

October to December 2018
Teenz RPG Series on
“New Testament Survey”

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 Teenz RPG committee

WHAT DO THE WORDS NEW TESTAMENT MEAN?

“And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15). Let’s answer the question for today – What do the words “new testament” mean? We can say – that’s easy! – when we open our Bible, we see that it has two sections – the Old and the New Testaments! So there it is! But read the verse for today *“And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament...”* – and you can see that “new testament” can have another meaning. It also means *“new covenant”*. If there’s a *“new covenant”*, it’s logical to deduce that there must be an *“old covenant”* – and you’re right!

“Covenant” is a wonderful word. It means an agreement – in this case an agreement/treaty between God and man. It tells us that our God is not a remote, abstract God who has no love, no feeling towards his creation. Our God is a very “personal” God! But why do we need a “treaty” with God? Read the verse today and you’ll understand. We need a “treaty” because:

1. We are all sinners (we’ve all committed *“transgressions”*)
2. So we deserve condemnation (hell)
3. God loves us, and He knows that we cannot save ourselves from condemnation/hell
4. So, He sent His Son to die (*“by means of death”*) for us, to *“redeem”* us – Jesus is our *“Mediator”* – the One who makes peace between God and man
5. So that we can have His *“eternal inheritance”* (of salvation – justification, sanctification and glorification)

This is therefore what the whole of the New Testament is about - it is the fulfilment of God’s covenant or promise with His people, of how He sent his only begotten son the Lord Jesus Christ to die for our sins. Simply put, it is the whole gospel message! As believers in this present church age, we are all under this new covenant. However that does not mean that salvation in the past prior to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ was any different. We all looked to Christ by grace through faith. Through our study in the next few days, we will come to understand more of what this is all about.

Thought: Our God is a “personal” God. As His children, it is our joy to get to know Him more and more each day, as He is revealed in His word through the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to love Thy Word more and more each day.

WHAT IS THE COVENANT OF WORKS?

Before I came to know Jesus, I tried to understand the Christian faith intellectually (using the brain only, but not the heart) – I had many questions about the Bible, and this verse alone triggered off all sorts of questions:

1. *“one man”* - Is there such a person as Adam (didn't we evolve from apes?)
2. *“death by sin”* - Even if there's an Adam, why must he be punished so severely (banishment from the Garden of Eden, and from God's presence) for such a “tiny” sin?
3. *“all have sinned”* - It is Adam (and Eve) who committed the sin - why must we (assuming we are the descendants of Adam (and Eve)) be punished?

How do we understand and accept all these seemingly “unreasonable” propositions? “What is the covenant of works”? We read Genesis 3:3 *“But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.”*

God made an “agreement” (“covenant”) with Adam (and Eve) – a simple command. If they obey the command, they will have eternal life – if not, they will die. As the first man, Adam was what is known as our ‘federal head’, meaning he was our representative. If he obeyed the command and passed the test, then his descendants would all be able to enjoy eternal life. However, because he failed, then through him sin entered into the world, and we are all born in sin, condemned to death. You may say it is unfair, and question why we didn't get our own chance to choose. You may get upset with Adam – such a simple command, and you “blew it all”! Why, why, why? This just showed the sinfulness of man – right from the beginning. Probably none of use would have passed that test, for we too are weak and unable to make the right choices.

Yet with this covenant, it leaves the way open for a second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ to come as the perfect man, that by his death, we can receive the gift of righteousness through Him. Where Adam failed the test, Jesus passed it perfectly. Thus just as through Adam sin entered into the world, and death by sin, then through the death of one perfect man, we can all be made righteous!

Thought: The greatest of saints are those who feel themselves as the greatest of sinners

Prayer: Lord, forgive me for the many times I take Thy word lightly.

WHAT IS THE COVENANT OF GRACE?

“That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Today’s verse is the last verse in chapter 5 of the great book of Romans. In a way, Romans is the book of grace – in which Paul explains the great doctrine of grace. In the first part of Romans, Paul dealt with the problem of sin, resulting in death for all mankind. Remember the “covenant of work” that we learned yesterday – the covenant that God made with Adam and Eve?

From the fall of Adam, all human beings have been “infected” with sin, and all of us deserve to die. So how can any of us be saved?

You read the rest of the Old Testament (through Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, the “history books” and wisdom books, and right up to the prophets!) and you’d come to see glimpses of God’s plan of salvation – more and more clearly – His “covenant of grace”!

The first glimpse was in Genesis 3 – immediately after the fall, when God told Adam and Eve *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel”*. This is the first glimpse of our Savior, who will bruise the serpent’s head – defeat Satan and deliver us from our sin! In this covenant, the onus is no longer on man to obey, for by himself he can never save his soul! It is now all of grace, whereby it is a free gift of God. God himself will be the one to send the Lord Jesus Christ as the atonement for our sins, and He alone will through his death, be able to grant us the free gift. What free gift you may ask? It is that by believing in Him, we can have the righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Aren’t we glad that the glimpse has become a bright shining light, the light of our Lord Jesus Christ! Aren’t we glad that we are in this *covenant of grace*? This is a in which God does everything and promises everything, and bestows this “grace” (undeserved favor) to us – for which we don’t have to do anything (“not works”) but just trust in Him!

Thought: Grace is free – for us. But it costs the Son of God His life!

Prayer: I thank You, Lord, for giving us all things good and beautiful – especially the new life in Christ!

HOW IS THE NT A BETTER COVENANT?

The word “testament” (“diatheke”) is also translated “covenant”! Hebrews 7:22 tells us that So our Lord Jesus is the surety (“guarantor”) of a better covenant! So we ask, in what way is this testament or covenant better than the one before?

The author of Hebrews makes a comparison in the following verses, of the priests of the Old Testament, with Jesus Christ as the great High Priest. He proves beyond a shadow of doubt that Jesus is indeed far superior them, and in so doing proving that the covenant that we exist in now is a much better one. There were many priests in the past, as the mantle passed from one generation to another, and each generation passed from life into death. All who went to the priests in the past did not have any hope in the priests themselves, for they too had to face death. Jesus on the other hand, even after his death he rose again and continues forever and has an unchangeable priesthood. He lives, is eternal and does not change. All who come to Him can therefore have hope in His resurrection and have the confidence that He intercedes for us.

Furthermore, Jesus was different from the priests in that he is holy, perfect and sinless. He did not have to offer sacrifices for himself first before he could enter into the most holy place, like the priests had to do in the past. As the perfect man, Jesus was fully qualified to offer himself once and for all, and thereby acquiring the perfect righteousness necessary for our salvation. We can all have hope in Him, and know that our hope is sure.

The role of the priests of the Old Testament was therefore only as a channel to point men to Christ. They themselves could never save. Through their sacrifices and offerings, they foreshadowed the coming of the great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would one day come and offer himself once and for all. Therefore they had to continually offer up these sacrifices, both for themselves and for the people - what a chore! For us it is different. We have Christ who has paid it all! This is the better covenant that we are in right now, and for that we thank God!

Thought: Jesus is certainly better – he is “*without sin*” (Heb 4:15), and he had to offer the sacrifice (himself) only once! We need only look to Jesus for all our needs!

Prayer: Lord, help me to present my body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad"

ARE OT SAINTS INCLUDED IN THE NEW COVENANT?

The covenant of grace is not only for those who live after the time of Jesus, but also for Old Testament saints! They (Noah, Abraham, David etc) are all saved by the New Covenant, though they only had a glimpse of it!

Some of you may have learned that Hebrews 11 is the "chapter of faith". Verse 11:1 says, *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"*. The rest of the chapter talks about Enoch, Noah and Abraham, and also Rahab, David, Samuel etc. They are known as the heroes of faith. They were men and women of old who showed exemplary faith in God. This is despite the little revelation that they had of Him, having not had the completed Word of God that we have today. Nonetheless they believed in Him and lived their lives by this faith that they had.

And what of them? "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" This verse tells us clearly that even though they did not see Jesus Christ face to face, nor did they know exactly what the promises that they had received would result in, they believed by faith. By faith they look forward to the promise of a the coming seed, of the Messiah who would bring salvation and redemption to them. Though they died, they died in faith, having embraced the promises (covenant) of God! They all knew that their time on earth was but a sojourn, that they were strangers and pilgrims looking forward to the blessed hope and promise of eternity in a place far better.

Thus for all saints, both in the New and Old Testament, the method of salvation is the same - by grace through faith! It is only through Jesus that anyone can have hope of eternal life. That is how Jesus was able to say to the Jews: *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad"* (John 8:58).

Dear teen, you have the completed Word of God in your hands, and the full message of salvation before you. Are you confident that you too are a recipient of this wonderful covenant of grace?

Thought: The Old Testament saints look forward to the cross. The New Testament saints look back to it.

Prayer: I thank You Lord, that You have opened our eyes to Thy great salvation.

HOW COULD THE OT SAINTS SEE CHRIST?

When we read parts of the Bible like Leviticus 1, it is hard for us to fully picture and understand what was going on during that time. The whole practice of offering up animal sacrifices is so far removed from anything that we have experienced, and as such we find such portions dry and hard to interpret. To better understand this passage, we must read it from the perspective of a Israelite in those days, and how it was significant to them.

For the children of Israel, the whole system of offerings and sacrifices was integral to their religious lives. It was something that every faithful Israelite would be faithful to keep, and would have an intimate knowledge of how it ought to be done. However, it is not the how that we are interested in, but more the why.

God did not institute these offerings just to give the Israelites something to occupy their time, or because he desired them to give up things that were valuable to them so it could be burnt and offered to Him. They were given as a foreshadowing of Christ. As Hebrews 9:1 clearly tells us, the law and its sacrifices were given as a shadow of good things to come. Through the giving up of the unblemished clean animals, Israel would learn to look forward to the coming lamb of God who would take away their sin once and for all. Through the shedding of the blood upon the altar, they would know the significance of blood that was shed, and that only through that can their sins be cleansed and washed away. When they burnt the offerings, it was to be completely burnt up, and they would realize that a sacrifice to God was to be whole and complete. When the smoke of the offering ascended to heaven, they would know that it was to be a sweet savour unto the Lord, pleasantly received by Him for an atonement for their sins.

This they had to do continually, day after day, week after week, year after year. They would realize that the blood of bulls and goats could never fully atone for their sins. Each time they did it, they would be reminded that they are looking forward to the coming Messiah who would offer once sacrifice for sins for ever, and that is Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thought: Jesus Christ is our burnt offering, our peace offering, our sin offering.

Prayer: Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.

HOW ARE OT AND NT SAINTS DIFFERENT?

We have learned over the past few days that in certain respects (the most important respects!), OT and NT saints are “in the same boat”! We’re all in the covenant of grace!

Our verse today describes Jesus as *“the author/founder/originator and finisher/perfector of our faith”* – so he’s alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, our everything! – whether it’s for OT or NT saints!

But today we are asked this question: “how are OT and NT saints different?”

Firstly, OT saints LOOK forward to what Jesus did on the Cross, and we NT saints look backward to this. Whilst it is the same Jesus, the chronology is different. For us we benefit from the wisdom of hindsight, where everything is spelt out very clearly and plainly for us. For the OT Saints, they had to look forward to Jesus by faith, and believe that this coming Savior would be the one who can save them from their sins.

Secondly, life is “simpler” for us – in many ways! In the Book of Leviticus, and learn about priestly duties, the various offerings, clean and unclean food, the elaborate regulations for the feasts etc. All these apply to the time of the Old Testament. But now

1. Every one of us is a priest! We can communicate with God directly!
2. We offer our bodies as *“living sacrifices”* (Rom 12:1) – no more cattle and sheep, goats and birds!
3. We can eat anything we like (except for blood), but of course we want to eat healthily so we can remain healthy to serve Him!

