones or friends. Though Satan has blinded them for now, in God’s good time they might still come to the Lord. Do not give up on them. As long as God gives them life, there are opportunities for them to accept the Lord. One day, the Lord may see fit to open their eyes and to remove the scale that seemed to have blinded them from seeing the glorious gospel. We often hear of believers who pray for ten to twenty years before their loved ones come to the Lord.

THOUGHT: We have an enemy who opposes the gospel.

PRAYER: Gracious loving heavenly Father, have mercy on those still outside your kingdom and grant that I may have opportunities to share the gospel with them.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21

Luke 2:14
Memorise Luke 2:14
"...goodwill toward men."

DOESN'T THIS WORLD NEED PEACE NOT RELIGION?

There is a huge difference between Christianity and religion. Christianity – what God did to bring us salvation. All other religions – what man does to bring salvation upon himself. In other words, the religions of this world like Buddhism and Hinduism emphasize works, or what man must do to be saved, while Christianity emphasizes what God did to save us.

It is true that the world does not need religion as that does not save anyone. What the world needs is the Prince of Peace for He alone can bring peace to this world. But this peace is not merely a situation where there is no war and everyone agreeing to a ceasefire. When Jesus came as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9: 6), He came to make peace between God and man. He reconciled the world to God. The world is at war with God; sinners are at enmity against their Creator and against each other. But Jesus came to make peace. He brings sinners to a state of peace with his Maker so that they submit their lives to God, thus experiencing the peace that passeth all understanding.

We give all glory to God for this great work of mercy when Jesus came to cleanse us from our sins and paid the price that the holiness and justice of God demands for breaking His commandments. In and through this great work of the Lord Jesus Christ, all sinners now cleansed and indwelt by the Holy Spirit are able to manifest goodwill to people. If the gospel of Jesus should universally prevail, there would be peace on earth.

Dearest teen, as you seek to understand the glory of God in His great love for us, do you value your faith even more? Do you see how great and good God is as He seeks to bring peace on earth, even as He sent His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die for our sins? What is your response? Surely, if God so loved us “first,” we ought also to love Him and increase in our love for Him as you meditate and ponder on the infinite greatness of His love.

THOUGHT: Jesus, the Prince of Peace will rule with perfect peace one day on earth.

PRAYER: Increase my love for Thee, heavenly Father, as I daily learn of Your glorious work of salvation.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22

Romans 1:16
Memorise Romans 1:16

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ..."

BUT I FEEL INADEQUATE TO EVANGELIZE

His own people the Jews had cast him off, and regarded him as an apostate. They together with the Gentiles persecuted him, and he was often driven from place to place, from town to town. Like many Christians who suffered thus, he was regarded as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things (1 Corinthians 4:13). But Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. He was so firmly convicted of its value and its truth that he soldiered on and continued to evangelize with unwavering and undiminishing zeal.

Yes, it can be said that Paul gloried in it as the power of God unto salvation. Let others be ashamed of their foolishness and offences. Let them be ashamed of the crimes they have committed. But the gospel was the precious good news that sin may be pardoned, and the soul saved. Paul saw it as such and he firmly believed that they who believed on Christ should not be ashamed of the gospel. He regarded this gospel of Christ to be the eternally good news of hope – hope of salvation and he was ready to preach it unto Rome, the rich and splendid capital of the world at that time.

The expression “the power of God” means that it is the way in which God exerts His power in the salvation of people. It is the mighty plan of God, by which power goes forth to save. It is not the device of man. Thus it is “mighty to the pulling down of strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Its power can overcome every sin, every combination of wickedness.

Dear teen, the saving power is not in us. It is in the message entrusted to us. Our role is to proclaim it faithfully. Its power will then work on the hearers, to the conversion of sinners and salvation of souls. Hearers who mock the gospel message are foolish. Hearers who heed and believe the gospel message will experience the power of God unto salvation. Witness and evangelize as you tell of how Jesus saved you, and what He has done for you. Then let the power of God work in the lives of your hearers!

THOUGHT: The gospel of Jesus Christ can turn a sinner into a saint!

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a love for souls that I may pray and witness faithfully for Thee.

WHO SHOULD I EVANGELIZE TO?

There are many verses in the Bible, of which Mark 16:15 is one, which tell us that we need to evangelize far and wide, to as many as possible (Acts 1:8; Acts 8:1; Matthew 28:18-20; John 3:16; Romans 2:9,10; 1 Timothy 2:4; 1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2). Collectively, the Church is to evangelize to all the world, as far as men are found. This is surely right and fair for why should some people hear and be saved and others not have a chance to hear the gospel to be saved. The gospel is not only for the people of the West but those of the East. It is not only for the rich but more so for the poor. It is to be preached to the white as much as to the black, brown and yellow – for Jesus died for all mankind. The gospel thus should be offered to all.

When the Church of the New Testament began at Pentecost, those who were saved of the 3,000 gathered at Jerusalem, returned home to their various countries (Acts 2:9-11). The Apostles also remembered and heeded the Lord's command before His ascension that they were to preach the gospel not only in Jerusalem but in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). They understood that it was not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. In obedience, as they were led by the Holy Spirit, they went and preached to all these places. God also used persecution to spread the gospel (Acts 8:1). Since that day, this has been the commandment of the Lord obeyed and carried out. As believers are added to the church in various places, they constitute a church which will in turn carry out the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

Dear teen, do you realize what a gracious and just God we worship? He commands His servants to offer the salvation to "all men." We have no right to limit this offer to any class of men. If any should reject the gospel, it is at their peril. God is not to be blamed if they reject God's gift of salvation. His mercy and grace is boundless in offering life to all. Judge not, therefore, as you witness. Sometimes, the person whom you think likely to accept the Lord, does not. Whereas the person whom you do not think likely to accept, actually does!

THOUGHT: Go and in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

PRAYER: Lord, may I know the joy of witnessing and bringing souls to lay at your feet.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 24

1 Thessalonians 2:13
Memorise 1 Thessalonians 2:13
"ye received the Word not as the word of men."

WHAT DO I NEED IN EVANGELISM?

When Paul preached the gospel to the people of Thessalonica, he was thankful to God that they received the truth of God's Word. They believed that it was the Word of God, and not of men.

That should be the way we receive God's Word. It is divine revelation. If we receive it because we are persuaded by human reasoning or out of great respect for others, it will not abide. True, genuine faith is when the gospel is received as a revelation from God, and from the love of the truth. Therefore, when we evangelize, we would also want others to receive it in this manner. We would desire that the truth of God's Word would work effectually in our hearers that they might have true and enduring faith.

Yes, the gospel is power. Moreover, the Holy Spirit also works in those whom God elects to be His own. What you need is to pray daily, not only for your own spiritual growth but also for the Lord to use you to evangelize effectively. You also need to know your Bible. "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Have a good command of salvation Bible texts to help you in your witnessing. These very words of God will give punch and power to your words.

Dear teen, keep up the good work of knowing your Bible, praying daily and keeping your Quiet Time. In this way, you will grow slowly but surely. Along the way, keep salvation verses close to your heart. They not only constantly remind you of your salvation but you can use them to witness and even to assure others of their salvation. Memorise them, knowing that you will be using them regularly. Make a start. Speak to someone simply about Christ. Tell that person how Jesus saved you, what He has done for you. Be friendly and sincere. Use gospel tracts and booklets.

THOUGHT: God's mercy is greater than all our sins.

PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, teach me to be a faithful witness to thy saving grace and use me to save some souls for your glory.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25

Luke 7:22
Memorise Luke 7:22

“tell what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk,...”

DOES LUKE 7:22 MEAN WE FOCUS ON THE POOR?

The general focus of Luke 7:22 is Jesus replying to two of John the Baptizer’s disciples who wanted to know whether Jesus was truly the Messiah to come. Jesus answered their question by telling them of His miracles of healing – the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead raised and lastly the fact that the gospel is preached to the poor. The miracles that Jesus performed and His message about the kingdom of God directly fulfilled what the prophets had foretold for example in Isaiah 61:1. Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would come in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring freedom to those oppressed by sin and evil.

The preaching of the gospel to the poor is the climax of His work. However, the word “poor” should not be narrowly interpreted as those with little or no money. It means the lowly and meek in heart, as was prophesied in Isaiah 61:1. This word used by Luke, who was looking back to Isaiah 61:1, encompasses all the underclass of society who are suffering and helpless. God is favourably disposed toward those who are lowly and contrite in spirit.

The gospel is for all – not only for the poor but also for the rich. For many rich people what the Bible says still holds true. “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25). However, difficult does not mean impossible as two verses down Jesus continued with these words, “With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”

Dear teen, some of us have the mistaken notion that the gospel is for the pitiful poor and not for the snobbish rich. The Bible makes it clear that the gospel is for all for Jesus died for all. The rich need Jesus as much as the poor. All souls are precious to the Lord. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit leads and guides us, let us witness to one and all.

THOUGHT: Christ’s love for the lowly strikes a chord above the miracles.

PRAYER: Father in heaven, may I witness to both the lowly and to the wealthy and to all who will hear Thee.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26

1 Corinthians 9:12
Memorise 1 Corinthians 9:12

"To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak"

WHY IS MY TESTIMONY IMPORTANT?

Your testimony is a true personal account of how the Lord saved you and the joy you experienced. That is important. Together with many other testimonies around the world and through the ages, it is living proof that what the Bible says is true. You have experienced your sins forgiven and joy in your heart.

Paul's testimony to the Corinthians is that as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, they have been living sacrificially without receiving any support from them. It is a rule that those who have received spiritual things should show their appreciation in some way or other. Yet, Paul and his team had never mentioned about any support. They had chosen to forgo their right. In so doing, they subjected themselves to poverty, want, hunger and thirst – "suffered all things". They were careful to avoid any suspicion that they were motivated by mercenary aims.

Such carefulness and life of self-denial is indeed commendable for a servant of the Lord. This is especially so for all those in full-time service. They must walk circumspectly. They must not succumb to the temptation of seek more and more financial support so that they appear materialistic. Their testimony would be ruined. Both Christians and unbelievers would be stumbled. Paul sets us a fine example of how he treasured a good testimony so that the gospel of Christ would not be hindered.

So you see, dear teen, how important our testimony is to those around us. They may not look very interested in the things we do and say but they are definitely watching. They will be ever ready to point out our faults and failings. Therefore, our walk must match our talk. We need to be long suffering and live a life of self-denial like Paul. As we endure hardships for the Lord, we not only promote the welfare of others, but most importantly we glorify the Lord.

THOUGHT: Shine for Jesus by being strong in the Lord.

RAYER: Our Father in heaven, grant that I may be a good testimony for Thee wherever I go.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27

Philippians 1:27
Memorise Philippians 1:27

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

DOES MY TESTIMONY JUST INVOLVE BEING GOOD?

“Being good” is too vague a term to describe the conduct of a vibrant Christian with a good testimony. Non-believers can be said to be good too when they obey their parents. For believers, it is godliness and Christ-centredness in our way of living. What we need to ask ourselves is how should we conduct ourselves such that we shine in our testimony for the Lord. The Apostle Paul has given us some pointers in 1 Corinthians 9: 12 when he tells us that he is willing to suffer all things that he might not hinder the gospel of Christ.

In this verse the Apostle Paul further elaborates on how we should conduct ourselves throughout our earthly sojourn here. The word “conversation” is conduct – our conduct in all relations in life, not merely as citizens of the country we are in but also as members of the body of Christ, the church, and in all other relations. In our manner of speech, our plans for the future, our dealings with others, our conduct and walk in the church and out of it – all should be done as becomes the gospel of Christ.

To make it plainer, our testimony involves the way we speak, the language we use, the way we dress, style of living, how we spend our leisure. There is a godly way of living that gives a good testimony for our Lord and such as the gospel requires. It should distinguish us from the frivolous, and from those who seek fame, prestige and wealth as their supreme goal in life.

Dear teen, how is your conduct when no one is watching? Away from the public eyes, from our parents, do we still obey them? The mark of an honest and honourable person is when no one is looking, they are still faithfully doing that which is right in God’s sight. Be a person of truth and uprightness. Seek the ways of God constantly – in the way you talk, in the way you relate to others and the way you live. Shine forth for Jesus!

THOUGHT: We are to be salt and light in this world.

PRAYER: O Father, grant me your abundant grace and unfailing strength that I may constantly persevere to obey You and thus shine forth for You.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28

1 Thessalonians 1:5
Memorise 1 Thessalonians 1:5

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only..."

DOES MY TESTIMONY JUST INVOLVE EVANGELISM?

Have you heard of the phrase, "What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say?" A good testimony involves more than just telling others the gospel. It involves the way we conduct ourselves, our manner of living. Dear teen, our walk must match our talk.

Paul the Apostle, in speaking to the Thessalonians, told them that the gospel that he preached was not only in word but also in power of the Holy Spirit. This accounts for their deep conviction of their sins and their being gloriously saved. This was further confirmed by the way Paul and his team conducted themselves in their midst.

Indeed the Thessalonians were witnesses of their good conduct and character. Paul and his team were exemplary in their love, their life of self-denial and their godliness such that the Thessalonians were convinced that the truths they taught were real and true. If this was not so, Paul and his team would be exposed as hypocrites. The holy life of a Christian goes far to confirm the truth of the gospel which he speaks of. It is among the more efficacious means of inducing others to embrace the gospel.

Dear teen, we are constantly exhorted to be doers and not hearers only. It is very sad if we hear good preaching and teaching only to let it go right out the other ear. Take time to think, ponder and meditate on the Word of God. There is so much food for thought and for digesting it right through our system and into our soul. That way, we will further, fully and deeply understand how wise and how great God is when He gives us His divine instruction manual to guide us in this pilgrim way on earth. Let it transform us into a more Christ-like person that God can use mightily.

THOUGHT: He rightly reads Scripture who turns words into deeds.

PRAYER: O Father in heaven, help me not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of my mind to live to Thy praise and glory.

DOESN'T MY TESTIMONY GLORIFY MYSELF?