This is all made possible because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, when he made our salvation full and free! We no longer have to look forward to Christ through the keeping of the offerings and the keeping of the ceremonial law, but we simply look back at Christ who is The Offering sacrificed once and for all for us!

Thought: *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10)

Prayer: Lord, pray that I will always be filled with the joy of the Lord, daily!

WHO IS THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT?

What's the answer to the question today ("who is the mediator of the New Covenant")? You'd probably say, "it's easy!" Yes, the answer is in the verse itself – the mediator is our Lord Jesus Christ!

Is that the end of the devotion for today? Oh no! – we've got to probe further.

1. What is a "mediator"?
2. What does a mediator do?
3. Why do we need a mediator?
4. Why is Jesus the mediator? Can't we get somebody else?

A mediator is needed when there's enmity between two parties. He is a person who would come in between them to mediate, to resolve the conflict, to try to reconcile the enemies.

Do you know that unless we are saved, we are God's enemies? Romans 5:10 says, *"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."*

Why were we God's enemies? It's because God is holy, and He cannot tolerate any sin; so all sinners (i.e. all of us) are His enemies.

Why did God want to reconcile with us? It's because God is love, and He does not want to leave us in our sin and damnation. So we need a mediator so that there will be peace between God and us! We need someone to come in between us and God and to bridge the huge gulf that separates us because of our sin.

Why is Jesus our only mediator? Answer: A mediator needs to understand both parties – God and man. As the verse for today tells us, and Jesus is the only "God-man", for he is the one God... the man Christ Jesus. So he understands both sides, and is the only one qualified to stand between us and God!

Is this not such a wonderful thought? God himself provides his own son to be the mediator for us. We had to do nothing on our part to be reconciled to God!

Thought: In a way, the Christian life is an easy one – follow Christ!

Prayer: Lord, help me to be more and more "Christocentric" day by day!

WHAT WAS JESUS' MISSION IN THE GOSPELS?

First, let us be clear about what we'll be talking about – “mission” Many of us, when we hear the word “mission” in a Christian context, we think going abroad to third-world countries on a ‘mission trip’ to share the gospel with the lost. But we should also understand “mission” in its original meaning. The root word means “send”. So we are all sent by God to do something for him – whether it's in Indonesia, Africa or at home, in Singapore!

From the verse today, we know that Jesus was sent by His Father to *“take away the sin of the world”*. He was to be the perfect lamb of God, the one sacrifice who would be accepted by God as the atonement for the sin of the world. Jesus alone would be the fulfilment of the New Covenant, for through Him, the world can be saved. That was his mission, and that was why he was sent to this earth. It was not just so he could heal the sick, or feed the masses. These miracles that He were only to authenticate his identity as the Messiah, the Son of God. His main purpose was to do the will of the Father, and that was to die on the cross at Calvary.

Now we should read John chapter 20 (focusing on verses 20-22), describing the events after Jesus' resurrection: *“And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”*

Remember our lesson yesterday – Jesus is our mediator – that is another way of looking at His “mission”. As the mediator, He can say *“peace be unto you”!* So now, He gave us “our mission” – *“even so send I you”!*

So what is your mission? *“Even so”* means that we should follow the footsteps of Jesus – He lives for us, not for Himself – so we should not live selfishly, but live our lives for Him, in service to Him in love, and so through Him to live our lives for others!

What is your mission? We may not be able to take away the sin of anyone else, but what we have is the gospel message that can lead people to the one who can! May we all fulfil the great mission (commission) that God has set for us!

Thought: My mission is the Great Commission!

Prayer: Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth Thou hast for me.

IS JESUS GOD?

Since the time of the Apostles till now, the doctrine of the deity of Christ has been one that has come under constant attack. Satan knows how important it is that we believe and acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ to be fully God and fully man. Therefore he has focused his attacks throughout the ages on this simple truth. The moment the church stops believing that Jesus is God, then the gospel is lost, and man can have no hope of salvation. As we have seen in the past few days, Jesus must be God, in order for him to qualify as our mediator, in order for him to be the perfect lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

One clear passage that teaches the divinity of Jesus is in Philippians 2:6. This passage comes in the context of Paul's teaching on humility. He gives us the prime example of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was "*in the form of God*" and "*equal with God*", meaning that He was fully God in all His glory, majesty and honour, and equal to God the Father. Yet he did not think it robbery to be equal with God. What this phrase means is that he did not think that this notion of being God in heaven and enjoying all the glory of it was something that he had to grasp after, grasping it in the manner of how a robber would grab hold of his stolen goods. He did not think it was something too much to give up, in order that he could come to earth as a man to die for our sins. Thus whilst he was still God, and he never stopped being God, he made himself of no reputation, meaning he emptied himself of his divine attributes, and took upon him the form of a servant. So he went from being in the form of God, to become physically in the likeness of man. However this did not mean he ceased being God. Whilst he was on earth, he was both fully God and fully man. That is the only way his death on the cross would become effectual for our salvation. Indeed such is the humility and love of Christ, that he was willing to forsake heaven's glories, to come to this sin-filled world to live amongst us, to suffer abuse at the hands of sinful men, and to die the most painful and humiliating death, the death on the cross. Realize what Jesus had to give up, and what He had to suffer, in order to make salvation freely available to all of us.

At the present, few people acknowledge Jesus as God, and many would go so far as to argue and try to prove how Jesus was just a man. But the Bible promises that one day every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is indeed Lord over all!

Thought: Jesus is God! But is He lord of your life?

Prayer: Father in heaven, I thank You for giving us Jesus!

IS THE OT GOD DIFFERENT FROM THE NT GOD?

There are times when you would read the Old Testament, and perhaps find a conflict with the God that you see described therein. We would ask questions like how can the God of love command those killings, judge so harshly, and decree such curses! We then dichotomise, and perhaps think that the God of the Old Testament is not the same as the God of the New Testament, or that somehow God has changed through the years, and softened in His approach towards man. However looking at scriptures we see that clearly that is not the case.

In Mark 12:26-27, Jesus defends the fact that God is a true and living God, and is a God of the living and not the dead. Whilst the main teaching point of this passage is not about the immutability (unchanging nature) of God, we can certainly see proof of it here. What Jesus states here is that when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush in Exodus 3, He described himself as the present God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Although they were saints who had died more than 400 years ago, God is still presently ('I am – present tense used) their God. Just as he was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he was the same God of Moses, and by extension, the same God that Jesus was preaching to them. They were worshipping the very same God of the Old Testament, and God never changes!

Likewise, the God that we read of in the New Testament and the God whom we worship today is the same as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All the promises that He gave to them still apply to us today, and all the warnings of judgment against sin and punishment for the wicked also still are in effect. The Bible makes a similar statement about the Lord Jesus Christ who is *“the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever”* (Hebrews 13:8).

Therefore when we read the Old Testament, realize that the same God who delivered Israel out of bondage, led them through the wilderness and into the Promised Land, is the same God who saved us out of sin and will lead us to heaven one day. The same God who then punished Israel for her wickedness and idolatry and sent them into captivity is the same God who warns of the coming judgment upon the world at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Thought: God never changes, His promises are always true!

Prayer: Lord I thank You that You are the almighty unchangeable God.

DO WE NEED TO BE CIRCUMCISED TODAY?

The circumcision of males was a very controversial topic during the time of the early church. The Apostle Paul had to deal with it at length in several of his epistles because it created many problems between the Jews and Gentiles. The reason for this was because circumcision was something the Jews held as a necessary part of salvation. God commanded Moses to institute the practice of circumcision and the Jews followed strictly to it for thousands of years. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant or promise that God made with His people. To the Jew, without circumcision, a person could not possibly be saved. However, as with many other practices in the OT, God actually only meant for them to be symbolic and to point to the work of Christ. With the coming of Christ, these practices were no longer necessary. This was something very drastic from the point of view of the Jews. The Apostles had to teach in no uncertain terms that with Christ, circumcision was no longer necessary. God authenticated what they said by blessing them with the ability to perform miracles.

In our passage for today, Paul says that the Colossians were circumcised with a circumcision that was done *"without hands"*. What this meant was that this circumcision was spiritual nature, not physical. Paul stated that nonetheless, they were circumcised, but this circumcision was the result of repentance and the work of Christ. Furthermore, their own sinful selves were buried and through faith, and just as God raised Christ from the dead, so were the believing Colossians raised unto salvation. Basically, what Paul was saying was that physical circumcision is not necessary for salvation. Salvation is a process of circumcision of the heart, of repentance, faith and the work of God through Christ. The Gentile Colossians had access to salvation without the need to be circumcised.

What this means for us today is that salvation is not limited to the Jews only but has been made available to all. We have to reflect and be thankful to God for how He has saved us and that salvation is not based on works but simply based on what Christ has done for us on the cross! It was His blood that was shed, that makes it possible for our sins to be cleansed. By faith we believe this, and by faith we are saved.

Thought: How does the fact that salvation is made freely available to you make you feel?

Prayer: Merciful Father, thank You for saving me!

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

DO WE STILL NEED TO CELEBRATE THE PASSOVER?

Today, Jews practice the Passover as a means to remember the time when God delivered Israel from bondage by putting Egypt through the 10 plagues. In the 10th plague, the Spirit of the Lord descended and killed the first born of every Egyptian household. The people of Israel were told to mark their doorposts with the blood of a spotless lamb. Upon seeing this, the Spirit of the Lord would “pass over” that house and not kill the first-born. Hence the first born of all those who obeyed this instruction were spared from death by the blood of the lamb. The Passover was instituted by God not only to commemorate this event but also to look forward to the work of Christ. In like manner, as the blood of the lamb caused the Spirit of the Lord to pass over the people, the blood of Christ would justify sinners and deliver them from the wrath of God. The lamb was meant to represent Christ and the slaying of the lamb was meant to represent the death and the shedding of the blood of Christ. The Passover was merely a shadow of the thing it represents which was the work of Christ on the Cross. As Christ has completed His work, there is no longer a need for the Passover. Christ confirmed this in vv16 and 18 when He said that He would no longer eat or drink of the Passover until “it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God” which refers to the future event where the Church will be united with Christ in heaven. As Christ has already been sacrificed on the Cross at Calvary, the Passover no longer needs to be practiced.

In its place, Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper. (vv19, 20). Through that, we now look back and remember the death of Christ for us. Christ was emphatic in vv19 and 20 by repeating that both His body and His blood were given for our sakes. He will suffer great pain and finally be put to death while His blood will be shed because of His love for us. In Rom 5:6 – 8, we learn how Christ died for the ungodly. Some may venture to lay down their life for someone who is good, but God commendeth His love toward us, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Christ gave His body and blood for enemies, for people who once hated Him. Christ died for us sinners. This is God’s gift to you because He loves you and sacrificed His begotten Son for your sake. There is no greater love.

Thought: Are you hesitant to accept God’s love? If so, why?

Prayer: Lord, I believe Thee and accept Thy gift of salvation

DO WE NEED TO CELEBRATE THE JEWISH SABBATH?

The Sabbath was instituted by God for mankind since the creation of the world where God rested on the seventh day to teach mankind to do the same. Traditionally, the Jews celebrated the Sabbath on what we know today as Saturday. The Sabbath day was later changed to Sunday by Christians which on the Jewish calendar is known as the first day of the week, Saturday being the last. The day was and is also known to Christians as “the Lord’s Day”. The reason for these changes lies in today’s scriptural reference that records for us the events revolving around the resurrection of Christ. Christ was raised from the dead on *“the first day of the week, very early in the morning”* (Luke 24:1) which was Sunday morning. For this reason, Christians keep the Sabbath on Sundays, both to continue to obey God in keeping the Sabbath as well as to remember the resurrection of the Lord which is why we call it the Lord’s Day.

As such, as Christians, we no longer observe the Jewish Sabbath which is on a Saturday, but it has been replaced by Sunday, the first day of the week. That is what we see the disciples doing in Acts 20:7, where they gathered on the first day of the week to break bread, and to listen to preaching. In this way, we continue to obey the 4th commandment to honour the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Jesus taught that *“The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.”* (Mark 2:27, 28). The Jews kept the Sabbath legalistically without understanding or true devotion hence they could not accept what the Lord said. Although there has been a change to the day of the Sabbath as a result of the resurrection of Christ, the need to keep the Sabbath holy as commanded by God is still required of us today. This has not changed. We are to continue to reserve this day for the Lord, to worship Him, to study His word and to serve Him. Hence, as Christians, we are still required to keep the Sabbath as commanded by God. But always remember that the Sabbath was made for man, and is a provision given to us for our benefit, for it is a day whereby we can set aside all our worldly cares, and find rest in God. It is a blessed opportunity for us to gether together to worship God, honour Him and have fellowship with God’s people. It is a great joy and privilege to celebrate the Sabbath.

Thought: Is the Lord pleased with how you spend your Sabbath?

Prayer: Father, help me to set aside the Sabbath for Thee alone.

CAN WE THEN IGNORE THE ENTIRE OT?

Seeing that so many of the Old Testament laws and practices are now done away with, there are Christians today who believe that the whole OT is no longer relevant to us, except perhaps for the book of Psalms. Hence, there are Bibles published where only the NT books and Psalms are found. In so doing, they have shown a lack of understanding of what the Bible, the complete Word of God is all about.

In our passage today, Paul was dealing with a doctrine that related to the law, which referred to the 10 Commandments. In earlier chapters of Romans, Paul showed that the law was incapable of saving souls. Indeed, the law was never meant to do so. Instead the law, like a schoolteacher, was meant to teach us about sin, to help us distinguish what are sins and what are not. It is only the work of Christ that justifies us before God and redeems us from sin, not the law. In Romans 7:6, Paul says that we are delivered from the law. This is often misunderstood to mean that we no longer need to obey the law. What Paul meant was that we were delivered from the bondage of the law in sin. The law points us to the existence of sin within us and our enslavement to it, but the work of Christ delivers us from this and therefore also delivers us from the effects of the law which was to show us our sins. He was not saying that the law was no longer relevant. Paul reaffirms this in Romans 7:12. He stated clearly that the law is holy, just and good. Hence, the law is not discredited in any way. On a broader scale, this also tells us that the OT is by no means irrelevant to us today. As believers, the Holy Spirit works in us to affirm this in our hearts. With His help and through His Word, we are able recognize both the OT and NT as God's Words. As we study God's Word diligently, we can see the wonderful unity that exist in all 66 books of the Bible. Doctrines found in NT are affirmed in the OT and vice versa. The character of God is seen both in OT and NT and with both we get a complete and consistent picture of who God is. We see Christ and the gospel message beginning from the very first book to the very last. What is lacking is not God's revealed Word to us, but rather, it is our understanding and knowledge of it. We put in so little time and effort in the study of God's Word. We know so little about God and His will for us. Instead we put in a lot more time into the things of this world. The irony is that God's Word is what will last for eternity. May we change our ways and be determined to spend more time to study God's Word.

Thought: When was the last time you were blessed by the OT?

Prayer: Father, forgive me for my laziness in studying Your Word.

WHY ARE THERE ONLY 27 BOOKS IN THE NT?

The Word of God has been and will always be under attack by the devil. If the devil succeeds in destroying God's Word, he would have destroyed man's only hope at salvation, and he knows it. One of his crafty ways is to cast doubt on the canonicity of the Bible, meaning to make people doubt if the 66 books are truly 66, no more, no less. The canonicity of the OT is not debated as much as the NT. Most if not all accept the 39 books of the OT as canon. The canonicity of the NT was officially established by the Council of Carthage in AD397. The council consisted of godly men who were led by the Spirit. The leader was the preeminent theologian named Augustine, a godly man who was one of the greatest scripture scholars of his day. Prior to the convening of the council, most believers of that time already accepted the 27 books as the Word of God while rejecting others that were proposed. The Council merely made it official. One may argue, but how could this group or even the early Christians be so sure? Our passage for today holds the answer. Christ said that His sheep will hear His voice, and they will follow Him. The ability to recognize which books were true was more than just intellectual, but also spiritual in nature. We must not underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit and His work in the believer. He is able to give discernment to believers and they will have the divine wisdom to tell the difference. The unbeliever, on the other hand, does not have this ability. He cannot tell what belongs to God and what does not. He is foolish in the things of God. Hence, the Holy Spirit worked among the early Christians to help them discern and confirm the 27 books of the NT. There were other books written, but with the help of the Spirit, they were soundly rejected.

The Holy Spirit continues to work in believers today. However, if the believer sins and refuses to repent, he grieves the Spirit and this working will stop until he humbly returns to the Lord. If in sin, the believer must quickly identify his sin and seek God's forgiveness and resolve never to commit it again. Only then will your relationship with God and the influence of the Holy Spirit be restored in your life. However, if you find that you have never felt the working of the Spirit in your life before, then it is possible that you may never have been saved. Search your heart and if that is the case, you must quickly come to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus before it is too late.

Thought: Can you identify when was the last time you were aided by the Holy Spirit?

Prayer: Lord, help me to see how You work in my life.

“...repent, and do the first works or else I will come... and remove they candlestick.”

WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS?

Peter in his first epistle was mostly addressing the Jews. He referred to them as “strangers” or foreigners, who were “scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia”. At the time of writing, the Jews were not located in their original homes. This scattering of the Jews throughout the world is known as the “Diaspora”. The Diaspora started when the Assyrians invaded Samaria in 722 BC followed by the Babylonians who destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC. Although some of the Jews returned to Jerusalem during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, they were never in control of the land, but were only a vassal state of the Persian Empire. With the writing of Malachi, OT ended, followed by a period of about 400 years before the NT period began. The inter-testament period was marked by the lack of prophetic activity. There were no Biblical books written during this time. It was known as the “silent years”. During this period, Israel had different masters as one empire conquered another. The Persian Empire which succeeded the Babylonians were followed by the Greeks, the Syrians and finally the Romans. Under these foreign rulers, several religious institutions were created to keep the Jewish heritage alive. Many of these are mentioned in several NT books. Synagogues were created that allowed for the Jews to gather and be instructed. The Sanhedrin was formed which consisted of a group of people who ruled within the Jewish community. Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes were offices created and assumed by Jews to rule over the community in different ways. As we know from the Gospels, many of these individuals became corrupt and were responsible for the plotting and the eventual crucifixion of Christ. The Jews remain scattered until 1948 when the nation of Israel was reestablished and the return of the Jews began.

The inter-testament period can be characterized by the scattering of the Jews. This was a period of chastisement. From the time of the death of Solomon, Israel plunged into deep sin and rebellion against God. Instead of being a light to the world, they ended up exceeding even the Canaanites in their sin and debauchery. God punished them for their unfaithfulness against a loving and merciful God. We should ourselves not forget that our God is also a God of judgment. While we love God, we should also fear Him. Just as He judged the people of Israel, so can he chastise us if we remain unrepentant and fail to be a good testimony for Him.

Thought: Our purpose as Christians is to testify to the world of God’s goodness and glory.

Prayer: Help me to be a faithful witness.

“...My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.”

HOW DID SYNAGOGUES COME ABOUT?

Matthew 1:17 documents three very significant phases of the history of Israel. Each phase is a symmetrical 14 generations apart. How wonderfully precise the plans and timing of God! The first phase stretches from Abraham to David, the second from David to the invasion of Israel and Judah that lead to being removed from their land and into captivity. The third phase stretched from the start of the captivity to the first coming of Christ. It was during the third phase that Synagogues were formed. To understand why Synagogues were formed, one has to understand the circumstances the people of Israel were in when they were in captivity. They were removed from their land and they were dispersed far and wide throughout the empire states of their enemies. The intention of the conquerors was to cause them to learn and absorb the culture of the people and in turn loose their own. The conquerors were mostly effective in doing so. However, the remnant people of Israel were very adamant about not loosing their culture and heritage. As God's witness, their culture did not just result from their history as a race, but came from God himself through the Word of God. The Synagogues were places of assembly, instruction in God's Word and mutual encouragement. Synagogues kept their faith alive during the captivity years. Synagogues were very much in existence during the time of Christ and the Apostles. Christ and later the Apostles often taught there and used it as a good opportunity to preach the gospel to the Jews. The Synagogues in Ephesus were used by Paul to evangelize to the much of Asia Minor. As we also know, by the time of Christ, many of synagogues were no longer places of pure teaching. Instead they became corrupted just like their leaders. As believers, we have a similar setup.

For us, we have the local church given to us by the mercies of God. It is for our benefit. It is a place of learning, prayer, worship, fellowship and service which all serve to make us more faithful and closer to God. However, we often take it for granted. Attending church can be with reluctance and the study of God's Word even boring. We should not wait for these graces to be taken away before we realize what we have lost. May we seek to always thank God for what He has given us and may we avail ourselves to these means of grace found in activities in church as well as seek to see how we can serve Christ in our local churches.

Thought: What if there was no more church?

Prayer: I thank Thee Lord for giving us a place to worship, fellowship and study Your Word.

WHO WERE THE PHARISEES?

The Pharisees originated from a group known as the Hasidims who revolted against Antiochus Epiphanes who ruled the Grecian empire about 200 hundred years before Christ came. Antiochus was trying to corrupt the Israelites by introducing evil and corrupt Greek practices into their culture. The Hasidims were noble in their intentions and tried to stop this. In the succeeding generations that followed, Pharisees became successors to the cause of the Hasidims. The Pharisees started out as a pious group of people who were trying to encourage the people to follow God. They were like religious “policemen” who enforced a strict interpretation and observance of the Torah, the first 5 books of the Bible. In addition, they produced 613 extra laws on top of those listed in the Bible. They wanted the people to adhere to these extra laws as closely as they would the Bible itself. Whilst noble in their intent, such adding to the scripture was clearly wrong. Over time, the Pharisees become powerful and corrupt. By the time of Christ, we can see from the gospels how the Pharisees had become evil and hypocritical. (Matthew 23:15). They appeared very pious but actually they were wicked and proud. They abused their power to deceive and cheat the common man. The Lord frequently rebuked the Pharisees. Matthew 23:27 described them as whited sepulchers, or beautiful graves. They look clean and respectable on the outside but in reality, they were rotting bones on the inside. The Pharisees were constantly going about telling people how they have done wrong, but they were actually guilty of greater sins themselves.

As we consider these Pharisees, we must ask, are we Pharisees ourselves? Are we guilty of knowing a lot but doing very little or none? Some of us are blessed with the ability to learn and have accumulated much knowledge about God’s Word. Although we can recite verses from memory, or be able to name many obscure facts in the Bible, our lives are really not much better than an unbeliever. In fact, it is possible that some have never come to believe in the Lord in the first place. We must watch against becoming a Pharisee ourselves. It is much better that a believer knows little but practices all that he knows than to know a lot but practice very little. We should check out hearts and if there be any pride or hypocrisy, we must repent straightaway.

Thought: If I think of myself as being better than others, I lack humility.

Prayer: Lord, search my heart and show me if I be guilty of pride.

WHO WERE THE SCRIBES?