A Christian testimony gives the glory to God. It is God who in His mercy and grace has effected salvation for him or her. Truly salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9b). Ephesians 2:8-9 puts it this way, "For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not work works, lest any man should boast."

A Christian who has received forgiveness for sin by trusting alone in the person and work of Jesus Christ will surely relate how he or she came to know the God of the Bible. He will probably include how God's miraculous intervention and work in his life through specific events. When giving this testimony, a sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ is always a necessity. Though we can include specific information about how we came to accept Christ as Saviour those details should not be the focus of the testimony. This focus should be about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

A Christian testimony should not end with the conversion experience, but should also include the ways in which the Lord has worked in our lives to sanctify us for His service. As an example, a testimony could include how He brought us through a difficult period in our life (such as a loss of some sort or a severe illness) and built our faith in Him through that experience. The focus should be on the Lord and His faithfulness. In this way, we decrease and He is increased.

Dear teen, knowing that there is nothing good in ourselves that merit salvation and that it is all God's grace and mercy that has saved us, let us walk with God humbly. Daily die to self. This verse in Galatians 2:20 is tremendously helpful. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ lived in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Then go forth valiantly to do good works daily to shine forth the glory of our God.

THOUGHT: No sincere and humble Christian lives in vain.

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to be always about doing good for Thee and so let my light shine forth to glorify Thee.

AREN'T I TOO YOUNG TO THINK OF MY TESTIMONY?

Many youths in churches are actively involved in missions. They help to organize camps, gospel rallies, VBS where the gospel is preached. A church in Florida had 10 young people going on a mission trip with their preacher, testifying and singing, holding gospel meetings in public schools, ministering in feeding kitchens providing meals for hundreds of needy children and painting a local church building. Each young person testified of having the privilege of leading a lost sinner to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In every age God has called youths to do a special work for Him. He told the prophet Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee: and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." When Jeremiah confessed that he was too young, the Lord answered, "Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 1:7-8).

God has a plan for your life as surely as He did for Jeremiah's. The same Word which made Jeremiah fearless in the face of great difficulties will strengthen you to accomplish the task He gives you. Go in the strength of the Lord.

Dear young teenager, you can be an example of the believers. As the Spirit of the Lord fills you and you diligently study His Word, you can be an inspiration to others around you with the way you conduct yourself, in your love for the Lord and those around you, in your forgiving disposition and in the purity of your life. Thousands of young people through the ages have proved that this can be so. Young Charles Spurgeon was preaching at the age of 16!

THOUGHT: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

PRAYER: Father in heaven, may I not lean to my own understanding but trust Thee with all my heart to use me for Thine glory.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 31

Jeremiah 1:7
Memorise Jeremiah 1:7
"Say not, I am a child..."

ISN'T ALL THIS TOO LABORIOUS FOR A TEEN?

There have been not a few prophets whom God called at an early age to do a prophet's work. One of them was young Samuel, the first prophet of Israel whom God called to bring a message to Eli. Though yet a child, God wanted him to tell Eli that God is going to make an end of his house. Bravely, young Samuel was able to perform the task that God had given him.

Young Jeremiah was also called to be a prophet to the nations. His objection that he was young was not accepted by the Lord. God did not think his youth was an obstacle in doing what He commanded. Thus though young and you have a sense of your own weakness and inadequacy, it should not make you draw back from the work that God has for you. God was angry with Moses even for his modest excuses (Exodus 4:14). When God sends, God will enable. God can make children prophets, and ordain strength out of the mouth of babes and sucklings.

Dear teens, when you compare the work of witnessing for the Lord to the work of the young prophets of old, yours is a simple duty. The prophets like Samuel and Jeremiah had to go before the authorities and even kings to speak strong words of condemnation. Their lives would be on the line. Jeremiah was imprisoned by the king who was angry with him. Go then in the confidence that the Lord will be with you.

The world needs to hear the gospel. We have the gospel. We have been saved. We have been commanded under the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 to bear this message to those around us. It is not laborious. It is a glorious opportunity and a privilege. Dear teen, do not consider yourself worthless or useless. No matter how weak or foolish you may think yourself to be, God can use you for His glory.

THOUGHT: God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.

PRAYER: Our gracious heavenly Father, let me bring the gospel to those outside Your Kingdom faithfully, urgently and happily.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1

*Deuteronomy 8:19
Memorise Ephesians 6:7*

"...doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men."

HOW DOES SERVICE DIFFER FROM WORSHIP?

Service and worship are both vital aspects of the life of a Christian. To worship God is to give Him the due acknowledgement of His identity as Creator, Sustainer, Saviour and Judge by adoring and exalting Him through certain spiritual activities. This includes worship services in church and dedicating our time for honouring and praising Him through prayer.

To serve the Lord is to dedicate our time, energy and resources to doing His work for Him. While service to the Lord includes worship, there are many activities which qualify as service to the Lord but which cannot be described as worship. For example, being a welcomer to worshippers just before worship service starts, selling lunch coupons, handing out tracts, teaching or doing kitchen duties. These activities are important as they have spiritual as well as practical value to the church. Done with a sincere heart, serving the Lord is pleasing and honouring to Him.

Service honours God through performing tasks which have practical value. This differs from worship whereby there is less emphasis on the physical and practical aspects but rather, it is more a spiritual exercise whereby the believer sets his heart, mind and soul on the adoration of God alone to the exclusion of everything else.

The focus of worship is on giving God the praise and honour that are rightfully His. This is why we say our prayers and attend worship services. The focus of service is on labouring for Him because we love Him and are grateful to Him. Indeed, it is a privilege to be given the opportunity to repay our Gospel debt to Him in some small way. This is why we offer our time, money and energy to the various ministries and activities in church.

THOUGHT: Can I worship God in spirit and in truth if I am not willing to serve Him?

PRAYER: Help me, O Lord, to both serve and worship Thee while giving me the wisdom to know the difference between the two.

ISN'T SERVICE MORE IMPORTANT THAN WORSHIP?

The world cannot understand why Christians would spend time, even the best part of their week (Sundays) in church week after week. To them, this is a great sacrifice on the part of worshippers in terms of time, money and energy.

In the text from 1 Samuel 15:22, a question is asked; “Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD?” The prophet Samuel was asking a rhetorical question (a question with an obvious answer) to king Saul as a rebuke to Saul’s disobedience to God. Because of this passage, we may be tempted to think that serving God is an expression of our obedience to Him and is therefore more important than worship, which involves sacrificing our time and resources.

While there is truth in the unbeliever’s observation that worship involves sacrifice on our part, genuine believers who truly love the Lord should know that Christians cannot do one without the other (worship or serve). While a lack of desire to serve makes our worship hollow and even hypocritical, a lack of desire to worship the One we serve would mean that we have lost sight of the purpose of our service, and that is to please the God we so love.

Neither one of worship nor service is more important than the other. In fact, worship is service. We serve God in our worship. Both are equally important because the desire to worship and serve the One true God should exist in the heart of every Christian.

THOUGHT: To obey is better than to sacrifice, but joyful, genuine and sincere sacrifice is a sign of obedience.

PRAYER: O Lord, give me the wisdom to always do Thy will with proper understanding.

When does too much service affect worship?

A man labours day and night to support his family, but in so doing he forgets about his wedding anniversary, his daughter’s school concert which he promised to attend and his son’s graduation ceremony. When confronted by his wife, he simply offered two words-“too busy”.

Clearly, it is important for fathers to labour to support their families, but the “job description” of a father is much more than just to be a provider of material things. He must, among other things, also make a conscious effort to spend time with his loved ones when it really matters.

This is the same for Christians. We are sometimes so caught up with simply “doing” that we are in danger of forgetting Who it is we are serving. God desires our labouring for Him, but He also desires that we set apart some time to dedicate to Him and to spend in communion with Him. This is why Jesus explained to Martha, who was so busy fussing about the other things that she neglected the best part of Jesus’ visit which is to spend time with Him and learning His Word (Luke 40-42).

It is certainly a privilege and joy to labour and toil for the Lord. When God blesses our service in various ministries with growth and success, it lifts our spirits and encourages us to serve Him with even greater zeal and fervency. However, God desires more than just our service; He desires our time and undivided attention. This means that we should not compromise on time spent with the Lord be it attending worship services or meditating on His Word during quiet time and prayer. When we find that time spent with the Lord becomes short and hurried because we are distracted by “unfinished business” for the Lord, it is time to re-think about our attitude towards serving Him.

THOUGHT: The Christian’s “job description” is not to merely labour for the Lord but to also honour Him and commune with Him with his protected time.

PRAYER: O Lord, may You help us never to neglect spending time with You, the one true and living God Whom we serve.

WHAT IS VAIN WORSHIP?

Certain religions advocate vegetarianism. This is seen as a virtuous practice as it means not indulging in the pleasures of consuming meat, the production of which involves the killing of animals. Some of these vegetarians however, instead of eating meat, substitute the meat in their diet with certain food products that are made to look, feel and taste like meat. While this is consistent with their position of not contributing to the death of animals from a practical standpoint, from a spiritual standpoint it demonstrates that they continue to cling on to their love for meat.

In Matthew 15, Jesus rebuked the hypocritical Pharisees who “pledged” their wealth to God so that they would have an excuse not to support their parents while still appearing (in the eyes of men) to obey God’s 5th commandment. For them, the appearance of holiness was more important than the actual love and possession of it. Likewise, not all who come before the Lord in worship and prayer do so with the right intent. Some do so to sooth their guilty consciences for having committed sin. Others do so because a person “in their position” must be seen at the right place and the right time, saying and doing the right things just to appear more “spiritual”. Jesus describes this as honouring Him with one’s lips and not one’s heart.

Our worship is superficial and meaningless if it is not done out of a sincere heart, just like a vegetarian who appears to abstain from meat and yet indulges in meat-like food: the change is merely external. The time we spend worshipping God must be a result of having a love for communion with the Lord. To do so for appearance’s sake (or just to “mark time”) would constitute vain worship. While it is impossible to tell from the external which believer is worshipping in spirit and in truth, from our God who knows the innermost recesses of man’s hearts can nothing be hidden.

THOUGHT: If I am more concerned about appearing pious than being pious, am I really honouring God or myself?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, give us a heart that truly desires holiness, that our worship may be pleasing in Thy sight.

DO YOU LOVE TO WORSHIP?

The "Reunion Dinner" is a very important aspect of the Lunar New Year. Each year on the eve of Lunar New Year, Chinese people make it a point to return to their parents' homes for a family gathering to share a meal, catch up with each other on what has happened in their lives in the previous year and simply enjoy each other's company. So significant is this event for the Chinese that returning to see their parents for reunion dinner constitutes the greatest mass movement of people in the world, and they do so out of a deep yearning for communion with their loved ones whom they love and miss very much.

Christians all around the world, however, are given the tremendous privilege of having close communion with the God whom they love deeply, who saved them from an eternity in hell and have been given a future in heaven to look forward to instead. They do not need to save up and queue for hours for travel tickets just to have a reunion with the Heavenly Father because Christ Jesus removed the barrier between sinful man and their Creator through His death on the cross. How wonderful it would be if people around the world could reunite with their parents at the blink of an eye! But this is exactly what worship means for believers - to be able to spend time with God, to honour and to behold the beauty and wonder of God in awe through worship and prayer at any time wherever we may be.

Romans 8:15 tells us of the intimate relationship that all Christians have with God, whereby they can call Him "Abba" or Father. If even mere cultural tradition can motivate a certain race of people to reunite with their families once a year out of love and respect for parents, then how much more should Christians seek out their loving and merciful Father and dwell in His house not just once a year but many times each day through worship and prayer?

THOUGHT: To dwell in the house of the Lord is to have communion with Him through worship and prayer.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, teach us how we ought to worship Thee, and help us to always look to Thee with love and reverence.

CAN WORSHIP EVER BE WRONG?

The words of the passage taken from Amos 5:21-23 shows clearly that God who is holy expects to be worshipped in a way that is honouring and pleasing to Him while He deplores false worship. It is all too easy to fall into the trap of thinking that whatever we do in worship would be acceptable to God if it is done out of love and sincerity. Likewise, it is foolish to assume that God is pleased with us approaching Him irreverently just because what we are doing seems acceptable according to our modern cultural norms.

Sincerity can be wrong and love misplaced if not guided by biblical principles. In fact, our God is a consuming fire and instead of pleasing Him, we can expect to have His disapproval or even wrath if we are not careful with the way we approach Him. This is something which two of Aaron's sons named Nadab and Abihu sadly found out to their own destruction. In Numbers 3:4, they offered "strange fire" before the Lord and died as a result. This is because the fire that they offered was deemed to be unholy. They had displeased the Lord through their failure to strictly follow God's instructions pertaining to worship. This shows that not only is worship important to God, the manner in which we worship God is just as important to Him.

We sometimes think of God as someone who is just like our best friend. We think we can be casual about the way we treat Him because He loves us and will disregard the few little liberties we take in the manner with which we come to Him in worship and prayer. While God is indeed our Best Friend, He is also our Creator and not a mere creature. He is Lord and not just a leader. He is our Saviour and not just someone who did us a favour. We must understand that He is infinitely different from all the other creatures under His charge and approach Him the only way we should, which is, the way He has shown us according to His Word.

THOUGHT: Do I allow the things of the world to occupy and dominate my mind when I am spending time with God?

PRAYER: O God, teach us to fear Thee, not with the fear of heathens, but with reverential fear as Thy blood-bought children.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 7

Psalm 103:1
Memorise Psalm 103:1

"Bless the Lord O my soul ...bless his holy name"

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BLESS THE LORD?

Born again believers are the most blessed people in the world because they have been spared from eternal torment in hell and given eternal life in heaven through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Here we can see that salvation is the greatest blessing that anyone can have, and the blessing of salvation can be likened to a gift which is of infinite value yet freely available to all who earnestly seek and accept it. The prophet Isaiah spoke about salvation in exactly this same manner in Isaiah 55:1, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

God not only blesses His people, and abundantly so with all things great and small, He also showers blessings on the saved and unsaved, makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust alike through His common grace (Matthew 5:45). However, the word blessing in today's reading refers not to bestowing gifts graciously but to praise since we cannot give to God anything that does not already belong to Him. Rather, we praise God, the Giver of all good gifts and blessings.