The scribes were a group of people whose profession was to make copies of Holy Scripture. The printing press was not invented then hence scripture had to be copied by hand. To be very precise and exact and not make any mistakes, the job of copying became very specialized and was a full-time profession up to and after the time of Christ. In fact, scribes were revered by the Jews and in time were look upon as leaders, as Ezra was (Ezra 7). The work of a scribe was to ensure that each jot and title be copied perfectly. Over time, the scribes also took on the task of being “lawyers” of the laws of Moses. What this meant was that they knew the minute details of the Law and taught them to the people. As a result, the people looked to them to interpret God’s Word. However, many of the scribes were themselves unbelievers and were therefore not aided by the Holy Spirit in this. Hence their interpretations were flat and often flawed. Instead of teaching the people what God’s Word meant, they corrupted the Word of God through their wild interpretations, and often added to it with their stringent laws and additional requirements. When Jesus came into the scene, He taught with authority and meaning, as if the Words of God were His own. Indeed, the Words of God were His own. Hence, when Christ spoke, the people were astonished. (Matthew 7:28). This made the scribes very envious and they hated Him because the people became drawn away from them and to Him. Christ became more popular than the scribes. This hatred eventually simmered into plans to murder Christ. We read in Matthew 26:3 that the scribes were among those who plotted to kill Jesus.

If you were one of the people there in the time of Jesus, what would have been your response to Christ’s preaching? Would you be enthralled and hang on every word that was spoken and be filled with joy and excitement as you heard it? Or would you be offended or even jealous, and reject what was said? Today, we need not go very far to hear the Words of Christ spoken. Every faithful preacher with the help of the Holy Spirit would be enabled to speak forth God’s Word with authority. However, sin is always the hindrance to loving what is said. Do you love what you hear or does God’s Word land on numb and unfeeling hearts? If God’s Word does not thrill you, you must check your life and even your salvation if it is true. If you repent of your sinful ways, your love for God’s Word will be restored.

Thought: Am I excited by the faithful preaching of God’s Word?

Prayer: Father, help me always to love Your Word.

WHAT WAS THE SANHEDRIN?

The Sanhedrin Council was the ruling body within the Jewish community during the time of the NT. We do not see this word mentioned in the English Bible, as the word ‘sanhedrin’ is actually a direct transliteration from the word in Hebrew which means council or assembly, and its Greek equivalent was used in the NT to refer specifically to this Sanhedrin Council.

They were like a government within a government. During the time of Christ, the Roman empire had rule over the Jews. However, the people of Israel never really accepted the rule of the Roman Empire and hence preferred to be governed by their own people. But the council had to tread carefully because the Roman Empire allowed the council to exist simply by its graciousness and could remove it anytime. But of course, things were a little more complicated because giving them too much authority and autonomy could result in the Jews revolting. Hence, it was a delicate balance. The council consisted of priests, elders and scribes. The high priest was the chairman of the council. The council consisted of 70 members. We read in Matthew 26 about how it was this same council that conspired to have Jesus killed. Although the council was supposed to be religious, it was hardly godly. Instead, they were deeply corrupted. The council was meant to administer God’s law on the rule of the Jews. Instead, they were filled with man’s laws, unjust practices and corrupt abuses of power. They had become wicked.

Many churches today suffer a similar fate. The founding fathers of these churches may have been godly. However, as God blessed, the churches prospered and the later generation of leaders became spoiled by pride and desired only to please men and not God. They lose sight of God and did things in their own way. In fact, we need not look too far to find this happening. Leaders of fellowships and ministries must guard against running their ministries using the methods of the world. They should instead always turn to God’s Word and do all things according to God’s ways. Never man’s ways. We must pray for our leaders, that they are kept faithful, vigilant and steadfast in the keeping of God’s Word in the running of God’s work.

Thought: What can keep any church leadership faithful? The Word of God and nothing else.

Prayer: Father, we pray for our churches, that the leaders never depart from You.

WHO WERE THE SADDUCEES?

The Sadducees were aristocrats. They were the wealthy and prominent figures of Jewish society. Many were in the Sanhedrin council forming the majority. Sadducees were rather political and often acted to try to find a compromise between the Romans and the Jews. They were not very popular among the Jews because the Jews did not trust them. The Sadducees also held rather strange doctrinal beliefs including that they did not believe in the resurrection of believers, as can be read from our reading for today. The Sadducees questioned Jesus on this topic attempting to trap Him. The Sadducees were condemned both by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:7) as well as by Jesus. (Matthew 16:6). John described them as a generation of vipers or snakes. They were liars who constantly conspired to cheat poor people of their possessions. Jesus warned the disciples to be careful about the doctrines and beliefs of the Sadducees likening it to leaven used in baking bread meaning that little amount of this false doctrine will cause much damage.

Our modern churches are also in danger of being infiltrated by people who are like the Sadducees. These are people in the church who have an appearance of respectability because of their wealth. People look up to them because of that. However, their hearts are worldly and wicked. Problems arise when church leaders allow themselves to be deceived by these, showing them more respect than they deserve and even calling them into positions of leadership very much the reason why the Sadducees were called to be part of the Sanhedrin council. Before long, the church becomes worldly and corrupt and the Lord is no longer taught or loved and the church slowly dies. We must be always careful that that never happens to us. The choice of leaders should always and only be founded in the Word of God, nothing more and nothing less. If we add or remove any of the criteria that God has given us in His Word, we fail the Lord and His sheep. We must be steadfast.

Thought: It takes only one unfaithful generation to destroy a church.

Prayer: Father, help us to elect leaders into church leadership who are godly.

WHO WERE THE HERODIANS?

The Herodians were named after King Herod Antipas who lived from 4 BC to 39 AD. King Herod was appointed by the Roman empire to rule over the Jews. King Herod had to be therefore subservient to Rome if he was going to keep his throne. The Herodians were a group of people who supported king Herod ardently even to the point that they believed that Herod was the messiah. Like the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Herodians were powerful people in society. While the Pharisees held religious power, the Herodians held political power, which meant that they held government power over the people. Because Herod had to submit to Roman rule, it meant that the Herodians often sided with Rome. The Pharisees and Herodians never really got along because of this. What the Pharisees wanted often opposed to what Rome wanted. However, both became united in their hatred for Jesus. Both could see their power and hold over the Jewish people eroding because of Jesus. More and more followed Jesus and the Pharisees and Herodians hated that fact. They wanted their power and refused to let go of it. Hence, they were constantly trying to trap Jesus into saying something that would incriminate Himself like the incident mentioned in Matthew 22:16 where they were trying to trap Jesus into saying that they should not pay taxes to Rome. Instead, Jesus emerged faultless and confounded them yet again.

There are always people in the midst of the church who are power hungry. Like the Herodians, they want to be popular among the people and have their way over them. Perhaps it is just ego or pride, but other times, it could be that they have wicked intentions and want to achieve them through those who look up to them. They achieve this by being nice and kind, praising them even when the praise is false or giving gifts to people or using any other methods to please people into following them. God hates such men. (Luke 6:26, Jude 1:16). Paul said that if he should serve to please man, then he should not be the servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10). The trouble is such men claim to be the servants of Christ but they continue to serve and please man. We must be careful of such men. The next time you receive praise, be careful to check if it is sincere with no hidden agenda.

Thought: Am I guilty of vain flattery?

Prayer: Father, teach me to discern between those who please man and those who please God.

“...turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way.”

WHO WERE THE VARIOUS KINGS NAMED HEROD?

Herod the Great was made king of Judea in 43 BC by the Romans. He started the rebuilding of the temple that took 80 years to complete. He never saw it done as it was only completed after his death. He was a cruel and mad man. He was the one who ordered the murder of babies during the time of Christ's birth. At his death, Rome divided the kingdom between his sons Antipas, Archelaus and Philip. Like their father, they were all depraved and not much better. It was Herod Antipas who had John the Baptist beheaded. (Matthew 14:1-12). There was no king during this time until AD 41 when the Romans gave Agrippa, Herod's grandson the throne. It was Herod Agrippa who imprisoned Peter where an angel released him. (Acts 12:3-10). Agrippa thought of himself as a god. It is recorded by historians that he would wear a tightly woven silver suit in public to give himself the appearance of a god. He went too far when he claimed to be divine in which God immediately caused worms to eat him up and he died. (Acts 12:21-23). Herod Agrippa II, the great grandson of Herod the Great took over the throne. It was before him that Bernice and Paul made their defense at Caesarea. (Acts 25:13-27, 26:1-32). He died at about 100 AD.

The Herods must have been majestic and magnificent as kings, but none of them are with us today. They have all died. Psalm 144:4 tells us that man's days are as a shadow that passes away. Psalm 39:5 tells us that the days of man is as a handbreadth. Even men at their best is vain. The Herods were no different. Despite their elevated positions on this earth, they are inconsequential to us today. In fact all things will pass from this world. Nothing will last except for the things of God. His Word is eternal. His works are eternal including the salvation He has given all believers. The Herods were nothing more than just placeholders in history for God to fulfill His plan of saving mankind. All who will not do His will are the same. If we do His will, we can be part of this work that will last for all eternity. However, if we seek our own ways of sin, we will only fall into things that are vain that will not last. If you are a believer, you will not fade into history but will spend eternity with God in heaven. However, if you have not come to repent of your sins and trust in Christ, you are only destined for one place and that is everlasting hell fire. Come to believe today!

Thought: All will die one day. It is what comes after that counts.

Prayer: Father, include me in eternity's plan.

WHICH TEMPLE IS MENTIONED IN THE GOSPELS?

The temple that was referred to in our reading today refers to that being built by King Herod the Great. He took a total of 80 years to complete the temple. Construction started in 20 BC and completed in AD 64. When Christ spoke those words recorded in John 2, it was the 46th year of construction which meant the words were spoken in AD 27. King Herod wanted to out do all those before him, including King Solomon. He wanted to build the most magnificent temple in the history of the Jews and he did succeed in doing that although he did not live to see the completion of it. However, he did it not because he wanted to honor God, rather, he did it because he was motivated by his own pride and honor; his ego. He wanted to be known as the king who built the best temple.

When Jesus said that he would destroy the temple and raise it in 3 days, the Jews were obviously offended because the temple was sacred to the Jews. However, Jesus was actually referring to the crucifixion and resurrection of His own body. Jesus, nonetheless, knew that the Jews would not have understood Christ's true meaning and Christ did not explain it to them either. Christ intentionally left the Jews in ignorance and their lack of understanding of the truth would condemn them. This was a judgment for the great sins that they had committed. Do you reject the Word of God? Do you persist in disobedience and rebellion no matter how much Christ has already shared His truth with you? If you persist in your ways of disobedience, it is possible that Christ may judge you in like manner; that is, He may stop revealing His truth to you and leave you in darkness. Being able to hear God's Word is a privilege. If you continue to reject Christ's approaches to you, you risk becoming like the Jews, you risk being hardened in your ways and be condemned to eternal damnation. Please respond to God's Word now! If you hear God's Word preached over the pulpit, hear and receive every Word into your heart with faith and seek to obey it completely. If you read it from the Bible, pray for understanding and faith so that you it can be made alive in your heart. Do not wait. Walk in obedience to the Lord today.

Thought: God is never wrong to harden the heart of anyone because we all deserve eternal condemnation in the first place.

Prayer: Father, I want to obey and trust in You, please help me.

IS CHRIST A HISTORICAL FIGURE?