To praise is not just to speak well of but to exalt. We bless the Lord by exalting Him to others whenever the opportunity arises. We bless His holy name during worship and prayer. We exalt Him in our testimony to others not just verbally but also by the way we live our lives. We praise God for being the loving and merciful yet righteous God that He is, and in so doing, we are blessing the Lord and His holy name.

THOUGHT: We remember (are grateful to) the Lord by blessing Him who blesses us freely and abundantly.

PRAYER: O Lord, I bless Thee from the depths of my soul because Thou has crowned me with lovingkindness and tender mercies.

SHOULD I WORSHIP ONLY IN SECRET?

It is important to spend time alone with God through prayer and worship in a conducive environment so that our relationship with God can be strengthened. Indeed Matthew 6:6 tells us to pray to the Father in secret, therefore we know that there is a biblical injunction to worship God in private. However, does this mean that we should only worship by ourselves and not with other believers?

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” This means that believers must not forsake fellowship with each other and gathering together as people of a common faith. It is to be expected, therefore, that when believers come together, they will participate in spiritual activities together, and this includes corporate worship. In Matthew 6:6, Jesus encouraged the disciples to spend private moments to pray and worship the Lord, but he did not prohibit corporate worship. In short, we must do both.

Time spent alone with the Lord is sweet and precious, but so is time spent with other people of the same faith. Being spiritually alive in a sinful world filled with people who are spiritually dead should cause us to look forward to meeting up with others who are also spiritually alive. It is indeed a privilege and pleasure to be able to meet other Christians and encourage each other in the faith, to labour together with them for the Lord and to help one another in practical ways as members of the same family should. However, all these activities should be centred around the living God who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. What better way to honour Him, therefore, than to worship Him together as one body in Christ

THOUGHT: It pleases God that I devote my time to Him individually as His child, and with other believers as part of His eternal family.

PRAYER: O Lord, may Thy Spirit draw us nigh unto our brethren that we may together draw nigh unto Thee.

WHY MUST THERE BE UNITY IN WORSHIP?

Paul says in Romans 12:5 that, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” to emphasize the fact that there must be unity in diversity within God’s family. This means to say that God meant for Christians from different backgrounds with different gifts and abilities to labour together for the Lord.

However, one of the problems faced by the members of the church in Corinth was that so much importance was placed on certain spiritual gifts such as the speaking of tongues that everyone wanted to be able to do so. The Apostle Paul had to correct them. He taught them that the inappropriate use of spiritual gifts was the cause of disunity and chaos in church. Referring to the speaking of tongues in particular, he cautioned the use of this gift firstly because without interpretation only the speaker himself understood what was said when nobody else did (hence edifying only the speaker), and secondly, because it was used by the speaker to make himself appear spiritually superior. Finally, this was done for the tongue-speaker’s profit rather than for the benefit of others. In 1 Corinthians 14:16, he asked how others could possibly benefit if only the speaker alone understood the prayers.

When spiritual activities are done out of pride or for selfish reasons, the consequences would be no different from that of the inappropriate use of spiritual gifts in the church of Corinth in Paul’s day - the spiritual well-being of the church suffers. Therefore, every believer must be aware that in serving the Lord, no particular gift is more important than another. Every believer has something different to offer in his labour for the Lord, but every believer must work in unity with others as part of a team much like the way different parts of the body work together. Only then can there be unity in worship which will result in healthy spiritual growth for the church.

THOUGHT: God made us unique so that we can put our different abilities to good use together for His glory.

PRAYER: O Lord, remind us daily that our gifts and talents come from You alone, that we may not fall into the sin of pride.

HOW IMPORTANT IS HOLINESS IN SERVICE?

The Bible says that we are the temple of God, and His Spirit dwells within us (1 Corinthians 3:16). This being the case, how could God possibly be pleased with us and our service in His name if we defile ourselves with sinful thoughts or acts? In the early days of the New Testament Church, two characters by the names of Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead by the Holy Spirit for lying because God took such a serious view of sin that He wanted to set the standard for subsequent churches and Christians to abide by to this very day.

This is not restricted to the New Testament as we see in Psalm 51. This was a psalm written by David in repentance for his sin of adultery and murder, but it also teaches that personal sanctification (holiness) is extremely important if we are to serve the Lord effectively. He wrote, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalms 51:10) followed by “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee” (Psalms 51:13) because he realized that he could not be a good witness for God if he himself had unconfessed sins and was willfully engaged in sinful acts. Likewise, the high priest would be struck dead instantly if he would regard any iniquity in his heart while performing rituals in the Holy of Holies in Old Testament times. He had to first confess his sins and offer a sin offering to God before he could perform his levitical duties.

Spiritual work acceptable to God requires that the believer performing it first be holy and pure inwardly before the actual act of doing it. Hence, we must not only repent of all known sins in preparation for service, we must also live lives which are patterned after our Lord Jesus Christ in holiness every day if we are to please God with our labour for Him.

THOUGHT: We are serving a God who sees and knows everything and nothing can be hidden from Him.

PRAYER: If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? (Psalm 130:3) Thank You for being a merciful God.

WHAT IF I'M NOT AS GOOD AS OTHERS IN SERVING?

In our competitive society it is easy to become influenced by the world's values so much so that we bring some of it into our spiritual life as well. Because we have to strive to be "better" than others in school and at our workplaces to satisfy our teachers and bosses we think that we can please God the same way. This is perhaps the reason we sometimes wonder if we are not as "good" compared with others in our service for the Lord.

When God instructed Samuel to select a successor for Saul from among the sons of a man named Jesse he wrongly assumed that Eliab was God's choice because of his outward appearance. However we see in 1 Samuel 16:7 that God sees things very differently. Indeed, "the LORD looketh on the heart." God does not size up people the same way the world does. Though externals are not unimportant, God's measure of a man's quality of service lies more in the faithfulness with which a believer performs a certain task rather than the magnitude, complexity, or even the results of the tasks he performs per se.

Because no man can see a person's inward level of faithfulness, asking the question stated as today's title can be dangerous as we are ill-equipped to decide whether what we are doing is better or not as good compared with others. Rather, a better way to assess how we are doing in terms of service is whether we are doing it from the heart out of love for the Lord and if we can do more for the Lord with the time and resources that He has blessed us with. This is self-examination, and we only need to ask if our faithfulness in service and spiritual maturity has grown with time rather than to turn it into a competition with others to see who is doing "better".

THOUGHT: Even the widow could please Jesus by giving God her two mite's worth, but whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

PRAYER: O Lord help us to understand that true wisdom is seeing things not from man's perspective but from Yours.

HOW DO I KNOW WHICH AREA TO SERVE IN?

We certainly cannot approach the issue of which area to serve in with a heart and mind clouded by sin and distracted by the noise of the world outside. God desires for us to “tune in” to the still small voice of His Spirit. This is where praying and meditating on His Word and His will for our lives will provide us with guidance. Just as importantly, we are to honestly ask ourselves what spiritual gifts the Lord has given us (every believer has at least one) and what our strengths and weaknesses are as this will exert a great influence in deciding our area of service. If, for example, a person has good language skills and has the gift of being able to teach God’s Word simply and clearly then he should consider serving in a teaching ministry instead of ministries involving music, audio-visuals or information technology for which he has no special applicable skills. Likewise, a musically inclined person gifted with a wonderful voice but poor mathematical abilities would do better in the church choir instead of handling accounts.

Sometimes, it may not even be a particular ministry that God can use us in but rather in the way we interact with others. Barnabas, for example, was great at encouraging others. Perhaps there are those who are good at comforting others, counseling them or just simply lending a listening ear for others to confide in.

The new life of a believer in Christ is filled with joy, excitement and adventure though there may be times of trials and difficulties. After his conversion, a genuine and faithful believer will undoubtedly be filled with fervency and compulsion to dedicate his life to the Lord by serving Him. He dedicates his time, money and energy to this end. However, even though there may be times that he may wonder in what capacity he can best serve God, this is where the journey of opportunity and discovery really begins, and it ought to be an enjoyable and uplifting experience!

THOUGHT: Jesus said that He came to give us an abundant life. Undoubtedly this includes the privilege and blessing of godly service.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, still our hearts that we will know that You are God and know where we can best serve You.

HOW SHOULD I TREAT THOSE I SERVE WITH?

In Philippians 1:15-18, the Apostle Paul acknowledged that, while he was being incarcerated in prison, there were those who tried to oppose him and discredit him even as they were preaching Christ. In response, he did not retaliate with a smear-campaign of his own against his opposers but rather he rejoiced as long as Christ continued to be preached to the people.

There are those who guard “their turf” jealously in their respective areas of service for fear that some “new kid in town” will “usurp” their position. If we approach service to God with such an attitude we will only succeed in stunting the growth of our ministry rather than allowing it to flourish and grow. By encouraging “new blood” to serve in our ministries, nurturing them, helping them “learn the ropes” and equipping them to be able to assume a vital role in our ministries we may one day find that we have an able co-labourer in the Lord to bring our level of service to the Lord collectively to greater heights. Conversely, if we are new to a particular area of service and feel that there are others who have more wisdom or experience we should be ready and humble enough to learn from them.

It is certainly a waste of time and energy to see others we serve with as rivals. Christians serving the Lord together should pick each other up and help each other improve the way they are serving the Lord in a kind and affectionate manner. They ought to look out for one another that they will be given support and sound advice whenever needed. Just like the Apostle Paul, we should focus on labouring for God’s glory as the singular objective of our service rather than for personal recognition or prestige (unlike his “competitors”) otherwise we run the risk of regarding those who serve with us with resentment and suspicion.

THOUGHT: Do I rejoice that others are partaking in the same joy and privilege of serving God as I am?

PRAYER: Father of Lights, teach me to appreciate my co-labourers in Christ for the harvest is truly great but labourers few.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONFLICTS WITH BRETHEN?

In any group or organization in society, whether it be the family unit, a working company, government body or social club, as long as there are at least two people interacting with each other, there will be conflict. How do conflicts arise? They have their origins in a sinful heart. Before the fall of Man, Adam and Eve lived in harmony with each other. Immediately after they disobeyed God's command and tasted the forbidden fruit, they turned against each other with Adam pointing an accusing finger at Eve to blame her for his sin. Passing on blame to others, selfishness that only demands one's own way, pride that refuses to listen to the opinion of others', lack of love towards others and other sinful behaviour lead to conflict. Sadly, the church is not immune from conflict. As long as we are in this fleshly body, the motions of sin does threaten to cause us to fall when we are not careful.

This is not what God desires of His people. In 1 Corinthians 12:25, Paul notes that God does not want any “schism in the body”, meaning division or disunion within the church. How can we let our flesh tear down that which had been bought by so great a price, even the blood of God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ? Paul goes on to say that God wants us to “have the same care one for another”, showing love to one another and not discriminating against the seemingly “weaker” people in the church. He gives more honour to that part which lacked (1 Corinthians 12:24), showing us that we should view all church members similarly and not discriminate against those we judge to be weaker.

So what if you have conflicts with brethren? First of all, you need to examine your heart and decipher the true instigating factor for the conflict. As seen above, most conflicts arise from a sinful heart. Has your pride or lack of love led to the conflict between you and your brethren? If it has, repent and be the first to seek forgiveness from the other party. Conflict between church members is one tool that Satan can use to disrupt and distract the church from concentrating on her goal to propagate the Gospel. We should not give any chance to the enemy to do so. If on the other hand, you realize that the conflict is due to doctrinal issues, it will be wise to involve your church leaders for guidance and advice.

THOUGHT: Have you witnessed any conflicts between fellow church members? How did they resolve them?

PRAYER: Help me to flee conflicts with my fellow church members, Lord, and instead learn to love them as You do.

“...if we are not of the same mind in our beliefs how can we truly be of one accord?”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE OF ONE ACCORD?

After the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the New Testament church was filled with fervency for the Lord and His work. They were truly of “one accord”. First of all, they shared the same experience of the transforming power of the Gospel in their lives as well as all witnessed the works of the Holy Spirit, such as the speaking of tongues at Pentecost and “many wonders and signs” done by the apostles (Acts 2:43). Secondly, they were of one mind in terms of their beliefs and doctrines (Acts 2:44) as they had the privilege of attaining direct instruction and teaching from the apostles.

They also shared all their worldly goods (Acts 2:45) such that material possessions could not serve as a dividing factor. They shared their days together as well, “continuing daily with one accord in the temple”, enjoying one another’s company and fellowship. They were full of Christian joy and possessed “singleness of heart” without hypocrisy towards one another. A true reflection of what Heaven will be like. Lastly, they were like minded in their goals. They wanted to praise God daily in the temple and worked hard to evangelise to unbelievers. Unbelievers could see Christlikeness in their lives as Acts 2:47 attests that they had “favour with all the people”. They also preached the Gospel to unbelievers, resulting in the addition of new members to the church on a daily basis.

The church of today has splintered into different denominations and different beliefs as apostasy has led to believers no longer being of “one accord”. Neoevangelism thinks that by tolerating the wrong doctrines of other believers and accepting false teachings for the sake of love and a false unity, the church can become one again. However, from the example of the New Testament church in Acts, we know that this cannot be true. If we are not of the same mind in our beliefs, how can we truly be of “one accord”? This will only lead us to compromise and a weak stand for Christ. We should unite with like-minded Christians and spur one another on in our Christian walk, looking forward to the day when the true Church of Christ is revealed at the end of the world.

THOUGHT: How do you reconcile biblical separation and Christian unity?

PRAYER: O Lord, preserve Thy church so that we will be of “one accord”.

HOW IMPORTANT IS CHRISTIAN UNITY?

John 17 records Christ's prayer and shows us how Christ is indeed our intercessor while He was on earth and now in Heaven, as He mediates for us at the throne of God our Father. He prays for the believers and that they “all may be one” (verse 21). The unity He wants His believers to achieve is of the purest kind. He wants them to be united as He and His Heavenly Father are united. Two different Persons yet single as the One and True God, single in the aim to glorify the Godhead, single in drawing all those who are His to Himself.

Christ says that if His followers are united as one, they will be united to Him as well, all being partakers of His grace and following His teachings. This unity will then show the rest of the world that Christ is indeed the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. Christian unity is extremely important to let the world know that we believe in Jesus as our Saviour and that we are one in this belief.

Christian disunity is definitely one of the factors why unbelievers find it difficult to accept our beliefs. We believe in the same God but have different denominations and practices. We preach love but have infightings and quarrels. This type of misrepresentation of Christianity does not show forth the agape love of God and does not set us apart as God's children. We should seek to fellowship with like-minded brethren who hold fast to the same doctrines although they may be of different denominations. If we have to separate from another church of false teachings, we should explain patiently the reasons of doing so to our unbelieving friends. We should focus on what the Bible says and not attack the character of the people in the church involved.

THOUGHT: Have you encountered unbelieving friends who have been turned off by the lack of unity in Christian churches? What did you say to them?

PRAYER: Dear Lord, may your people truly be as one as the Father and Son are one.

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP?

If Christians sit down for a meal or play a ball game together, is that fellowship? Some people think that as long as Christians spend time together, no matter how they spend that time, they are fellowshiping. However, that would make us no different from secular groups who also spend time together, sometimes even carrying out the same activities. John shows us in his epistle that Christian fellowship should be so much more.

John and the apostles had spent time with Jesus and John attests to this in verse 1-2: “we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness”. They had spent time with Jesus intimately, learning and witnessing firsthand from Him the Gospel. They heard His teachings on holy living and promises of eternal life and spiritual rewards. They had the privilege of experiencing true Christian fellowship with the Son of God Himself while He was physically here on earth. Now they wanted to share what they experienced and learnt with the rest of the believers. Through their sharing and teaching, they taught the Gospel as well as edified and encouraged the believers.

True Christian fellowship is not just spending time together with fellow believers. It is much deeper and intimate if all believers seek to build one another up just as what John aimed to do. So let us seek to show love and concern to our fellow believers when we meet up with them. To ask them about their lives and prayer needs. To speak an encouraging word or offer a Bible verse to comfort. To remind one another to hold fast to our faith and to look forward to Christ’s imminent return. Just as John did, let our fellowship with God motivate us to desire greater fellowship with our brethren. Conversely, through our fellowship, let us aim to spur one another on to greater fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: Have you been participating in true Christian fellowship? Do not wait for others to show care towards you. Make the first move.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to grow in fellowship with Thee and with my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18

Acts 2:42
Memorise Acts 2:42

“...Christian fellowship should be close like that of a family...”

HOW CLOSE CAN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP BE?

The New Testament church grew in number and fervency after Pentecost. They practically lived together in church, continuing “stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” They listened to God’s Word together from the apostles. They broke bread, meaning they partook of Holy Communion, together. They prayed together. They were very close, spending their waking hours growing together in the Lord.

They were like a big family. In fact, that is how we should view our fellow believers. Christ taught how those who believed in Him were part of His family. In Matthew 12:50, Christ said, “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Hebrews 2:11 also affirms this, “For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren”.

Christian fellowship should be close, like that of a family. We are all bought by the same blood and once we accept Christ, we are no longer part of the world. We are now “children of light” (John 12:36) and will never find true fellowship with those who are still in darkness. They will not understand our beliefs and goals. Although we still befriend them and evangelise to them, the depth of friendship will never be as deep as that between two fellow believers. Therefore, seek Christian fellowship. It is more profitable to pursue friendships with fellow believers than with others who are still outside God’s kingdom. Of course, we still need to evangelise to our non believing friends but it is definitely more enriching to spend time with our Christian brothers and sisters than to engage in worldly activities with our non Christian friends.

THOUGHT: How can we be good brothers and sisters in Christ to our fellow believers?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to desire good Christian fellowship and grant me discernment in choosing who I spend time with.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19

Hebrews 13:16
Memorise Hebrews 13:16

"...we should view fellowship as worship to God as it honours and pleases Him..."

ISN'T WORSHIP MORE IMPORTANT THAN FELLOWSHIP?

Some Christians just come to church for Sunday morning service and then quickly disappear after that without speaking to anyone. They feel that there is no need to go out of their way to fellowship with the other church members. They would think in their minds, isn't worship more important than fellowship? Isn't it good enough that I just come for service to worship God?

Hebrews 13:16 tells a different story. It starts off with verse 15 which speaks of worshipping God with the "sacrifice of praise" which we would offer during our services on the Lord's Day. However, it does not stop there. It goes on to say that praising God is only but one way to worship Him. God also desires us to "do good and to communicate", meaning to remember to do good works and to fellowship with other believers. These acts are also worship to God as God views them as sacrifices to Him as well. God is pleased when His children fellowship with one another. It glorifies Him as our Saviour who purchased us with His blood. It also honours Him as our Heavenly Father who looks after His children.

Therefore, we should not view worship and fellowship as separate and place one above the other in priority. We should view fellowship as worship to God as well as it honours and pleases Him. We should not shy away from fellowshiping with other fellow believers and give the excuse that God only wants us to participate in service. Fellowship is a vital component of the Christian life and will be enjoyed not only on earth but in Heaven where we will all worship God together.

THOUGHT: What would happen to the church if everyone had the attitude of the Christians mentioned in the first paragraph?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to see how fellowship is an act of worship to Thee as well.

*"...Every Christian needs fellowship,
from the newly born again believer to the mature church elder..."*

HOW IMPORTANT IS CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP?

Once you accept Christ as your Saviour, you become a child of God, a child of light (Ephesians 5:8). Suddenly, you realise that you are at odds with the world. You are no longer interested in the old activities that you used to enjoy like going to clubs or listening to rock music. Your life goals have changed such that you no longer want to pursue a career just for money but seek to find out God's will for your life. You also start to realise that you find yourself enjoying less and less the company of your non-Christian friends. Indeed, "what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). You want to find people who you can talk to about God and your Christian walk.

Paul, the mighty apostle and man of God, also felt this very basic need for Christian fellowship. He wrote earnestly to the Romans how he longed to see them that he could "impart unto [them] some spiritual gift" to establish and build them up in their faith (Romans 1:11). We see in the next verse that this edification was not one sided. Paul was also eager to be comforted and encouraged by the Romans as well and this was because of the "mutual faith" they shared.

Every Christian needs fellowship, from the newly born again believer to the mature church elder. The testimony of a young Christian will never fail to remind more mature Christians of the marvelous grace and love of our Saviour who died for us. A recounting of God's deliverance from a trial whether big or small encourages other suffering believers to persevere. A pastor's prayer for believers in need exhorts and lifts their faith. In this world, we can only find true kinship in our fellow believers. We should seek to mutually build one another up each time we meet. Always try to share with other believers about something God has taught you or helped you with in the past week.

THOUGHT: Do you actively try to edify and encourage fellow believers?

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for the fellowship I can share with Your children. Help me to learn how precious it is and to truly treasure it.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10
Memorise Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

“...The narrow way is a difficult path to trod, God did not mean for us to travel it alone...”

WHAT IF I PREFER NOT TO FELLOWSHIP?

Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, “Woe to him that is alone” and that is particularly true for a Christian. However, some Christians may prefer not to fellowship. Perhaps they prefer to be alone or because of pride, feel that they do not need any help from other believers. They may not see the importance of fellowship and therefore, fail to see the need to fellowship with other Christians.

Solomon writes of how important it is to have a companion or friend beside you. He says that “two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour”. This “labour” is service to each other, doing good deeds towards each other, showing concern for each other. It is definitely “more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35) and they are rewarded with the joy of helping another and the gratitude of their friend who will likewise return the favour. In contrast, someone who is alone does not have anyone to show concern for and does not benefit from giving and serving.

Solomon goes on to explain that two people can help each other when one of them is weak. If one of them falls, the other will “lift up his fellow”. Solomon also speaks of companionship in verse 11 and how two people can keep each other warm. Two are also stronger than one when withstanding any enemies (verse 12).

The narrow way is a difficult path to trod and God did not mean for us to travel it alone. If we have companions as we walk the narrow way, we can help lift one another up if we fall. For example, if a Christian falls into sin, his Christian friends can rebuke him with God’s Word and pray for him, bringing him to repentance and back to God. Christians also keep one another “warm” with love and concern for one another. If an enemy attacks, whether it may be Satan or false teachers, Christians can support one another through God’s Word and prayer to withstand the attacks. Imagine if the believer were alone. No matter how strong he may be, he will fall and be overcome more easily than if he had the support of fellow believers.

THOUGHT: Can you think of any experiences you have had which affirms Solomon’s statement that “two are better than one”?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be a good companion to my Christian friends.

*“...what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?
what communion hath light with darkness?”*

WHO AM I ALLOWED TO FELLOWSHIP WITH?

Many prominent Christian leaders who once held fast to fundamentalism have fallen away and turned around to support neoevangelism and ecumenism. Examples would be Billy Graham and Jack Van Impe who said, “Till I die I will proclaim nothing but love for all my brothers and sisters in Christ, my Catholic brothers and sisters, Protestant brothers and sisters... I don’t care what label you are.” They are campaigning Christian unity at whatever cost, throwing away doctrine and truth, and claiming that Jesus was praying for such unity in John 17. They go so far as to reject Christ as the only way to Heaven (John 14:6) and claim that their “brethren” of other religions will be saved too because of their faith in their gods. They conveniently leave out that in John 17, Christ prayed that although the world hates His people as they are “not of the world”, He does not ask for them to be removed from the world but that the Father “sanctify them through [His] truth”.

In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul calls on the Corinthian believers to not be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” Believers in Jesus Christ are poles apart from non believers. They are two ends of the spectrum. They can never have true fellowship with one another.

Therefore, we must reject the ecumenical movement. If Christians think they can worship together with other religions, then every basic fundamental of their faith must be brushed under the carpet and ignored. We are Christians, followers of Christ and we believe that He is the Way to salvation. Embracing other faiths is to reject this. Yes, we still have non-Christian friends and we hope to lead them to Christ but to fellowship with them on a deeper, spiritual level would mean denying our very faith and in effect, denying Christ Himself.

THOUGHT: What happens when a believer becomes unequally yoked with unbelievers?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to seek true fellowship with Thy people. Help me never to compromise or deny my faith in Thee by being unequally yoked.

HOW IS GIVING PART OF SERVING GOD?

Chapter 8 opens with a plea from the Apostle Paul to present all of our selves as a living sacrifice to God which is our reasonable service. Part of being a living sacrifice is to use our gifts, talents and resources for the Lord, rather than keeping them to and for ourselves.

Paul writes here in verse 8 of different gifts and how they should be exercised in the ministry, the distribution of money being one. In the early church, in Acts, one of the responsibilities of the deacons was to distribute alms to the poor and needy in the church. Here, they are commanded to do so with honesty and fairness.

God has promised to take care of our daily needs, and through the act of giving and distribution, we show our love for God and fellow believers. In turn, the recipients glorify God for His provision by means of those who give; and are also encouraged by the love shown toward them by fellow believers. God is glorified in your life and theirs. This is Christianity in action. Indeed this is what service is.

Perhaps whatever you have, be it an allowance from your parents or earnings from a part-time job do not seem much. Or your talents and gifts seem few. Consider the widow and her two mites and her commendation from Christ. She had so little yet she gave her all. Consider the young boy with 5 loaves and 2 small fishes. What if he had kept what little he had to himself? Service is what we, as servants of our Heavenly Master do. Christ has made the ultimate sacrifice for you. Returning a portion of your resources, time and talents for His work and to His glory is not unreasonable. Or do you expect your Heavenly Master to take care of you, provide for your every need and even prosper you, but you, will do nothing in return except the bare minimum?

THOUGHT: What does it mean to be a living sacrifice?

PRAYER: O Lord, may all that I am and all that I have be used in Your service for Your glory and Yours alone.

WHY DO WE GIVE ANONYMOUSLY?

Christ warns against giving in order to be seen by others. There will be no heavenly reward for such giving. The scribes and Pharisees had all the outward forms of religion but their hearts were not right with God. They were hypocrites. Their reward was, the fleeting praise and high regard of other men, which in Christ's estimation and eternity in view – no reward at all.

Whilst Christ is referring to the scribes and Pharisees, He is however is not speaking here directly to them but His disciples and the multitudes. Why?

So much of our self-worth comes from or is sensitive to the outside, be it friends, family, people in church, teachers and the world at large. Who does not want to look good and be well regarded! We, like the scribes and Pharisees are sinners. We are just as prone to do things in order to cultivate a certain image and gain the praise of others. This may even be unconscious. Though one might not seek after the praise of others, nevertheless it is all too easy for praise and flattery to puff up. Sin can very easily creep into a heart with a right motive. Service can become a source of pride, exercised for self glory or because of the fear of men. Such service is hypocritical and displeasing to God, and will not be rewarded by Him.

We live in an ever increasingly image conscious society, where self branding and promotion are the norm and encouraged. All Christians need to be vigilant against such vanity in our service of God. If we truly desire to do good from a pure motive, it does not matter at all whether anyone does or does not see it. Giving anonymously helps keep our hearts pure and sincere, that our sole concern is and remains that God is glorified. Our service and faith must be genuine, and such faith has no place for self.

THOUGHT: Are there areas of service that are hypocritical? Why do you choose to serve in some areas and not others?

PRAYER: He must increase, I must decrease.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25

Leviticus 27:32
Memorise 1 Samuel 15:22b
"...to obey is better than... sacrifice"

HOW ARE TITHES DIFFERENT FROM OFFERINGS?

TITHES are the tenth of any of our increase that is holy, set apart for the Lord and thus must be returned to Him. In the Old Testament tithes were for the Levites and priests who had no inheritance, unlike the other tribes. (Numbers 18:23-24) In Nehemiah, when the Levites were not given their portion, they had no choice but to abandon God's work and find work in the field to earn a living. (Nehemiah 13:10) Similarly, today, tithes are for a local church's general fund, to provide for full time staff and God's work in the local church and beyond.