There are those who doubt if Christ ever existed. They believe that Christ was no more than a myth like the characters in Greek mythology, like Zeus, Hercules and so on. However, the evidences make it hard to sensibly refute that Christ did exist at the very least as a historical figure. There are abundant historical evidences to show that Christ was truly a man who lived during the early 1st century AD. Many of these come from the writings of non-Christian historians who lived in the first few hundreds of years after the ascension of Christ. Some of these historians were actually negative towards Christianity and were not shy to admit it. Nonetheless, their writings showed various details about Christ, and many of the facts were similar to those recorded in the gospels. Another irrefutable evidence is found in the way our calendar functions. Our year 2012 is based on the birth of Christ also known as “Anno Domini”, AD and the calendar prior to AD is known as BC; “Before Christ”. Hence, the creators of the calendar system that we use declares that Christ was once born into this world and definitely did exist in history.

What we must realize though, is that the significance of Christ is far more than just that of a historical figure. Christ was not like any other man who came into this world and that after his death, passed on as a mere historical fact. Christ was God, who came into this world and became a turning point of human history. He presented Himself blameless as a sacrifice to redeem Mankind from the condemnation of sin. He became fully man so that he could bear the sins of sinful man. While man come and go and are lost forever if they are not saved, Christ is eternal before and after His existence on Earth. Christ was, before history even existed. He is the sovereign and supreme God of history itself, controlling every facet of it. While there is no doubt among sensible historians that Christ did exist, what we must also know is that Christ has said that He will return to the world again in the future. This is known as His second coming. In His first coming, He came to sacrifice and to save. However, in His second coming, He will return as a judge. Now is the time that He has given all mankind the opportunity to come to accept His gift of salvation, however, if they reject it, He will return only to judge. Dear reader, if you have not accepted Christ as your Savior, you must not wait, you must repent now, because the return of Christ is soon and you will not be able to do so then.

Thought: Do I trust that Christ was more than just a historical figure?

Prayer: Save me Lord, before Christ returns.

WAS JESUS MENTIONED IN THE OT?

The Jews do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah as promised in Scripture. Perhaps they find it hard to accept someone who made such radical statements about their Jewish practices and traditions to actually be the son of God, the one whom the Scripture prophesied concerning. Christ's first coming was indeed radical, at least to the common Jew. However, God did not leave the Jews and believers today without support that Christ is truly the Messiah as predicted of old. To do this, God meticulously threaded the entire Old Testaments with references to Christ found in every book of the OT. The OT can be described as a tree whose trunk and roots are Christ. Christ is the foundation of the entire Bible, which includes both OT and NT. Was Jesus mentioned in the OT? Certainly! Not just in some parts of it, but everywhere. Today's reference is the first reference of Christ in the Bible. Genesis 3:15 is a prophecy that the day will come when the seed of Eve, which refers to Christ, will bruise or crush the head of Satan while Christ's heel will be bruised in the process referring to His crucifixion. Christ's salvation work on the cross will destroy Satan's hold on humanity. Death will no longer have dominion over man.

Another important prophecy that is found throughout the Bible is the second coming of Christ. It is found in both the OT and the NT where it is described in great detail. This has not been fulfilled yet, but the signs tell us that it is very likely to occur soon, even within our lifetime. The Jews rejected Christ as the Messiah even though they were familiar with all the references made to Christ in the OT. All have perished into eternal condemnation so long as they did not believe in Christ as the Saviour.

How about you? Do you embrace the prophecies of Christ's 2nd coming or do you reject them as just myth and fantasy? When Christ returns, it will be too late because He will return no longer as a Saviour but as a Judge. Repentance will not be accepted then. Only judgment. It is not too late now. You have the gospel, do not reject it. It is the only way though which we can escape eternal judgment.

Thought: One cannot wait to repent because one never knows what tomorrow will bring.

Prayer: Father, save me today! I do not want to be judged with eternal damnation.

WHY DO WE HAVE GENEALOGIES IN THE GOSPELS?

A genealogy is a family tree. Names of significant people are recorded in the family tree for purposes of tracing back one's ancestry. The Bible also uses genealogies to record significant events and information involving the people whose names are found in genealogies.

For example, we see that in Matthew 1, the lineage of Christ can be traced back all the way to the royal line of Judah, focusing on His Kingship. It proved that Jesus was indeed the Son of David, the one who would sit upon the throne and rule from Jerusalem. Verse 16 focuses on something of great importance, and that is the birth of Christ through Mary within Joseph's lineage. This is indeed a most pivotal event in human history as it focuses on the fulfillment of all the O.T. prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah, without whom all of mankind would have no hope of salvation.

The Gospels are accounts of events surrounding Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, proving the veracity of O.T prophecy and God's promise right from the very beginning in Genesis 3:15 that a Saviour (seed of a woman) would be sent to defeat Satan and man's greatest and final enemy which is death. Because Jesus is at the very heart of the Gospels, genealogies are found in there so that there can be no doubt regarding His identity and the fulfillment of God's promises regarding Him and His purpose.

In Matthew 16:13 Jesus asked His disciples about His identity, saying "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" To this, they merely rattled off what other people thought of Him. Jesus was not interested in that. Instead, He asked again, "*But whom say ye that I am?*" This shows that Jesus considers the correct knowledge of His identity to be critical to His disciples (and to us believers also), and the genealogies in the Gospels serve this purpose so that we truly know who He is personally rather than who other people think He is.

Thought: Do I know Jesus the Son of God personally or do I merely acknowledge His identity as such?

Prayer: O Lord, help me walk more closely with Jesus as He reveals Himself to me through my life's experiences and Your Word.

WHAT DOES THE WORD GOSPEL MEAN?

“Gospel” simply means “good news”. From beginning to end, the Bible reveals to us God’s salvation plan for a race of fallen people. That is the good news that we have in God’s Word!

Not everyone understands their need for salvation. They do not see how the message of the Bible is good news. This is because they do not realize their present state of condemnation as sinners and that they cannot do anything by themselves to be saved. Because of these two reasons, they do not see the need for and therefore do not actively seek out the way to salvation.

However, the Bible says in no uncertain terms that there is only one way to be saved, which is through Christ and Christ alone (John 14:6). This in itself may not sound like the wonderful news that it actually is, if the sinner concerned does not fully understand what it means to be condemned. Some believe that they simply become non-existent after death (annihilation). Some believe that they still have a second chance to be saved when they find themselves in a state of spiritual limbo (purgatory). Others believe in reincarnation in an endless cycle of life and death while the rest simply do not care to seek the truth to this puzzle. They would probably be thinking “so what if I die today?”

The Bible describes hell as a place where there is eternal pain and suffering of the worst kind (Matthew 8:12, Mark 9:48). This is where people who die in their sin without knowing Christ (the condemned) will find themselves after death.

Application –Just when it sounds like the good news could not get any better, it does! To be saved is not just to be spared from an eternity in hell but also to have eternal life and fellowship with Jesus and the saints forever in heaven. The Gospel is wonderful news indeed. We have good reason to live joyfully every day because of it and to share it with those who still do not know Christ as commanded by Jesus (Mark 16:15).

Thought: Christ did not come to condemn the world for it is already in a state of condemnation. Rather, He came to save!

Prayer: Thank You Lord, for saving my soul and making me whole through Christ.

HAS THE GOSPEL CHANGED THROUGH THE AGES?

The Gospel was first given by God Himself in Genesis 3:15 after Adam had sinned. God revealed to Adam and Eve that the seed of a woman (Jesus Christ born of the virgin Mary) would bruise the head of the serpent (defeat Satan). Through time, God gradually revealed more about his divine plan of redemption to His people through a process known as progressive revelation. At each period of time, God revealed enough to His children, such that they could all, by faith, look forward to the coming of Christ and believe in Him.

Considering the consistency and unity of the Old Testament with the New, we know that God has only ever had one plan of salvation for mankind. Indeed, Galatians 3:8 is the Biblical proof that the good news of salvation in Christ that we know of today is the very same Gospel given to Abraham and the saints of old in the O.T. It is by faith, that Abraham looked forward to the promises concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, and it was through faith that he was justified.

Our God is not a fickle-minded God but an all-powerful, wise and decisive God who is absolutely capable of meeting man's greatest need. The very reassurance we have of our salvation lies in the fact that the Gospel is immutable (unchanging) through the ages, and also that there is only one salvation plan. Imagine if God had decided that there should be a "Plan B" or "Plan C". We would naturally wonder why there is more than one plan, and which one we can trust. Since there is only one Saviour God and only one salvation plan in Christ we can be sure about our own salvation by putting our trust in the Lord Jesus, the only plan that God has for man's salvation.

Although the Gospel is simple, the events which subsequently unfold from Genesis 3:15 to the birth of Christ takes many twists and turns with Satan trying every opportunity he gets to disrupt the lineage from which Christ would emerge, including a direct attempt at destroying Christ through king Herod who issued a decree to have every baby boy killed (Matthew 2:16).

Thought: The O.T. saints looked forward while N.T. saints look back to the cross to be saved.

Prayer: Thank You Lord for loving us enough to send us Jesus the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

WHY ARE THERE FOUR GOSPELS NOT ONE?

Some scholars explain that there are four Gospels in the N.T. because each human author had his own unique perspective of Jesus and the events surrounding His earthly ministry. This is true in a general sense, as the Holy Spirit uses specially appointed men to pen God's Word without violating their individual characteristics. However, Ezekiel 1:10 tells us very specifically why this is so.

Ezekiel 1:10 says, *“As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.”* This amazing vision that Ezekiel had showed him the amazing splendour of God's glory. It also gives us a glimpse into the different facets of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even though all four gospels have certain commonalities about Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, they emphasise different aspects of His identity.

The lion represents Christ's Kingship (Matthew), the ox His Servanthood (Mark), the man His Humanity (Luke) and the eagle His Deity (Gospel according to John). For example, in Matthew 1, Jesus' genealogy is recorded so that we know His ancestry can be traced back to the royal line of Judah. He also spoke of His enthronement in Matthew 19:28 and 25:31 while in Mark 10:44-45 He spoke of not being ministered unto but to minister (serve). In Luke Jesus' infancy and boyhood are described in great detail. Here, He is called the Son of man to focus on His humanity. In John 1 Jesus' deity is revealed in His identity as the Son of God, and indeed, God Himself.

Jesus does not have a “split personality” whereby one moment He is one person and another person the next. During Jesus' earthly ministry, He had to assume many roles and fulfill them all perfectly in obedience to God the Father and for the benefit of sinners. The four Gospels describe different aspects of one and the same Person, that is, Jesus. Indeed, they can and should be seen as four different parts of the one Gospel. Together they provide us with a richer, fuller and deeper understanding of the life, ministry and message of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thought: Being King, Servant, Human and God all at the same time is possible only with Jesus, fully God and fully man.

Prayer: O Lord, how I love to worship Thee in the beauty of holiness!

HOW DOES MATTHEW PRESENT CHRIST?

The book of Matthew refers to Jesus as the “*son of David*” 9 times. Wise men from the east referred to Him as “*King of the Jews*”. In Matthew 1:1-2, Jesus is introduced as the Son of David, and His lineage is then traced. Jesus’ lineage can be traced back through the royal line of Judah. Indeed, Jesus Christ is presented in Matthew as King, and comes in fulfilment of the divine prophecy that there will be this future descendant of King David, the Messiah, who would sit upon the throne and establish His kingdom.

Do not be mistaken, Jesus was not only the King of the Jews during the time of His earthly ministry. He did not simply assume this identity and position of glory, honour and authority when He condescended to become human only to relinquish it upon His ascension. Jesus is King to Jews and Gentiles for eternity. This is seen in many other verses throughout the Bible. 1 Timothy 1:17 says, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever.” From this passage we see that not only Jesus is identified as the King eternal and immortal, but also that the honour and glory due to Him as King is due to Him forever.

In Revelation 19:16, Jesus returns in power and glory to judge the world with “*KING OF KINGS*” and “*LORD OF LORDS*” written on His vesture and thigh. This is in contrast to the cruel mocking of the meek sacrificial Lamb that Jesus was at the time of His crucifixion when His tormentors wrote on His cross “*THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS*” (Matthew 27:37). God made sure that even in Jesus’ darkest moments on earth that his tormentors identified Him as such (albeit mockingly).

Anyone can declare that Jesus is King. For the unbeliever, he may make this declaration with the same sarcastic, scornful and resentful attitude as those who mocked Him. To the believer, Jesus is his Saviour King without Whom life would not only be meaningless but would eventually lead to an eternity of pain and suffering. As you read through the Gospel of Matthew, ask yourself if you would be one of those who called Him King and yet hated Him, or one of those who loved Him and wept for Him. Whichever one you really are will be reflected by the way you live your life today.

Thought: How thankful I am that Jesus is not only King, but also a loving Friend and Saviour Who knows me intimately.

Prayer: Forgive us, O Lord, in times when we have not honoured Jesus even as Jesus forgave His mockers while hanging on the cross.

IS CHRIST KING OF YOUR LIFE?

In days gone by, to acknowledge someone as king is to acknowledge his lordship. It means that you regard him as the lord and master over your life, and you submit to his authority, dominion and power.

In Matthew 2:2 we see that the wise men from the East knew about the birth of the King and came from afar to worship Jesus. This is in contrast to the reaction of king Herod, who also received news of the one who was born as the King of the Jews. However, instead reacting with joy and having a desire to worship and adore Jesus, he felt threatened and plotted to have Jesus killed while under the pretense of wanting to find Jesus to worship Him.

The very fact that King Herod reacted in such a manner in having every baby boy from 2 years old and under killed showed that the possibility that Jesus might truly be the King of the Jews was a plausible one to him. He was threatened by Jesus and wanted to protect his own selfish interests. Therefore, his reaction to the news of Christ's birth, far from one of joy, was one of aggression, violence and hostility instead (Matthew 2:3-16).

Though the wise men and king Herod believed the same thing, their responses to that belief was completely opposite. The wise men wanted to worship Jesus and brought him gifts. King Herod on the other hand resorted to mass murder in order to destroy Jesus. Is this not an accurate reflection of how the world responds to Jesus and His Gospel? It is no wonder that 1 Peter 2:8 says that to unbelievers, Jesus is a "stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient".

However, to those who have believed in Him, this means living every aspect of their lives in subjection to the teachings and authority of Christ. It also means being obedient to Jesus in every situation. Have you thought about how you have submitted your life to Him as your King?

Thought: Jesus is my King. Am I a humble and obedient subject in His kingdom?

Prayer: O Lord, I thank You that You are not only a powerful and sovereign King, but also a righteous, loving and merciful one.

HOW DOES MARK PRESENT CHRIST?

Mark 10:45 beautifully sums up Jesus' role as a servant, *“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”* What Jesus is saying here is that He did not come to the world to be served just as a very important guest at a hotel expects to be pampered and served hand and foot. Jesus came to serve others for their benefit and not His own. Indeed, the Greek word for “immediately” is a ‘servant word’ which occurs over 40 times in the book of Mark. When a servant is told to do something by his master, he is expected to do it *“immediately”*.

It would seem hard to reconcile the fact that Jesus, being the Son of God and indeed God Himself would assume the role of a servant. Indeed, we see in John 13:1-17 that in an act of great humility Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. However, if we try to understand the reason for Jesus willingly taking the form of a man and living amongst us sinners we would be able to reconcile the above. He came, lived, served, died on the cross and rose again out of love for sinners. If there is one word that could sum up why He came as a servant to man, that word would be *“love”*.

In many countries, people in positions of power in government are called *“ministers”*, but many times they expect to be ministered unto instead of just ministering to others. They think that a high position of power automatically grants them the respect and authority over men. However, Jesus sets an example of a very different style of leadership for us to follow. A loving father would not hesitate to lay his life down for his wife and children if it means saving them from harm. This does not diminish his position as the head of the family in any way. In fact, this would be what God expects of him in the same way that Jesus loves sinners in a self-sacrificial way and gave his life *“a ransom for many”*. Jesus laying His life down for sinners does not diminish His position as the head of the church. It is therefore obvious that Jesus expects the same of believers who are also in positions of leadership. They are not only to lead by example, but also to lead with an attitude of humility and servitude. Have you thought about the kind of leader Jesus wants you to be?

Thought: He who desires to be first shall be last of all and servant of all.

Prayer: Thank You, Father for giving to us Jesus Who is a King with a servant's heart.

HOW HAS YOUR SERVICE BEEN?

When was the last time you met an employer who also considered himself a co-worker with his employees? We may come across such bosses only once in a long while, if at all. But if we really think about it, who are we ultimately working for? Mark 16:20 is the concluding verse of the whole gospel of Mark, and really sums up for us the relationship that Jesus has with His servants in their service to Him. After the ascension of Jesus, as the disciples then went forth to preach, the Lord was the one who was working together with them, aiding them in their service and empowering them with signs and wonders to validate their ministry. They were labouring for the Lord, but yet He was the one helping them every step of the way!

What a wonderful employer we have in Jesus, who is not only kind and humble but also one who is exceedingly generous. Just imagine: He gave us eternal life even before we were able to serve Him in any capacity. This is like an employer who pays his employees enough money to guarantee their comfortable retirement for life the moment they signed the contract even before doing any work! We all owe Jesus a Gospel debt which we can never repay. Nonetheless, we labour for Him out of gratitude even though we can never fully repay Him for what He has done for us. It is with this attitude which we serve Him. This means committing time and resources to the various ministries in our local church. But we also serve Him by serving others (Matthew 25:40) be it at work or in church. Therefore we should not only perform works of mercy, charity and kindness in church towards other believers only but to everyone who is in need, using the opportunities that come along in these situations to witness for Jesus.

When we assume positions of leadership be it in church, at work or in school, the way we lead and set an example for others is equally important. Are we oppressive, intimidating and heavy handed or are we caring, understanding and approachable, always willing to roll up our sleeves to co-labour with our subordinates when the going gets tough? Our leadership style will influence what our unbelieving friends and colleagues think about not only us but even more importantly, about our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thought: We should lead with a heart to serve just as Jesus leads us as a King with a servant's heart.

Prayer: O Lord, it is not always easy to be able to serve in a manner that glorifies Thee. Give us wisdom and guidance to do so.

NOV 5

Luke 3:23-38

Memorise Hebrews 4:15

"We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities..."

HOW DOES LUKE PRESENT CHRIST?

Luke 3:38 gives us what theologians call the "Lukan Genealogy". This genealogy traces Jesus' lineage back to Adam and highlights His human ancestry. This is to emphasize His human identity. The phrase "Son of man" is used frequently in the book of Luke, and is seen in key verses such as Luke 19:10 which says, *"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."* Indeed, in the passages of Luke 1 & 2, we find great detail of Jesus' infancy and boyhood. We even have the very well known account about how Jesus honoured His human parents in the feast of the Passover when He went "missing" and was eventually found by Mary (Luke 2:41-52).

That Jesus is God is something we cannot dispute, but that Jesus is a God who feels for the common man on the street and has a deep understanding and empathy for him is something which we sometimes neglect to meditate on. Luke 4:18 gives us a vivid account of this: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised"*. Jesus knows us intimately because He too is human and understands our weaknesses, sorrows and struggles.

Hebrews 4:15 says that "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." This is entirely congruent with His identity as a loving God-Man who cares deeply for sinners. We can all relate to how we find it easier to confide in a person who has been through the hardships that we have experienced. This is exactly what Hebrews 4:15 is trying to teach us, that Jesus is not some distant celestial being, untouchable and unreachable. He is someone who is never far from us and the book of Luke highlights His humanity so that we can more easily relate to Him as a Friend with whom we can share our every burden.

Thought: Emmanuel - God with us!

Prayer: Lord Jesus I thank Thee for going through all the trials and temptations for my sake.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU REGARD YOUR SERVICE?

To regard something is to relate to it with affection and in high esteem. Therefore when the Bible says, *“If I regard iniquity in my heart...”* (Psalm 66:18) for example it means to not only have knowledge that we have sinned but to have an attitude of cherishing that sinful behavior and having an unwillingness to give it up.

Every Christian can rattle off that to be called a servant of God is the highest honour any person can obtain and to serve God is the greatest privilege he can enjoy. But we must ask ourselves, how often have we really taken the time to think about our attitude towards service? Some of us may feel it is an obligation, some a responsibility and even some look upon it as a hindrance and a chore. Perhaps the way we react when asked to contribute towards serving in various church ministries will give us some idea about our true feelings towards serving God.

Do we seek every available opportunity to serve (with prior careful thought and consideration) or do we try to give excuses to avoid committing too much of our time and resources to the Lord? Of course, we can sway too much in the other direction and end up being distracted by all the tasks of serving the Lord without actually putting our heart into it. Luke 10:38-42 gives us an example of how Martha was so distracted by the physical aspect of performing tasks for Jesus that she neglected to do what Mary did which is to simply honour the Lord by giving Him her undivided attention. As we busy ourselves in service to the Lord, we must always remember what is most important, and that is to sit at the feet of Jesus, to hearken to His voice, and always seek to do His will and not our own.

Serving God is not simply doing, but rather, it is prayerfully submitting ourselves to Him for Him to use as He sees fit and doing so willingly, joyfully and to the best of our ability. Only when we serve in this manner can we fully appreciate the value of what we do for Him and consider our service in high esteem and with much affection. This is how we regard our service. How often have you been doing so?

Thought: We regard our service to Jesus because we regard Jesus.

Prayer: Give us wisdom, O Lord, to know the difference between serving and simply doing.

HOW DOES JOHN PRESENT CHRIST?

The book of John presents Christ as God right from the very beginning: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:1) Moreover, He made everything, and there is nothing that was not made by Him. (John 1:3) Jesus is also the Creator of all. That Jesus is also a man does not contradict His deity in any way for He is both man and God. (John 1:14).

Jesus also identified Himself as Jehovah in His seven *"I am"* statements: *"I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."* (John 6:35), *"I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."* (John 8:12), *"I am the door of the sheep."* (John 10:7) *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."* (John 10:10), *"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"* (John 11:25), *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (John 14:6) and *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."* (John 15:1). These were all recorded for us, that we might believe that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing, we might have light through his name (John 20:31).

Even so, back in Jesus' day just as in this present time, not everyone believed that Jesus is God. When Jesus clearly stated that He and His Father are one, the Pharisees in their disbelief did not accept this and wanted Him stoned (John 10:33). Even though some would hold Him in high esteem, they nonetheless did not acknowledge His divinity (Luke 18:18-19).

Jesus knows our every fear and weakness, and knows this intimately because He is human. However, because Jesus is also the Almighty Creator-God Himself, He has power and control over everything and ultimately only He can help us overcome every obstacle that we face. Not only that, because He is God, He alone can forgive sin and be the only way, truth and life.

Thought: Because Jesus is man, He could be our sacrifice for sin. Because Jesus is God, He could rise from the dead and give us life.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, open my eyes that I may behold Jesus for everything that He is, including His deity.

DO YOU TRUST THE LIVING WORD?

Words have power. They can influence men, alter lives, sway our emotions and even change the course of history. However, for all the weird and wonderful things that the words of men can do, it is limited in that it can only influence events in this present life. With regards to our eternal life, only the Word of our Eternal God can make a difference. This is the one thing that every human soul on Earth needs - that is the Living Word of God. We need Him, that we may have eternal life, and we can only be forgiven through believing in Jesus (the Living Word) as Lord and Saviour as revealed to us in His Word the Bible (the written Word). That is why Jesus instructed His disciples in John 5:39 to *“search the scriptures (written Word), for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me (the Living Word)”*.