OFFERINGS are anything in addition to our tithes, and are not mandatory. These can be thanks offerings that believers give to specific ministries and individuals both within and without the local church.

Does it matter how much we tithe or where we tithe to? Would you rob God? (Malachi 3:8) Tithes should go to the local church a believer worships in. This is the church wherein the believer is ministered to and blessed. If worshippers, even in a wealthy church did not tithe to the general fund, choosing instead missions or specific ministries in the church, God's labourers and certain ministries would be neglected. God is sovereign and has appointed the leadership of the church. Therefore, we should trust and submit to them. There are regular congregational meetings and elections where leaders are called to account as to how they have used God's funds.

If we have been blessed by, or have a burden for a particular ministry or individual within or without the local church, we can express thanksgiving and supply their need or encourage them in the form of an offering.

We serve a precise and Holy God and should worship Him with knowledge and understanding, not in ignorance, be it sincere.

THOUGHT: To obey is better than sacrifice.

PRAYER: LORD, may my tithes and offerings be according to Your Word and acceptable and pleasing unto you.

HOW WILLING ARE YOU TO GIVE TO OTHERS?

An example of “distributing to the necessity of saints” was the church in Jerusalem who voluntarily sold their possessions and goods for distribution to the needy. (Acts 2:44-45) As Christ said, there will always be poor amongst us, and thus poor believers. (Mark 14:7) This is the case, even in an affluent society and church. There are and will be saints who are in need.

Hospitality is the act of hosting both friends and strangers with kindness and generosity, expecting nothing in return. Further, to be “given” to hospitality goes beyond being ready to be hospitable, but involves, pursuing after it – seeking out opportunities to exercise it.

At the heart of such giving is charity. Great love because believers share a common and precious bond in the Lord. We are one family in Him, and thus so are our possessions. It hence inconceivable not to give part of what we have to supply the needs of another because the immeasurable love of God constrains us.

How willing you are to give speaks of how much brotherly love you have for fellow believers, and testifies of the love of Christ in you. How you view all that you have will also affect how willing you are to give to the needs of others. Are you just a steward, or an owner with rights and entitlements? Do you hold them in an open palm – to be freely given and used for believers in need and for the glory of God? Or hold on to them tight fisted, hidden away.

Giving does not begin and end with monetary offerings. It includes our time, talents, home, possessions for which we should be equally generous and quick to offer to any believer in need. We should also be on the lookout for newcomers – strangers in our church, to exercise hospitality making them feel welcome and cared for.

THOUGHT: Do you think, I have given enough, rather than how can I give or do more?

PRAYER: Lord, let me seek out opportunities to do good to all, with all that I have been entrusted with.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I GIVE BACK TO GOD?

God has bought us with the life of His only begotten Son – Jesus Christ. Thus, to glorify God in you body and your spirit is to be every ready to give. We should give as often as we can. It reminds us that we belong to God and it glorifies Him.

As the purpose of tithes is to provide for the local church, giving of our tithes should be regular, planned and not haphazard. Whilst it may be more convenient to give once a month or fortnightly, setting aside a portion weekly reminds us to be thankful to our Heavenly Father, and that we do not come to worship Him on Sunday empty-handed. Regular tithing takes discipline and preparation. Sometimes, you may realise that you do not have enough at the last minute. Oh well, I'll make it up next week. This shows lack of reverence for God. When you start working, can you imagine if your employer sometimes forgets to pay you or is late? Yet, we impatiently expect God to provide for our every need and want, and even provide more abundantly than we ask.

However, this does not mean offerings cannot be spontaneous when a need or opportunity arises. If you wish to make them regular, all the better.

THOUGHT: How often do you wish to have your prayers answered and be blessed by God?

PRAYER: Lord, may I be a faithful and regular with my tithes and offerings.

*“...He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor:
is righteousness remaineth for ever.”*

IS GIVING ONLY CONFINED TO MY CHURCH BRETHREN?

Apostle Paul speaks here to the wealthy Corinthian church of the churches in Macedonia who had raised funds for the church in Jerusalem which was in great need. The Macedonian churches were a blessed example to the wealthy Corinthian church to likewise give, and give generously. Their example is impressive and commended because the Macedonian churches were themselves in distress and poverty, yet they gave exceedingly. Furthermore, they pleaded with Paul to receive the gift, and to give it on their behalf. So that they, though separated by land and sea from the Jewish church in Jerusalem could have the privilege to be part of this Christian ministry.

Giving of our offerings is not limited to our local church. It is a wonderful privilege for anyone, rich or poor, to give to brethren and ministries that they may never meet nor know. To know that one's offerings may be a blessing to Christians half-way around the world and furthering God's work; that someone in turn is praising the Lord for you, is to be spiritually blessed. It is something intangible that the world cannot understand. It is part of living a righteous life. Geography, race and culture are no barrier to experiencing fellowship and ministering to other believers. It may make giving and your prayers more meaningful if you have visited the mission station and know the missionaries. If you have the opportunity do take it. But do not let the absence of opportunity limit your giving. God may not call you to be a missionary to distant lands nor may you know the recipient of your gift personally, but giving is one means of furthering His work beyond your local church whether near or far.

THOUGHT: The example of Macedonian churches prove that material poverty is not a barrier to giving and great spiritual riches.

PRAYER: As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10)

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29

2 Corinthians 8:12
Memorise James 4:17

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not..."

WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TO GIVE?

As the Apostle Paul writes, a willing mind is the first and foremost prerequisite to giving. God does not require you to give what you do not have. Having a willing mind, give according to what you do have. Being worried and unduly burdened will not make you more spiritual. Suffering for suffering's sake is not the purpose of giving. However, if you have an abundance now, give to supply others who are presently in need, as was the case of the Corinthian church to the churches in Jerusalem.

Our problem, more often than not, is not that we have nothing to give. Rather, is that we have an unwilling mind which surveys all we have and thus concludes: No, I do not have extra. In fact, I lack! I do not have every single thing my heart desires, the latest fashion, clothes, books, phone, computer etc. I do not have enough savings stored away for tomorrow, and the day after and so on. We rationalize that when we have every "need" and "sufficient" savings stored away then, and only then, will we be able to give. My mind will be willing then.

The Macedonian churches gave today, so they may have spiritual blessings today and eternal reward in Heaven. Their concern was not about their immediate and future material needs here in this world. I once asked a Christian sister who was of humble and modest means whether she worried about her finances and the future. Her reply, in essence: "I worry when I have too much in my bank account, and so I need to spend it for God's work!" What a rebuke it was to me of little faith in God and love for Him!

THOUGHT: What happened to the Israelites' attempts to store away manna for another day? If you hoard your abundance today, do you think God should supply your needs through others in your time of need?

PRAYER: May I have a willing mind.

HOW CAN I BE CHEERFUL IN GIVING?

2 Corinthians 9:7 "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

This concluding devotion on giving, again focuses on the heart of a believer. Whilst, Paul exhorts the Corinthians in the preceding verse to give more so that they may reap more, when it comes down to it, give according to your heart. This, no one but the believer and God can know.

The Greek word for 'cheerful' here is *hilaron*, where the English word "hilarious" is derived. God loves a cheerful giver because he gives with such joy because of love, not compulsion. God does not need our money, He wants us to worship Him in body and spirit. Would you rather receive a thoughtful simple gift given with love or an expensive impersonal one given begrudgingly?

Search your heart if you struggle with being a cheerful giver. Perhaps it reveals a lack of love? Giving is a chore because the things of this world occupy your affections more so than heavenly ones. You are greedy for the things and pleasures of this world. The less you give to God, the more for yourself. Or perhaps it reveals a lack of faith? You are fearful that He will not provide for your every need, and encumbered by the cares of the world. Or maybe it is both?

THOUGHT: When was the last time you were excited to give to the Lord?

PRAYER: Lord, may I grow to love and trust you more each day and thus be a cheerful giver.

WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF THE FELLOWSHIP GROUPS?

God willing, the typical local church will see her congregation members grow old and by Providence, the younger more abled-bodied members will eventually take over the helm. Our reading today portrays a beautiful picture of the possible relationship between the older and the younger generations of a faithful church. The older men will be sober, serious minded, in control of his emotions, not easily angered, strong in faith, loving and patient towards others. The older women will be holy, not gossipers, not worldly and indulgent and teachers of good things. The young women will also be sober, serious, not foolish, they will love their husbands and their children with godly and selfless love, they will be wise in their words, pure, keepers at home, obedient to their husbands. Young men are likewise to be sober minded. If all were as described, then we truly have a “heaven on earth” found in the church. There is, however, one important note to be mentioned in our discourse and it is found in verse 4; teaching. This is a responsibility laid upon the older, that they will teach the younger. This is the role that belongs to the older, however, we have to also note that the older must himself or herself be mature in the faith, apt to teach the Word of God and fruitful in the things of the Spirit before he can be the teacher. Likewise, the younger must himself be humble and teachable before he can learn from the older.

In many ways, this is what Fellowship groups of the local church are meant to achieve. Such groups are organized to help believers grow in the faith through mutual encouragement and the learning of God’s Word. Instruction is designed to cater to issues that the particular age group of believers experience in life. The objective is to help young men and women to grow to be more holy, more temperate, more sober and faithful to God and those under their care. May the Lord continue to provide us with godly Fellowship groups.

THOUGHT: Does your fellowship group aspire towards the things mentioned?

PRAYER: Father, please continue to provide us with godly leaders and godly Fellowship groups.

WHAT IS THE MOST CRITICAL TASK OF SUCH GROUPS?

As we study biblical characters like Moses and Elijah we notice that there were episodes in their lives where they were made to spend time alone with God. It was not a time for fellowship with other saints. Instead God intended for them to experience the special building up of their faith during these times of solitude. Solitude with God is certainly a necessary part of every Christian's life. However, God never meant for the Christian to be always alone. Instead, He has made us creatures that require fellowship as part of our growth in the faith. In His wisdom, He created man to enjoy blessings that can only be found when two or more gather together. One such important blessing that comes from fellowship is found in our passage for today. Sin is described as deceitful; meaning, if one is not careful and watchful, one can easily fall into sin. Sin is often very subtle. Furthermore, our passage tells us that with the deceitfulness of sin, one can also become hardened; meaning, being in a state where one is no longer willing to repent or no longer feel the burden of sin. This is a sad and fearful state to be in and is described as like the dog returning to its vomit (2 Peter 2:22). If the person is a true believer, chastisement from the Lord will surely come his way. But we can avoid this state. The remedy that is given to us here is the mutual exhortation of saints on a daily or regular basis. Because of the nature of sin and of our hearts, we need others to observe the falling away in us and to point them out. We often ignore or lose sight of our spiritual state and others who know us well, can point out our slipping spiritual states.

Fellowship groups are meant to fulfill this task. It is an organized group where believers can come together to help one another. Of course, fellowship is not only about pointing out the sin of others, it also allows for opportunities to show your love and care as you encourage and build one another up in the faith. When one is down, the other is there to pull him or her up. When both are happy, then both can sing praises to the Lord together. God is pleased when believers come together in humility and mutual care and concern for one another. May you discover the joy of fellowship as the Lord has meant it to be.

THOUGHT: Is your best friend a Christian?

PRAYER: Lord, please give me godly friends and help me to be one too.

SO THEN WHY NOT JUST RELY ON PASTORS TO EXHORT?

The friendships and fellowship among Christians is often not very ideal. Often, fellow believers end up in disagreement and quarrel. Why is this so? This is due simply to sin. Pride and selfishness are often the main causes for disunity and unhappiness among saints. We often provoke one another to anger instead of love by our sinful ways. That should not be. This is not what God requires of believers. Our passage today appears to be a simple verse but yet it is not easy to achieve. We are commanded to provoke one another, not into anger, but instead into “love and to good works”. That means, we are to cause others to become more loving and to be motivated to do good. Instead of pride and sin, we are to help one another to love more and do good for one another. This applies mutually, which means, both the giver and receiver are to influence one another positively. You provoke me and I provoke you to love more and to be drawn to do good works as an expression of God’s love. Our love for Christ should be why we seek to do this. Our motivation to help one another should be first that Christ has done greatly for us unworthy sinners. If Christ can love us, why do then not love others? A friendship that is based on one another seeking to help the other to be more loving and more desirous to do good for Christ would be a truly wonderful friendship that is precious. There will be humility and a desire for the good of the other and there will be true peace and joy.

If practiced, godly fellowship will form a unique aspect of the growth of a Christian. Such aids to faith are only found between a personal relationship of two or more saints. It cannot be replaced by the preacher over the pulpit. While preaching and teaching form a very important part of a Christian’s life, it cannot replace the benefits of mutual fellowship between saints. Fellowship is unique and special and cannot be replaced.

THOUGHT: What is a Christian like without friends?

PRAYER: Father, help to understand the need for me to fellowship with saints and help me to see the beauty of it too.

WHAT IF I FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE REBUKING OTHERS?

It is never nice to have to tell someone that he or she is in the wrong. Often, the person reacts unpleasantly and the one who does the rebuking is hurt in the process. Very few possess the humility to accept a rebuke in a godly manner. On the other hand, the person who rebukes can sometimes lack love and meekness thus making the situation worse than it should be. It is not infrequent to hear of friendships severed as a result. Nonetheless, as we can see from today's passage, correcting the fault of a brother is commanded in Scripture. Although many of us find it something that is difficult to do, God does require us to continue to persevere at it. James explains that the act will benefit the person greatly even to the extent of rescuing his soul from death. Without your act of correction, that person may continue to commit a multitude of sins. Your act of correction can be used by God to turn him around and is actually a blessing to him. Proverbs 27:6 tells us that faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy is deceitful. A true friend will tell us when we are in error even when it hurts.