The concept of trust as taught in the Bible is a very important one. To merely acknowledge factual accuracy is NOT trust as taught in Scripture. Biblically speaking, trust involves a deep conviction that something is correct and making changes to ourselves and the way we live in accordance to that. Therefore, someone can say that he is a sinner, but may not feel the need to change his life or behavior in any way. He merely believes that he is not perfect but is blissfully unaware of his state of condemnation. A simple way to know if we have truly trusted in anything that the Bible has said is to see if our lives have been transformed by it.

The most fundamental truth we can ever learn from the Bible is that we are saved by trusting in Jesus and we ought to ask ourselves how this truth has impacted on our lives.

Sunday after Sunday Christians go to church to hear God's Word being preached. Pretty soon, some believers seem to take the marvelous truths of God's Word and even the Gospel of the Lord Jesus for granted and have little or no reaction to hearing the Word. It would seem that they have lost their first love. It's tragic that we would become numb to something as wonderful as our salvation when it should cause us to be overjoyed every day. Pray that the Holy Spirit will keep the flame of the Gospel burning in our hearts always.

Thought: To be nonchalant about God's Word is to be apathetic about what Jesus has done for us.

Prayer: O Lord, remind me of the great sacrifice that the Living Word made for me that I may never treat His written Word with indifference.

HOW IS JOHN DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER GOSPELS?

The Apostle John stated his purpose for writing his gospel in John 20:30-31. Jesus proved His own divinity by the numerous miracles that He had performed. His purpose was that, through the revelation of His own identity as the Redeemer God Himself in His Word, all would come to know Him and be saved. As such, we would notice that the emphasis of the Gospel of John is more theological in nature, as contrasted to the Synoptic Gospels which are more a narrative log of the events and teachings of the life of Christ.

John begins his gospel by identifying and describing Jesus as the Creator and the Son of God even before He became man (John 1:1-14). Jesus' deity is also emphasized by the references to Him as not only the Son of God but also the Saviour of the world (John 4:42). The seven “I am” statements by Jesus are meant to tell us that He is the Jehovah in the O.T. There is also much theology on the Person of Christ and the meaning of faith in John's Gospel. This is different from the Synoptic Gospels which begin with Jesus' birth and earthly ministry, and though there is mention of the Person of Christ and His deity, none of them place as much emphasis on these as John's Gospel. Furthermore, John's Gospel is written in a more “reflective” style, describing events as a person who recorded those events sometime after they had occurred in a topical manner. Thus, Christ's words are not always recorded in a chronological manner in John's Gospel. This is in contrast with the Synoptic Gospels which were written as if the authors were recording the events as they were happening. Hence, Christ's words are recorded in a chronological fashion in the 3 synoptic Gospels whereas John is “thematic” and theological in nature.

Some scholars had intended to exclude John's Gospel because it seemed so “different” from the other ones. We are to remember that ultimately we do not have the authority or wisdom to decide on the content of God's Word, and even much less, to change it in any way. Ultimately, it is God Himself through the Holy Spirit who identifies and preserves His perfect Word for us.

Thought: The next time I read any of the gospels, I should be able to discern the different emphasis that each gospel has with regards to the life of Christ.

Prayer: How wonderful is Your Word, O Lord, which has revealed different aspects of Jesus to us in all the Gospels.

ARE THERE CONTRADICTIONS IN THE GOSPELS?

Matthew 27:28 describes the robe given to Jesus by His tormentors as a scarlet robe, whereas its parallel verse in John 19:2 states that Jesus' robe is purple. This seems like a contradiction and certainly great concern is warranted since God claims that His Word is perfect. However, a difference in the way certain information is recorded in the Bible is not a contradiction or error unless there is no conceivable way of reconciling those differences. It is unlikely that Jesus would have been given a brand new robe. However, it is conceivable that this robe had originally been scarlet in colour but through the effects of time and age had turned a darker hue. Hence, Matthew chose to record the original colour of the robe whereas John (and Mark) chose to record the colour of the robe at the time it was given to Jesus. Likewise, did Jesus heal one blind man (Mark 10:46, Luke 18:35) or two (Matthew 20:3)? This can be explained again by the way the Gospel writers include or exclude certain details as they saw fit. Matthew's account simply focuses on two of the blind men whereas in the other two Gospels, the focus is on just one. There may have been only two, or even more than two, blind men. The Bible does not say exactly. But we can see here that the apparent contradictions can be resolved in a plausible and reasonable fashion.

Thus instead of being doubtful and questioning the Word of God, the words of Jesus in Matthew 8:26 asks us: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Likewise, we sometimes allow ourselves to have doubt that God's Word is perfect simply because there are apparent "discrepancies" in the Gospels. If we meditate upon this issue more intently, we realize that the Gospels are like 4 men trying to describe something huge from their own unique perspective, but ultimately, they can be easily harmonized and the perfect unity of the 4 Gospels would hence be obvious.

Thought: Am I flush with anger or red with fury? Both describe the same thing in different ways. There is no contradiction.

Prayer: Help us people of little faith, O Lord, and enable us to persevere in the faith until Christ's soon return. Amen.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF ACTS?

The Book of Acts records the acts of the Apostles as written by Luke. It describes the growth of the Church under the guidance of the Apostles after Christ's ascension. It provides an important link between the Gospels and the epistles as it allows us to understand the historical context of the epistles and thus enriches the doctrinal lessons found in the epistles.

The Book of Acts begins rightfully with the ascension of Jesus Christ who is the sole reason and driving force of all the acts recorded in this book. After His resurrection, Christ appeared to the Apostles intermittently for 40 days and was finally returning to His Heavenly kingdom. Before His ascension, He gave the Apostles a clear mandate to spread the Gospel. The Apostles had asked Christ if He was going to set up His earthly kingdom in Israel but Christ taught them that this was not what they should be concerned about now. God alone knows when this would be. Christ had a mission for them now and He would fully equip them for it. He commanded them to be “witnesses unto [Him] both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”. He commanded them to proclaim the Gospel not only in Jerusalem but to the ends of the earth. To carry out the Great Commission, Christ would send the Holy Spirit to empower them. They need not do so with their own strength but would be enabled by God's own Spirit. The great outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which resulted in the miraculous speaking of tongues by the believers was proof that God would enable them to do His will. These miraculous acts of the Holy Spirit in aiding and guiding the Apostles in the establishment of the early Church, in Jerusalem, Judah, Samaria and then throughout the known world is therefore what the book of Acts is all about.

Christ's commandment to the Apostles holds true to all believers as well. All of us receive the Holy Spirit when we become believers. This same Spirit who gave power to the Apostles to preach the Gospel is with us. We should therefore not fear when we evangelise but trust that God will empower us. It is our duty to be Christ's witnesses in our “Jerusalem”, which consists of the people closest to us, to the people around us in our “Judea”, and unto everyon, even to the uttermost part of the earth.

Thought: Imagine that you were at the Mount of Olives, hearing Christ's commandment to preach His Gospel. How would you react?

Prayer: Lord, enable me to proclaim thy Gospel everywhere I go.

“...we are Christians and our preoccupation, our passion, should be the Lord Jesus Christ...”

WHAT IS THE CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK OF ACTS?

The deeds of the Apostles recorded in the book of Acts are many and varied. Some are miraculous like the many works of healing performed by the Apostles. Some are difficult yet courageous like the persecution they endured. All were done in obedience to Christ's Great Commission and for one singular purpose – to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The last verse in Acts (Acts 28:31) sums up the book nicely and spurs us to follow in the footsteps of the Apostles. It concludes how the Book of Acts shows how the New Testament Church is an ensample to our churches of today. Our motive should be, as Paul's was for those “two whole years in his own hired house” (Acts 28:30), to “[preach] the kingdom of God, and [teach] those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding [us]”.

We are Christians and our preoccupation, our passion, should be the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever God places us, to whomever God connects us with, we should proclaim His name and His Gospel. If we purpose in our hearts that this should be our goal in all things, it will direct our decisions in life and protect us from becoming worldly in our pursuits. Acts 28:31 also describes how we should proclaim the Gospel. We should do it “with all confidence”, knowing that we speak the Truth and that it is God's Spirit who converts the souls of those we evangelise to. We should also not allow any man to forbid us in our preaching of the Gospel, meaning that the fear of Man or how people perceive us should not hinder us from courageously declaring His Word.

Dear Teen, can you make Acts 28:31 your motive for your actions and decisions in life? Or are you still pursuing worldly goals? If you desire to make Acts 28:31 your motive in life, do you then lack the confidence or is the fear of Man forbidding you? Are you afraid that your friends may reject you if you appear too “religious” or take a stand against ungodly views or practices? Remember Acts 1:8 which we read in the previous devotion. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit who lives within each and every one of us will enable and empower us to do His will for His glory.

Thought: Examine your motives for your actions everyday in light of Acts 28:31.

Prayer: Lord, grant me courage to proclaim Thy Gospel.

WHICH ARE THE SOTERIOLOGICAL EPISTLES?

21 out of the 27 books in the New Testament are epistles which are letters addressed to certain individuals or churches. Most of the epistles were written by the Apostle Paul and are known as the Pauline epistles. These epistles can be grouped into 5 categories, namely soteriological, (dealing with the doctrine of salvation) ecclesiastical (dealing with church matters), eschatological (focusing on the last days), pastoral and prison epistles. We will study each group in turn.

The soteriological epistles are those that deal largely with the doctrine of salvation. They cover fundamental truths of our faith, correct misconceptions and explain the hows and whys of salvation such as why we need salvation, who needs salvation, how we are saved, why salvation is only through Jesus, etc. These epistles include the epistles to the Romans, Galatians and Hebrews. An example of an essential salvation truth would be Romans 3:23 which speaks of how all Mankind “have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” which implies that all of Mankind needs salvation and no one can stand before God’s judgment and not be found guilty. It also gives us a good definition of sin, in that it is when we come short or fall short of the glory of God.

Dear Teen, are you able to explain the Gospel clearly to an unbelieving friend? Have you ever been stumped by some of the questions they ask you? 1 Peter 3:15 says to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you”. Studying the soteriological epistles will enable you to find the answers to questions that deal with the fundamentals of salvation. It will also allow you to reflect on your own salvation and check if you fully understand and believe in the Gospel. Many of us may have just said the sinner’s prayer at a young age having grown up in church and may not have fully comprehended the Gospel. Therefore, it is important not to take our salvation for granted and “give diligence to make [our] calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).

Thought: How can you be sure that you are saved?

Prayer: Lord, may the studying of the fundamental truths of salvation through Thy Son inspire in me a greater awe, reverence and gratefulness for Thy love for me.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF ROMANS?

The main theme of Romans is that all Man has sinned and need salvation through Jesus Christ by grace through faith. It sums up the message of the Bible, explaining how God's plan for salvation holds true both in the Old Testament with His chosen nation in Israel and in the New Testament where the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles. Paul explains in the first 3 chapters how all Man has sinned and “come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Establishing this truth first of all is essential for one to understand and recognize one's need for salvation. Chapter 1 describes how the Gentiles have sinned and rejected God despite knowing of His existence through creation (Romans 1:20-21). Chapter 2 then rebukes the Jews for also disobeying God despite having the privilege of being the receivers of the Law and God's Word spoken through the Patriarchs and the Prophets. Chapter 3 proclaims with certainty that all Man is guilty and is condemned to God's judgment.