However, before we go about to rebuke others, we must bear in mind some principles taught in God's Word. Christ teaches in Matthew 18:15 that the rebuke should be done alone. This will save the person embarrassment. Galatians 6:1 tells us that we must correct in meekness. Our own hearts should be filled with humility. And as we do so, we must be reminded that we are just as vulnerable to falling ourselves and we should be therefore compassionate and be always humble. Romans 15:1 exhort us who are stronger to bear those who are weaker. We must possess the attitude of care and love for those who are weaker and who offend. Proverbs 15:1 teaches us to be careful of the word spoken in anger. It is better to refrain from rebuking while in anger. Instead, do so only when you are calmer and less emotional. In addition, we must be careful not to judge. It is easy to do so given our wicked hearts and we easily forget that we are weak ourselves and that judgement belongs to God (Matthew 7:3-5 and Romans 12:19). Finally, remember to pray and ask God for strength and wisdom to rebuke correctly.

THOUGHT: Are we rebuking out of anger or love?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to rebuke in love.

WHY MUST I PRAY FOR OTHERS?

There are times in our lives when we are found in a state of weakness where for some reason, we may find it hard to pray for ourselves. It may be that we are in a state of deep despondency or sadness so much so that we actually turn away from God perhaps because we blame Him for our difficult situations. Sometimes, we are found in severe sickness and affliction and can hardly stay out of bed or even stay awake for too long. Or, it may be sin in our lives, where we find it hard to repent and abandon our state of disobedience. It is during such times, that we need others to intercede for us before the Throne of Grace. When we are weak, others who are stronger can help us. It would be sad if others do not help. By approaching the Almighty Father on our behalf, we can be saved from our poor states with God's help. With God, all things are possible. The sick can be healed. The sinner's heart be changed and he can repent and turn to God. Those undergoing trials can receive strength and faith to overcome trials triumphantly.

Indeed, scripture reaffirms this aspect of Christian fellowship of interceding for one another (Colossians 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, Hebrews 13:18). Praying for others is not only encouraged but also commanded. This should be an activity that is done frequently, hence the place for weekly Prayer Meetings at the church. At Prayer Meeting, the needs of church members, family members and friends are collected and prayed over together. By doing so, we bring before God the needs of others. This is what we can do as an expression of love and concern for others. However, praying for others need not be confined to Prayer Meeting only. Just being with our friends we can know what needs they have and we can remember to bring them before God for their sakes. Many great men and women of God have professed how God met their greatest hour of need rather mysteriously which has since been attributed to a someone praying secretly for them without their knowledge. Thank God for moving others to pray for us!

THOUGHT: How often do you pray for others?

PRAYER: Father, help me to love others as myself.

HOW CAN I HELP OTHERS WHEN I CAN'T HELP MYSELF?

Few of us can say we live life free of troubles. In fact, most of us have many trials and difficulties every day. Just getting through a typical school day is trying. Schoolwork is demanding, friends are not always kind, teachers not always fair. It is not easy. On top of the daily grind, some may even be confronted with especially difficult trials like a family member down with a severe illness, or father losing his job, or a calamity happening to someone close. Just as Job observed in Job 5:7; “.. man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward”. This is what this life holds for all while there is sin in the world. However, for the Christian, it is different. Yes, we continue to face difficulties; however, we are not without help or hope. There is God’s Almighty hand that continues to ensure that all things that occur to His children, happen for our ultimate good and will never be beyond our ability to cope (1 Corinthians 10:13). This is a promise He has given to us. It is with this in mind that we consider today’s passage. We are asked to help bear one another’s burdens. Yes, there are times when we ourselves cannot imagine helping others when we need help ourselves. But yet, this commandment does not come to us knowing that we cannot achieve it. We can still do it despite whatever difficulties befall the Christian. The second part of Galatians 6:2 tells us that by doing so, we fulfill the Law of Christ. The Law of Christ is to love our neighbor as ourselves. (John 15:17).

We may be experiencing pain at the moment, but we are encouraged to still look upon others and consider their plight and how they suffer too and see how we can help them. This calls for us to sympathize with others and to do what we are able to do to alleviate the suffering they experience. It can be in deeds of kindness, or simply words of encouragement and comfort, or it can be by prayer. We, for that moment, forget our own problems, and think of others before ourselves. This takes love and faith, knowing that God will never forsake us and in time deliver us too. In love, we seek to do what we can for others, trusting that God will take care of us.

THOUGHT: Are you really not able to help others?

PRAYER: Father, help me to love others as myself.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TAKE UP MY CROSS?

In the times of Jesus, the cross had a dreadful meaning and purpose. It was a crude tool of punishment and was meant to inflict the worst kind of physical torture possible on a human being before finally killing him. The cross was meant for the worst of criminals. To be convicted with crucifixion on the cross one had to exceed beyond the ordinary murder, robbery or rape. The crime had to be truly heinous and the criminal the worst of the worst. Punishment on the cross was not simple death, but a process of shame, mockery and degradation while the victim slowly dies, sometimes over a period of a few days. The cross was a great shame to the victim as well as his family and all who are related to him. If you were related to someone crucified, you would be mocked as well. When Jesus spoke to the disciples about the cross, it must have brought a shudder of fear in their hearts. Some of them may even have harboured the thought of why Christ would want them to bear shame and dishonour instead of glory and honour. Why are they called to bear something so despicable? Is not this the promised Messiah, the Son of God? Why does He speak about bearing shame for Him and even be prepared to be put to death for His sake? However, this is exactly what Christ requires of believers. We are to deny our wants and desires, our comforts and things we hold dearly and even be ready for the ultimate sacrifice of our lives if the need arises. We are to be ready to lose everything for the sake of Christ and Christ spoke of being ready to bear this daily. We have to deny ourselves daily. This is not a one-off resolution, but a consistent and constant effort to be renewed every day.

What do you hold on dearly to and refuse to surrender before Christ? What is it that you cling on to even though it dishonours our Lord? Is it your treasured past-time? Is it laziness? Is it the way you dress? Is it your desire for a new electronic gadget? Is it your foul language? Is it your pride and ego? If bearing the cross means denying yourself of all things that dishonour Christ for His sake, will you do it? Most of our problems are hardly "bearing the cross". They are mild in comparison. Yet, we are ready to disobey Christ for the sake of our little wants and desires. We have much to learn.

THOUGHT: Which is your strongest desire? Will you give it up if Christ asked you to?

PRAYER: God, please help me to love You more.

DOES GOD LOOK AT HOW MANY SOULS I SAVE?

Faithfulness of a Christian involves living one's life in full accordance to God's revealed will in His Word. There are various things that we are commanded to do according to God's Word. Leading an unsaved person to Christ is one of them, however, it is not the only one. So, does God measure us as Christians by how many souls we save? We know from scripture that salvation is not for us to give because it belongs only to the Lord (Jonah 2:9). We are commanded to bring God's saving Word to everyone who is unsaved, correctly and in its completeness. However, we do not have the power to convert the heart. Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. Hence, God does not measure us by how many souls we save. That being said, Christians are, nonetheless, still measured. 1 Corinthians 3:12 tell us our works as Christians will be considered when we appear before Christ. They can be "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble". We are also told that our works will be judged by fire where not unexpectedly, wood, hay and stubble will be consumed. Only works of gold and silver will last. What then are works that will last?

1 Corinthians 3:10, 11 speaks about taking heed to where we lay our foundations. If we lay the wrong foundation, whatever we build on top of this foundation will not last. The foundation refers to our motives. Verse 11 tells us the only correct foundation is Christ, which means that the only motive that is considered pure is one where we serve Christ and Christ alone. Hence, all that we do, what we build on top of this foundation must be to serve Christ alone. Not other men and not ourselves. Hence, ultimately, we are measured by whether our works are built on the correct foundations, whether our works are based on the correct motive and if they were done for Christ. Another point to note is found in Mark 9:41. Christ said that even by providing a simple cup of water in Christ's name, meaning done to serve Christ, will be rewarded. Hence, works are not measured by their size or number, but by their faithfulness. What does this mean to you? You should now seek to examine your motives for everything that you do, whether they are for Christ or not. You are "measured" by your faithfulness in everything that God has called you to do, whether it be your studies, your service in Church or even as a child to a parent. Be ye faithful!

THOUGHT: Why should I study hard?

PRAYER: Search my heart Lord, and show me Thy truth.

IS SERVICE MORE IMPORTANT THAN DOCTRINE?

The story of Cain and Abel as told in Genesis 4 is well known. Both Cain and Abel presented an offering to the Lord. Both were earnest and sincere. Both did so presumably as a service to the Lord and wanted to please Him. However, Cain's offering was rejected by God, while the offering of Abel was accepted. And we know that that made Cain very angry where he ultimately murdered Abel. Why was the offering of Cain rejected while that of Abel's accepted? 1 John 3:12 tells us that Cain's work was evil while that of Abel's was righteous. Hebrews 11:4 tells us that Abel's offering was done in faith while that of Cain was not. We know that true faith, which is accepted by God, can only be so if it is founded in truth. Faith that is not founded on God's truths cannot be true faith. In other words, Abel's offering was done in true faith. Abel had the correct understanding of what God required in an offering and ensured that the offering was done correctly. Abel knew God's will and obeyed it. On the other hand, Cain did not please God. No matter how sincere Cain might have been, his offering was not what God wanted, his offering was not done correctly, it was not according to God's will.

In a very similar way, we can err like Cain. Cain chose to serve God in the way that he taught was best, not what God required. He either did not know God's will or chose to ignore it. Either way, God rejected his work. In the same way, if we choose to serve God in the way we think is best and not according to how God has instructed us to do so, our service can similarly be rejected. Likewise, unless we know God's will, we cannot serve God correctly. No amount of service, no matter how sincere and selflessly wrought will make a difference before God. We must not be deceived to think otherwise. If we are to serve God, we must serve Him the way He desires and the correct way to serve Him is told to us in His Word. The better we know His Word, the more likely we can serve Him correctly.

THOUGHT: Why does one serve God in his own way and not God's way?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to be humble and to serve You in a manner that pleases You.

BUT I REALLY DO NOT HAVE TIME TO SERVE GOD?

Serving the Lord is never meant to be a bed of roses. Christ said in Luke 9:58 even the foxes and birds are better off than Christ Himself when it came to finding rest and comfort in this world. The Master Himself suffered, what more His servants. Christ was not giving His disciples, and us today, any delusions about the nature of serving God. It will not be easy and often times require sacrifice. Christ makes no apologies, and in fact, he admonishes and warns us against entering into service lightly. The question then beckons, why does one want to serve God in the first place? The role of the servant was exemplified by Christ Himself (Philippians 2:7,8). This was something Christ chose willingly so that the price of sin could be paid for our sakes (Matthew 20:28). Paul called himself a servant of Christ at the start of many of his epistles. 2 Corinthians 4:5 even speaks of Paul being willing to be the servant of man for Christ's sake. There is no doubt that we are saved to serve.

God calls Christians to be servants and Christ was the best example of this. So, yes, this is commanded of God, so does it mean that we are to serve God because we have no choice? Are we so ungrateful as to ask such a question? Knowing we owe Christ everything good that we have in this world and much more in the world to come, can our reply be “I have no time”? If God calls you to help in the YF, or to usher new comers, or serve in the kitchen, will you say “no”. Are our hearts so cold that we have forgotten to be grateful? Have we forgotten that we were once bound for eternal hell but Christ gave up heaven's glories to bare the cross in pain and agony so that we can be saved? Because of Him, we have hope in eternal glory alongside with Him as the sons of God. If we remember what Christ has done for us, serving Him will be our joy. If we understand the work of Christ, sacrificing all of ourselves is only a reasonable service. (Romans 12:1). God who considers us worthy to serve Him because of Christ would be nothing short of a privilege and honour on its own. It is because of this that Christ says the servant who is unwilling to serve, is not fit for the kingdom of heaven. The true Christian, will be grateful.

THOUGHT: Have you forgotten what Christ has done for you?

PRAYER: Father, help me never to forget what great a salvation you have wrought for me.

HOW IS ATTENDING SUNDAY SCHOOL SERVING GOD?

Have you ever wondered why God wants us to serve Him? Does He need our help? Why doesn't He just simply do all things by Himself? Why does He call us to be the bearers of the Gospel that has the power to save souls unto eternal life? Why doesn't He just appear in miraculous fashion before unbelievers and speak the gospel Himself? Actually, Christ did just that, but many remain faithless. Well, the fact is, God does not need an iota of our help. He, who created and rules the universe by His very word and command, does not need us to help Him in anyway. Then why does He call us to serve Him? The answer is simply because it is for our own sanctification and growth in the faith. There is nothing we can do that will help God in anyway. He does not need our help. By His wisdom and mercies, He determined for us to be involved in His work. By the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ, God counts us worthy to be instruments of the most high God. And by answering the call to serve Him in obedience, we are the ones to benefit as our faith grows.

How is attending Sunday School serving God then? Our passage today exhorts children to learn the fear of the Lord. What is the fear of the Lord? It is reverential fear and knowledge that God is all powerful and requires holiness in us. The same God takes account of any sin in our lives and does not take any of it lightly. If we learn the fear of the Lord, we learn true wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). A correct understanding of the fear of the Lord comes through regular and systematic study of His Word. To know God better, we have to know His Word better. Sunday school or any other ways where God's Word is taught faithfully is a good place to start. By attending Sunday school or Bible Study, it is in obedience to God and in that sense, we are serving Him. May your faith continue to grow and abound as you diligently seek after His Word.

THOUGHT: Many came to believe in the Lord through Sunday School.

PRAYER: Father, help me always to love your Word and to do whatever is necessary to learn and keep it.

“...that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.”

HOW IS ATTENDING PRAYER MEETING SERVING GOD?

We have considered the need to gather together as Christians and the need for mutual encouragement in earlier readings. In addition, we have also learnt the necessity of needing to pray for one another. Prayer meeting is a special time set aside so that many can gather together to pray for those in the church who are in need. By being part of this, you are showing Christian love and concern for others. All this already said, let us today now consider why we should pray. Firstly, it is commanded. Isaiah 55:6 commands that we seek the Lord in prayer while He may be found. Hebrews 11:6 exhorts us not only to seek Him but to do so “diligently”. Psalm 105:4 tells us that we may find strength from Him if we seek Him in prayer. He gives to us strength that our weary bodies and souls often cannot do without. But beyond simply being commanded or a necessity, prayer is a blessing in itself. Psalm 119:2 tells us of blessings to those who keep His testimonies and seek Him with the whole heart. God promises blessings when we pray and do so correctly according to His will. The Psalmist also speaks of joy that comes from seeking after the Lord. Prayer will lead to joy and peace so profound that it passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). In our passage for today, we know that God’s house is called the house of prayer which shows how important and central prayer is in the sight of God.

Often prayer is neglected in our lives. We pray so little when God’s Word says to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We hardly pray for one another and hardly come to pray together at prayer meeting. Do we have such a low view of prayer? To that, there is a warning. God will not always be ready to hear our prayers. Proverbs 1:28 says in that instance that God refused to hear the prayers of His people. We must not think that that too can happen to us if we persist in our rebellious ways. May you seek the Lord while He may be found.

THOUGHT: What if God shuts His ears from you?

PRAYER: Lord, may it be never so that I be found so steep in sin that Thou will not hear me anymore.

HOW COME I DON'T HAVE JOY IN SERVICE?

The walk of the believer should be characterized by joy. In Romans 14:17, Paul described what the kingdom of God is like; “.. is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”. As believers we are citizens of this kingdom and we should experience some measure of these characteristics in our lives. This is true joy and it is able to endure good or bad times. However, this joy can be lost, even for the Christian. How so? Joy can be lost when we are in sin. (Psalm 38:3). But how is this also true in the area of service? We can lose joy in service when we serve amiss which means that we are not serving God the way that He has required of us to do. Do note that sincerity alone does not make our service acceptable to God. It cannot be right in our sight, instead it must be right in His sight. If we are to serve Him, we are to serve Him in the manner that He has taught us from His Word. Being familiar with God’s Word allows us to not only know what God requires but also to understand who God is. That helps us know how to serve God correctly.

There are many possible causes for serving amiss. Most commonly known to the author is that of serving man instead of God. Note, however, that it is also possible that the “man” mentioned here could be oneself. Your ideas on how to serve Christ may take precedence over what God requires. You end up doing things by your own wisdom and not according to God’s Word. Also, you may be guilty of putting more weight in your own ideas than those of others when God’s Word tells us to be humble and to look more highly on others than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). The consequences of serving God amiss can be quite serious. Romans 14:23 tells us that anything that is “not of faith is sin”. If we serve God without faith which includes our obedience, we actually sin against Him. The consequences of serving Him amiss will be more than just a loss of personal joy, but many around us will be hurt especially when one is called into position of leadership. Hence, we must be very careful with our motives when we serve God. If we lack joy, we must reflect and study our hearts for it is most likely due to serving God amiss.

THOUGHT: When was the last time I searched my heart for wrong motives?

PRAYER: Father, show me where I have sinned against Thee.

DO YOU FEEL UNREWARDED FOR SERVING GOD?

Serving God can be trying. It can be tedious at times when we have to labour to ensure various ministries under our care run smoothly. Other times, it can be a real trial when we encounter difficult people and there are also moments when our faith is tested to its limits where we wonder if God cares when we suffer for His name's sake. As we read earlier, Christ warned His followers in Matthew 8:20 about how serving Him will not be a bed of roses. The person who decides to serve the King of kings, must count the cost and be willing to suffer loss. Yet, we find many passages of Scripture telling us that following after God is not as bad as it seems. Yes, there will be trials and difficulties, but along with it there will also be great blessings. In Psalm 84:11 it is promised that God will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly. 1 Peter 5:10 adds a great encouragement when it says that after we have suffered a while, God plans to “make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you”. Ephesians 2:7 speaks of the riches of God's grace and kindness for His people as being “exceeding”. Even as we step forward to serve Him, 2 Corinthians 9:8 promises us that God will not only give us the grace, but will give it in abundance such that we will not be lacking in any way and be able to accomplish each duty to its best. Galatians 6:9 further exhorts not be weary of well doing because at the right time by God's appointment, we will see the fruits of our labour. Although our passage for today starts with an exclamation of discouragement in service, blessed are those who continue to read on, because in the subsequent verses, we read of the greatest of encouragements to those who serve faithfully. Our names will be written into “the book of remembrance” and we will be counted as “jewels” in the sight of God. Yes, the rewards will be eternity with God and we will be very dear in the sight of God.

We must not be overly despondent when we suffer in our service. Instead, we must remember the many precious promises God has made to the faithful and know that God has a special place in His heart for those who faithfully serve Him.

THOUGHT: Do you know of any faithful servant of Christ who died in regret?

PRAYER: Father, encourage my weary heart.

DO YOU GIVE YOUR BEST IN SERVING GOD?

In our passage today, God gave Moses the manner in which the people of Israel were to bring to God their sacrifices. Their sacrifices were meant to seek God’s forgiveness of sins committed and God required them to be prepared in a very specific way. The particular detail that was required in our reading today is that “there must be no blemish” found in the animals. Which means, that the animals must not have any scars or be born with some kind of deformity or imperfection. In that sense, it has to be perfect. That was what God required. There are some reasons for this. Firstly, the sacrifice was meant to be a “type” of Christ; meaning, it was meant to represent Christ. As God required a perfect sacrifice for our sins, in the same way, Christ was perfect and completely free of sin and hence His death was sufficient to take away our sins forever. Another meaning that can be drawn from this requirement is the fact that the person who brings the sacrifice would need to bring the best from his fold. Of all the animals he had, he had to choose the best. This would mean sacrifice on his part as such a sacrifice would be costly. The sacrifice can also be understood as our service to the Lord.

Often times, we bring God our leftovers. We serve the Lord only during our free time, we treat serving God as a recreation or leisure activity to be replaced when something “important” crops up. Our main pre-occupations, our studies take first place. Our friends, hobbies and favourite leisure activities are more important than what God calls us to do. This should not be the way to serve God. God requires the best from us. Just as He required sacrifices without blemish, He expects that we give Him our best efforts. We should serve Him with the best of our efforts and resources. We should do as good if not a better job than what we do in other areas of our lives. We often forget that serving God is actually the highest order of work we can do. We should feel privileged that God even finds us worthy to be His servants. May we understand the significance of the high calling of serving the King.

THOUGHT: Why does God bother to call us to serve Him?

PRAYER: Father, help me to see the privilege of serving You.

“...unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH?

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

So, God gave various leaders to the church “to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ”. We are the “saints”! And the leaders are there to equip us to serve God, so that everybody (every member of the church, not only leaders!) can play a part in “building up” the church!

One commentator explains it very well!

“What model of the church, then, should we keep in our minds? The traditional model is that of the pyramid, with the pastor perched precariously on its pinnacle, like a little pope in his own church, while the laity are arrayed beneath him in serried ranks of inferiority. It is a totally unbiblical image, because the New Testament envisages not a single pastor with a docile flock but both a plural oversight and an every-member ministry. Not much better is the model of the bus, in which the pastor does all the driving while the congregation are the passengers slumbering in peaceful security behind him. Quite different from either the pyramid or the bus is the biblical model of the body. The church is the body of Christ, every member of which has a distinctive function.”

“So Christ’s immediate purpose in the giving of pastors and teachers to his church is through their ministry of the word to equip all his people for their varied ministries. And the ultimate purpose of this is to build up his body, the church. For clearly the way the whole body grows is for all its members to use their God-given gifts” God gives everyone of His children certain gifts. Think – what gift has God given you? Can you use this gift to serve God – whether in the church, or at home, or in school?

THOUGHT: In the church of God, the unemployment rate should be 0%! Are you unemployed, or are you using your gifts to labour for God and His church?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to see my role in your church, and help me to do the best I can for the church.

“And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them”

IS THE CHURCH A PHYSICAL BUILDING?

The word “church” can mean two things: 1. A church building 2. A gathering of Christians. In our daily lives, we usually use the word to refer to the church building (“I’m going to church!”)

However, in the New Testament, the word “church” usually refers to a local congregation (never a church building), and sometimes to the “universal church” (i.e. all the Christians all over the world, throughout the ages!)

In the verse today, we read, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

So, we are all stones that build up the house of God. We are lively (i.e. living, not dead) stones, because we are spiritually alive (and so we are a “spiritual house”) and this life comes from our Lord Jesus! “House” here refers to the temple of God – so Christians are a new temple of God guided by the Holy Spirit.

Peter also describes us as an “holy priesthood”. “Holy” means that we are separate from the world, and we obey God’s instructions. We are “priests” because we offer sacrifices to God.

“Sacrifice” means “giving up of something valuable”. Have you given up anything valuable to God? How about your time or your hobby? Instead of spending time “doing your own thing”, do you spend time “doing God’s thing”?

THOUGHT: We may think of our service to God as sacrifice, but think again – whatever we have comes from God, and what we give Him is only our giving back to Him what belongs to Him. Is this sacrifice?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to have “the mind of Christ”, so that I will see things from the right perspective, so that I will love you so much that I no longer consider a sacrifice as sacrifice, but as something that I will joyfully offer back to you – because you have given us the greatest gift of all – our Lord Jesus Christ!

"that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God..."

DO I HAVE TO BEHAVE MYSELF IN CHURCH THEN?

We read in these 2 verses today, "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth".

This is a letter from Paul to Timothy. Paul calls him "my own son in the faith". Don't you think it's so wonderful – the Bible is not a dry book of doctrine, but we can feel the love of God through its pages. Here, we can feel the love that Paul has for Titus – the battle-scarred, aged apostle for the young pastor.

He wrote the letter to teach Timothy to be a good pastor! He wrote the letter because he could not be with Timothy. So, by the providence of God, we have this letter which teaches us so many precious truths. I am sure Paul wanted every pastor to study this epistle diligently, and learned from Paul the importance of right doctrine, how to conduct public worship, how to select deacons and elders etc!

Apart from all these "official" issues, Paul also taught Timothy how to "behave" (or conduct) himself in the church.

So, if the pastor has to learn how to "behave" himself in the church, do you have to do the same? When you "misbehave" – remember where you are – in the "house of God... the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth".

We try to behave ourselves in school. All the more we should conduct ourselves well in church.

THOUGHT: How can we "behave" ourselves well in church? This comes from knowing "the whole counsel of God"!

PRAYER: Lord, help me always to be conscious of the great responsibility that I have as a child of God, and behave myself appropriately – to the praise and glory of Thy Name – always!

"Christ is the head of the church."

WHO IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH?

If you're asked the question, "who is the head of the church", I'm sure you can answer the question correctly, right? You'd even say, "hey! that's too simple a question! – the head of the church – yes, our Lord Jesus Christ" – and you'd be right! Read Ephesians 5:23: "Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body".

But if you ask Pastor Joseph Prince – you'll get a different answer! Have you heard of Joseph Prince? He's the senior pastor of New Creation Church (one of the 3 biggest churches in Singapore). In one of his sermons, he said "if you are the body of christ, the head represents the under shepherd, the pastor of the church". What blasphemy!

Why did he say so? To understand this, you can watch his sermon online, and see how this false shepherd twisted the word of God for his own benefit (the bible calls this "filthy lucre").

That's what he said, "Every blessing of god, the church can only go as far as their leaders are blessed", "Every blessing of god first comes on the head and then comes on the leadership and then comes on the entire body of Christ."

What he was saying is: the more the church members give of their offerings, the more they will be blessed, but it is the head (the pastor and leaders of the church) who must be blessed (be enriched) first before the members can receive their blessings!

In contrast to the false shepherd Joseph Prince, what did Paul say? "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Beware of false prophets, wolves in sheep's clothing.

THOUGHT: Be discerning, like the Bereans. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17:11)

PRAYER: Lord, help me to remember always to focus on You, and not idolize any human leaders.

“Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it”

HOW PRECIOUS IS THE CHURCH TO GOD?

The book of Ephesians is very much loved (among other things) for Paul’s grand vision for the church, and its detailed instructions on interpersonal relationships (husband and wife, parents and children etc). In Ephesians 5:25, we read, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it”.

Read this verse carefully, and think....

If you go to the bookshops, you can find many books on personal relationships, especially between husbands and wives. Most of the books are based on secular psychology. What we have in this passage is a much grander vision! Whether it’s how we deal with our parents, our siblings or our friends, we should base our relationship with the realization of what our Lord Jesus has done for us!

What has he done for us? Peter explained in more detail in his First Epistle:

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”. (1 Peter 1:17-19)

Yes, we are redeemed by the “precious blood of Christ” – this is the thought that should inspire us, everyday! If that is the case, what should we do? Peter says, “pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Peter 1:16b) – this can be translated as “conduct yourselves with fear”. This refers to the whole pattern of our lives!

We forget very easily what Jesus has done for us. Remind yourselves often that you have been redeemed by “the precious blood of Christ”.

THOUGHT: Our lives should be a daily hymn of thanks to God. The motivation for all we do should be love and gratitude.

PRAYER: Saviour, Thy dying love Thou gavest me. Nor should I aught withhold, dear Lord, from Thee. In love my soul would bow, my heart fulfill its vow, Some offering bring Thee now, something for Thee.

"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH ELDERS?

One of the most touching passages in the Bible comes from Acts 20, which relates the farewell message of Paul to the Ephesian elders. Read through the whole passage in verses 18-35. Paul realized that this was probably the last time he would see them ("And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.").

Why was Paul so concerned about the church in Ephesus? Read what Paul said, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them".

So what was Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders?

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood".

"The Ephesian pastors must first keep watch over themselves, and only then over the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made them responsible. For they cannot care adequately for others if they neglect the care and culture of their own souls. They are to be 'shepherds' of God's church. The word "feed" translates the Greek word "poimano" which means to 'tend' a flock and in particular 'to lead a flock to pasture, and so to feed it".

What does a shepherd do? If you want to know, read Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (i.e. I shall lack nothing)) – memorise the 6 verses, understand them, and "hide" them in your heart. Then you'd know what a wonderful God (the chief Shepherd) we have, and how the elders (the under-shepherds) should look after the church like how the Good Shepherd looks after His sheep!

Knowing what a good elder/pastor should be, we should love, respect and pray for them.

THOUGHT: Should all church members have the qualities expected of the elders?

PRAYER: I thank God for faithful elders and pastors who teach us, boldly and faithfully, the truth, so we can learn to know and love you more and more each day!

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour...”

HOW DO I RELATE TO THE ELDERS IN SERVICE?

Today’s passage comes from Paul’s letter to young Timothy: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” What does this verse teach us about “how to I relate to the elders in service”?

First, we should be discerning and see whether our elder “rule well”! We pray that we have godly, responsible elders in our church who “rule well”. Some members may take election lightly, and put a tick on every election slip! Some do it because they don’t know their elders, and so have no idea whether they “rule well”! Some members take things “personally”, and vote for those whom they know well personally, “as a favour to them”. But the church is the “body of Christ” which He “purchased with his own blood”! It is not a clubhouse. We should do God’s business God’s way!

Secondly, we should pay respect to everybody (“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” Philippians 2:3). But we should especially honour and respect our elders.

How does it work out in practice?

When you come to church on Sunday, don’t run away from the elders! Many young people try to avoid eye contact with the adults, especially the elders! It can be very discouraging to them. Go up to them and say a “good morning”! It’s your way of honouring God!

Be a faithful Christian yourself. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). A godly elder has the glory of God as his aim everyday (“the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him foerever), and he would have great joy to see our teens glorify God in their daily lives! When you see an elder coming your way, don’t turn the other way, or pretend you don’t see him!

THOUGHT: Do we have elders who “rule well” in our church? Do we honour them?

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for godly elders, who serve you faithfully and teach us the word of truth with love.

“Know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord,...”

HOW SHOULD I RELATE TO OTHER LEADERS IN CHURCH?

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you”.

In this verse, Paul used three expressions to describe the church leaders.

Firstly, these leaders “labour among you”. “Labour” in this verse means work hard. This hard work is not only physical (spending their free time in serving the church, instead of on their pleasures and hobbies) but also spiritual (studying God’s word diligently, knowing the church members, and praying for them).

Secondly, they are “over you”. “Christian leaders are those who are over you in the Lord. True, the very first thing which needs to be said about Christian ministers of all kinds is that they are “under” people (as their servants) rather than “over” them (as their leaders, let alone their lords). The chief characteristic of Christian leaders is humility not authority, and gentleness not power. Nevertheless, authentic servant-leadership still carries an element of authority”.

Thirdly, “admonish you”. This of course refers to church discipline.

So – how should I relate to the leaders?

Firstly, “know” them. The bible refers to the church as the “household of God”. This is a lovely picture! A church should not be a place where you just slip in on Sunday morning, and slip out again after service, without knowing or talking to anybody else! We should regard other members as part of the family, and we can do so only if we “know them”.

Secondly, verse 13 says we should “esteem” them i.e. respect them.

Many of us are too shy to get to know people. But for the sake of our Lord, we should “know” and “esteem” our church leaders.

THOUGHT: Do our leaders “labour” (work hard) for the church? Do they admonish us when we go wrong? (Or are they trying to be too nice?)

PRAYER: Lord, I pray that our leaders would be godly and labour with love for your church, and that I would play my part in encouraging them.

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”

WHAT IF I FIND IT DIFFICULT TO SUBMIT TO LEADERS?

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”

What goes through your mind when you read this verse? Would you ask yourself, “it’s OK to ask us to obey our leaders, but what if our leaders teach us and ask us to do the wrong things? Should we still obey, should we still submit?”

That was my thought! Is it wrong? No – what we must realize that we should never interpret the Bible in isolation – we must read it in context, and with the knowledge of the Bible as a whole.

In this case, there are other passages in the Bible that teach us to be discerning, and not be led blindly. Remember what we learned the other day – who is the head of the church? Not Pastor Joseph Prince but our Lord Jesus Christ!

“The clear recognition of authoritative leadership is essential for the harmony and effective administration of any group. Just as the New Testament does not encourage undiscerning obedience, neither does it teach unintelligent submission.... The Scripture does not teach, encourage, or exemplify submission of this sort. It is bad for the one who practises it in that it discourages personal accountability to the Lord God, a mark of true Christian maturity.” (Raymond Brown)

We thank God for godly faithful pastors and leaders in our church, who “watch over our souls”, and we should give them joy (rather than grief them with our disobedience and disrespect) eg by coming for worship services punctually, and living lives that glorify God).

Pray that our church leaders be faithful to God. Then it’s our joy to obey and submit to them.

THOUGHT: The Christian is answerable to God alone. His obedience and submission to leadership is in obedience to God – it’s a discerning and wise obedience.

PRAYER: Lord, teach us to be discerning and submissive, as we submit to Thy authority in all that we do.

*“Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven:
and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

WHAT AUTHORITY DOES THE CHURCH HAVE OVER ME?

Verse 18:18 is part of a passage Matthew 18:15-20 on how to deal with a church members who “trespass against thee”. Do read the whole passage, and you will learn how to deal with this fairly frequent problem! Remember, many mistakes and many enemies are made unnecessarily just because Christians do things “their own way”, and not follow the instructions in the Bible (we must learn to have the “mind of Christ”) – and we will only “grieve” the Holy Spirit.

So what should we do with somebody in church who “trespass against thee”. First, “go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone” (we don’t want to create a hooah – unnecessary commotions!).

If that doesn’t work, then “take with thee one or two more” (witnesses) for multiple testimony. And if that still doesn’t work, then the whole thing becomes public: “tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” i.e. excommunicated.

Then we come to today’s key verse: “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” “Binding” and “loosing” means “allowing” and “disallowing”. “Jesus gives that authority to leaders of his church, but we betide them if they exercise it amiss. Church regulations affect immortal members of the body of Christ. They can do great good or harm. It is a responsibility that requires the greatest love, tact and thoughtfulness.” (Michael Green) The church is a family, and the leaders, like the father in a house, have the responsibility to do their best for the members, but also the responsibility to exercise discipline.

THOUGHT: Are the leaders of our church too “pampering”, only saying nice words? Or do they love us so much that they would exercise discipline when necessary?

PRAYER: Lord, we pray for the leaders of our church that you will grant them the love for us that they would teach us the truth, and also to be discerning and practise “tough love” when it’s in Thy will.

"Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught..."

MUST PASTORS "ATTACK" THOSE WHO PERVERT GOD'S WORD?

"Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake."

Paul's epistle to Titus is one of the "pastoral letters" (the others are 1 and 2 Timothy), written to give instructions to young pastors. You can imagine it must have been difficult for Titus and Timothy to be "strict" and teach God's word faithfully, when many of the church members were much older than them – remember, in the society at that time, age and seniority was very important!

So Paul had to encourage them not only to "hold fast" the word of God, and teach "sound doctrine" – but also to "attack" those who pervert the word of God ("teaching things which they ought not") so that they can earn more money.

It has been difficult for me to believe that there are preachers who are out there just to earn more money! But as I grow older and "see more things", I have to say that the Bible is true – there are indeed such people around. They can be excellent speakers. They may even know their Bible in a way (but quoting the verses out of context, misinterpreting them for their own benefits). The result of their ministry is that they "subvert whole houses".

I have heard people from other churches who complain that our pastors "keep attacking others"! But now, you see – our pastors are just doing what Paul has taught Titus to do – to be faithful "watchmen" for the house of God!

We should be faithful watchmen too! We should know God's word so well that we can be the watchmen for our friends.

THOUGHT: What would you answer when your friends say they will never come to our church, as our pastors are too "fierce" and keep on attacking others?

PRAYER: Lord, give us the discernment to know when to defend Thy Word, and the right spirit to do it with love.

“the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself”

WHAT DOES THE LORD DEMAND FROM HIS CHURCH?

Read this verse from Deuteronomy, and you might feel “peculiar/weird”! How can we be the “weird” people of God?

Of course, this is not what the Bible means! It is here that we must brush up our King James English! You go and check a good dictionary and you will see the explanation:

“Peculiar” means 1. strange or odd, 2. (peculiar to) belonging exclusively to.

It’s also time to learn a bit of Latin (many English words originated from the Latin language). My dictionary says that “pecu” in Latin means cattle, from which is derived the word “peculium” (which means property). This then is borrowed into English to mean something like our treasured possession.

So you can see that we, the children of God (who have believed in Jesus as our Saviour) are His treasured possession – what a wonderful thought!

But, with privilege comes responsibility! So the answer to the question today (“what does the Lord demand from His church”) is that we should be holy, that we should be different from non-believers, that we should be “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14).

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

God does not demand from us what He can and will give us!

THOUGHT: Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to live a holy life so that I can be a good witness to those around you of your love.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 28

Matthew 12:50

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

HOW CLOSE ARE THE TIES WITH CHURCH BRETHREN?

When you read the Bible, have there been times when you are shocked by what it says? If you have not, you must have been sleeping through your reading!

Read the verse for today – isn’t it shocking? Then you’d have to ask yourself, “what does it mean”? To understand it, you have to read the whole passage, Matthew 12:46-50. We read that, as Jesus was talking to “the people”, His mother and brothers sought to speak to Him. It provided Jesus the opportunity to teach us that, when we are converted, it’s not only us who are changed (“new creature”), but our relationships with others have also changed thoroughly!

“It is one of the very painful things to note in the life of Jesus that members of his family seem constantly to have misunderstood him and opposed him ... here his mother and his brothers are poignantly described as outside. The situation was wonderfully changed by the beginning of Acts, where we find his mother and his brothers gathered with his disciples in the upper room in prayerful fellowship, waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit”.

I must confess – if you take this seriously, this is hard to understand and experience! But I am glad to testify that as I mature as a Christian, I have come to feel more and more that my brothers and sisters in Christ (especially those who really love God) are closer to me than my own parents and siblings. Do you feel so?

Get to know your Christian brothers and sisters (and “aunties” and “uncles”) well! Love them as you love your family members (even more!)

THOUGHT: “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)

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to know and love fellow Christians as my family.

*“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners,
but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God”*

HOW CAN WE BE CLOSE TO THOSE WE DON'T KNOW?

How would you answer the question for today?

I must say this is a difficult question! But first we should pay attention to the verse – it says that we are “fellow citizens”. All who believe and trust in Jesus are in the Kingdom of God – and so are “fellow citizens”! But (even better?) we are members of the same family! Do you feel that? When you meet your fellow believers, do you see them as your brothers and sisters?

Now to answer the question. I would like to illustrate it with personal experience. Most of us are rather shy, and reluctant to speak to ‘strangers’, even fellow church members. This is partly due to our Asian culture! I am like that too – but I have tried to be more active in church, attending bible studies, discussion classes and have attended almost all the church camps over the years. Through all these, I have learned to get to know more members of the church and have appreciated the fellowship!

In my professional life as a doctor, I have worked with many other doctors both in Singapore and outside. Just this week, I have got to know an Indonesian doctor much better. He is a Christian brother, and he told me about his love for Jesus and his service of love for Him. We prayed together that we would be able to be good testimony for God through our work in looking after our patients. The bond that has developed between us is certainly special, closer than the bond I have for most other colleagues in Singapore, even in my own department. It is God’s love that has drawn us together, and we have a common vision of serving God through our professional vocations!

Now – can you answer the question better now? (how can we be close to those we don’t know?)

THOUGHT: Isn’t it wonderful that we have our new family in Christ?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to be a good member of this new family!

“that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.”

HOW DO I SHARE WITH THOSE I DON'T KNOW?

Have you read the book of Romans before? If you are like me (till recently), you would say, “tough book. Difficult to understand. Very abstract. It’s easier to read the gospels!” And you’re right! (to a certain extent) – yes, Romans is tough, and the arguments in the book can be rather complex.

But, at the same time, it is also a very intimate letter. You can see the heart of Paul when you read the book – how he loves the brethren in Rome! Chapter 16 (the last chapter) is especially revealing – here you read “I commend unto you Phoebe our sister”, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus, Who have for my life laid down their own necks”, and so on, and so on!

So Paul (even though he had not been to Rome when he wrote the epistle to the Romans) already knew some of the members of the church in Rome. But in verse 1:12 he wrote, “that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me”. He was explaining why he wrote the letter (and aren’t we glad that he wrote this letter which is such a profound proclamation of the gospel!) – to be “mutually encouraged” by each other’s faith. Even though he was such a great apostle, he knew that he could still learn from the Christians in Rome. So, he was very keen to “share” with them.

So, “how do we share with those we don’t know”? I think we can say – Jesus has broken down the wall among believers, and we know one another through Him. What a joy it is to meet another Christian brother and sister who truly loves Jesus. Jesus has broken down the barrier, so we can share freely with one another. Most people are by nature shy. Let Jesus take away the shyness. Get to know your brothers and sisters in Christ, and learn to share and encourage one another.

THOUGHT: It is sin that keeps people apart. Remember Adam and Eve? When they fell, they blame each other. Christ has redeemed us, so we can share freely, and encourage one another in the knowledge of Him.

PRAYER: Lord, break down more and more of the barriers between You and me each day, so I would know and love You better, and to share this love and knowledge with your other children.

“Pray unceasingly.”

HOW CAN I AID THE LEADERS OF THE CHURCH?

“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.”

Today’s two verses come from Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians. Can you remember what happened? Read Acts 17 – “they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures... and some of them believed... But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people”. This is a riot scene!

Paul and Silas managed to escape to Berea, and then Athens, and finally Corinth, where the two letters to the Thessalonians were written. So you can see – Paul had a tough time everywhere he went, because he was bold in his preaching! He told “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” (“free course”). No wonder he offended so many people (‘unreasonable and wicked men’), who wanted to kill him. But thank God there were also many who were touched by the word of God and believed (such that the word of God was “glorified”).

In our own church, we may not see our pastors in danger of being lynched! – but we know that many people have vilified them for their strong stand on God’s truth (eg on separation from those who preach a “watered-down” version of the gospel)! What should we do?

Pray for them – that those who oppose them would not have the chance to hinder their ministry of the word of God – that the word of God may be allowed to have its “free course” and be glorified (honoured).

Pray for our leaders that they will continue to hold on to the true faith, that our Lord may be glorified through their ministry.

THOUGHT: If the great Apostle Paul requested for prayers from the believers, all the more our own leaders need them!

PRAYER: Lord, may I always be faithful in constantly having our leaders in my prayers.

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