Chapters 4-5 then explain God's plan for salvation. Despite being sinners on death row, “God commendeth His love toward us (Romans 5:8) and “we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Romans 5:10). We can do nothing to attain this salvation for it is not by works but by grace through faith that we are saved. Chapter 5 explains that just as sin and death entered the race of Man through one man in Adam, salvation and eternal life came to Man through one man as well, in Jesus Christ. Likewise, as both the Jews and Gentiles have sinned, both are also able to be saved through Christ (Romans 1:16). “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). Abraham and the believers who lived before Christ “believed God and it was counted unto [them] for righteousness” (Rom 4:3) as they looked forward to the Saviour. We, who look back to Christ's redeeming work on the cross and believe in faith, also receive salvation by grace and have Christ's righteousness imputed in us (Romans 4:24-25).

Indeed God's plan of salvation is so marvelous! Have you fully understood that you are a sinner and in need of God's salvation? Or are you still living a life of sin and trying to earn your way into God's kingdom? Repent now and receive the free gift of salvation.

Thought: How would you explain the above to an unbeliever?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for Thy gift of salvation, so rich and so free!

“...Shew me thy faith without thy works and I will shew thee my faith by my works...”

IS DOCTRINE OR PRACTICAL LIVING MORE IMPORTANT?

The first part of Romans (chapters 1-11) covers essential doctrines of salvation such as justification, predestination and sanctification. The next section of Romans (chapters 12-16) discusses practical Christian living, such as Christian behavior, service in church and relationships between fellow Christians as well as with our enemies. It is no coincidence that Paul places his exposition on doctrine first as doctrine is important as the basis of practical living. Romans 12:1-2 begins with the word ‘Therefore’, and then goes on to instruct the readers how they should then live in light of all that they had read. He shows how having received the free gift of salvation from God, it is our “reasonable service” to offer our bodies and our lives to God, seeking to do His “good, and acceptable, and perfect, will”. Note that this must always be the order. Doctrine can come first before we know how to live. If we just do good deeds, church service and live peaceably with Man as described in Romans but have understood the gospel and the reason behind why we need to do good works, then we are merely practising a religion of works and trying to earn our own salvation.

On the flipside, doctrine without practical living is also wrong. “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?” (James 2:14). If you say you have true saving faith but yet are living a sinful life with no concern for the people around you, are you truly saved? An authentically converted heart would desire to do God’s will and seek to live a life that He approves of. James is not advocating salvation by works when he says that “faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:17) but rather, he is proving that evidence of true faith is its works or fruits in a transformed life (James 2:18).

Therefore, we can see that neither doctrine nor practical living is more important than the other but both are inextricably linked. One cannot truly exist without the other. Romans 12:1-2 shows this link very well and it is profitable to reflect on this verse as you examine your own salvation and if your life has proof of your salvation. Have you presented “your [body] a living sacrifice holy, acceptable unto God”? Are you “not conformed to this world” and “transformed by the renewing of your mind”?

Thought: What evidence can you think of in your life that shows that you have true saving faith?

Prayer: Search me, O God, and know my heart today.

“...the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith...”

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF GALATIANS?

Paul's epistle to the Galatians is a soteriological epistle as Paul had to reiterate the fundamentals of the Gospel to the Galatians. They had started to believe that works, namely the act of circumcision, were necessary for salvation. There were Jews in the congregation who were teaching that the Gentiles had to be circumcised before they could truly be saved. Paul expressed his disappointment with the Galatians that they were “so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (Gal 1:6). Their basic understanding of the Gospel of grace had been so poor that they were so easily swayed into believing heresy.

Paul goes on to explain how “no man is justified by the law in the sight of God” (Galatians 3:11). No man is able to fulfill every letter of the Law and not sin, except the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16). Not even Abraham who lived before Christ and was given the commandment from God to circumcise God's people as a sign of God's covenant with him (Genesis 17:10). Paul explains that it was not through this act of circumcision and the Law that God promised Abraham that “in [him] shall all nations be blessed” (Galatians 3:8). But rather it was through the Gospel, which Abraham believed in, that future generations would attain salvation and be called “the children of Abraham” because they share Abraham's faith (Galatians 3:6-7). The Law “is not of faith” (Galatians 3:12) and all of us are cursed as we cannot keep the Law perfectly. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us... that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:13-14)”.

Is the Law then useless? God forbid. Paul writes that “the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). Having now been justified and freed from the curse of the Law, we now “live unto God” and “Christ liveth in [us]” (Galatians 2:19-20). We are a “new creature” (Galatians 6:15) and should “[crucify] the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24) and “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16), bearing the fruit of the Spirit which is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 2:22-23).

Thought: Have you heard of any false teachings that teach that works are necessary for salvation?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to live and walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:25)

“...Try every spirit whether they are of God and let the Word of God be your yardstick always...”

ISN'T ANOTHER GOSPEL STILL THE GOSPEL?

We have read how disappointed Paul was that the Galatians had so quickly started to believe “another gospel”. The Greek word used for “another” in Galatians 1:6 is “heteros” which means something completely different from the original. This is in contrast to the word for “another” in verse 7, “allos”, which means another of the same or similar kind. Thus what Paul was telling them was that this new “gospel” that they were receiving and beginning to believe in was something completely different from what he and the other apostles had taught them. It was corrupt, heretical and apostate. This totally deviant form of the Gospel which taught that works were necessary for salvation should have been immediately rejected by the Galatians. They however had let themselves be “bewitched” (Galatians 3:1) by false teachers whom Paul sternly pronounced as “accursed” (Galatians 1:8). The gospel they taught was conceived by Man, in contrast to the true Gospel which is given by the “revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12). Because of that, Paul called them “foolish” (Galatians 3:1) and says that they have “fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4). He marveled at how they had started so well “in the Spirit” (Galatians 3:3), having been made free from the Law by Christ’s redeeming blood, but ended up being “entangled again with the yoke of bondage” by returning to the belief that works of the Law were necessary for their salvation (Galatians 5:1).

Let us learn from the mistake of the Galatians in not recognizing false doctrine quickly and allowing themselves to be deceived by false teachers. They failed to expel the “little leaven” of heresy that had grown into a cancer invading the whole church. Certain church leaders who are admirable as persons or of high standing and reputation may blur our perception and we may fall into the trap of naively believing everything they say. Examples of false teachings they may propagate are the need for baptism to be saved, speaking in tongues to receive the Holy Spirit, ecumenism or the health and wealth gospel. We must not be foolish but rather, be alert and wise! Paul said that even if an “angel from heaven” teaches you something, you must ensure that it is in keeping with God’s truth. Try every spirit “whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1) and let the Word of God be your yardstick always.

Thought: Do you have any beliefs that you may have heard or read from influential Christians? Are they consistent with what the Bible teaches?

Prayer: Lord, help me to always be on my guard so that I will stay true to Thy Holy Word.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF HEBREWS?

The main theme of Hebrews is Jesus’ threefold Messianic office as prophet, priest and king. No one else in the Bible has fulfilled all three offices perfectly. Hebrews 1:3 summarises this for us. It first shows how Jesus is God Himself, having in Him the “brightness of [the Father’s] glory, and the express image of His person”. In the Old Testament times, God spoke to His people through prophets (Hebrews 1:1) but in “these last days”, God has “spoken unto us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:2) who fulfils His role as a prophet by “upholding all things by the word of his power”. Christ is the ultimate prophet because He is not merely just a channel for God’s Word but He Himself is the Word (John 1:1).

Hebrews 1:3 then goes on to describe how Christ “had by himself purged our sins” as a priest used to do in the past by offering up animal sacrifices as atonement for the people’s sins. However, the priests of old were themselves sinful men who had to first offer sacrifices for their own sins before they could act on behalf of the people (Hebrews 7:27). They also had to continually offer sacrifices to atone for new sins as “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). By His own blood, Jesus Christ did what an endless flow of sacrifices could not do. He once and for all offered His own body as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins and being “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26), His one sacrifice appeased God’s righteous wrath and stayed His judgment on us (Hebrews 10:14).

Having offered Himself for us, He then took His place at the “right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12), making intercession for us at the throne of God. This last picture of Christ at the “right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3) paints Him as the true King who will soon return to earth to rule.

Jesus is the King of kings but yet He made himself “a little lower than the angels” (Hebrews 2:9) so that He could be the “great high priest” for us who “cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:14-15). As He had “suffered being tempted”, He is thus able to “succor” or help “them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16).”

Thought: What other verses in Hebrews support Jesus’ roles?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for Thy Son who is the true King, Prophet and Priest.

“...Christ will come as the King of kings and Lord of lords, fearsome and majestic...”

WHY MUST JESUS RETURN?

Jesus is coming again! Are you excited by this? Your unbelieving friends wonder why you keep looking forward to this event which to them sounds like a page out of a fantasy novel. Did He not already accomplish what He needed to do in His first coming by dying on the cross? Yes, He did but in His first coming, He came as the Saviour, “not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). In His second coming, Christ will come as the King of kings and Lord of lords, fearsome and majestic. Revelation 19:11-16 describes Him as riding on a white horse, thundering in to judge the world and claim His rightful place as the ruler of all creation. This is in stark contrast to His quiet entrance as a baby in a manger during His first coming. God “hast put all things in subjection under His feet” and “now we see not yet all things put under Him” (Hebrews 2:8). When He comes again, we will truly witness how all creation will be under His reign.

When Christ comes again, there will be a “new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1). Christ Himself will dwell with us and He shall “wipe away all tears from [our] eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Revelation 21:4). Our suffering in this sinful world will end and we will be with Christ. How wonderful it will be when Christ returns!

What will happen if Christ does not come again? The world will keep on sinning to its own destruction and we will have no hope of release from its sin nor of the glorification of our bodies. Thankfully, this is not true. Through His Word, we know that Christ is coming again. Just as the saints of old desired a “better country, that is, an heavenly” (Hebrews 11:16), we also look forward in hope to Christ’s second coming and the setting up of His earthly kingdom. We should therefore “lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Thought: Are you eagerly anticipating Jesus’ return? If not, why?

Prayer: Even so, come, Lord Jesus (Revelation 22:20b).

WHAT ARE THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL EPISTLES?

I know of many people who have been Christians for many years – a number of decades even – but who still behave no differently from the unbelievers out there. Although they might attend church regularly, much of their lives do not reflect this at all.

The Corinthian church was much like that. The ecclesiological epistles refer to the 2 letters which Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, I and II Corinthians. "Ecclesiological" basically refers to things pertaining to the church, and this was Paul's intent in writing these 2 letters – to deal with issues that had arisen in the Corinthian church. Among all the churches which Paul wrote to, this was perhaps the most problematic of the lot! Reading through the 2 books, you will find that there were many problems indeed – there were divisions and strifes within the church, there was a lack of church discipline on errant members, members had brought lawsuits before secular judges, the women had usurped the headship of the men, members were abusing spiritual gifts, and some even denied the resurrection of Christ.

What was the root cause? Paul identifies the problem in today's reading – *"For ye are yet carnal"* (vs 3). Although some had been Christians for some time already, they remained *"babes in Christ"* – spiritually immature Christians who were weak in the faith. That is why Paul could only feed them with milk, and not meat yet. They had not yet progressed from spiritual infancy to a level of spiritual maturity. They were carnal and worldly in their thinking and conduct. As a result, many problems remained in the church relating to the way in which they lived their lives and interacted with one another.

Dear teen, how has your life changed since you became a Christian? Do these same problems of worldliness and carnality remain in your life? Are you still a babe in Christ, spiritually immature and still indulging in the sins that we ought to have repented from? What are the sins that continue to persist in your life? May you seek the Holy Spirit's help in searching them out and ridding your life of them today.

Thought: What problems and sins are there in my life?

Prayer: Lord, plant my feet on higher ground!

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF 1 CORINTHIANS?

A couple of years back, there were some problems in the leadership of our church which led to much strife and division among the members. Although I was not fully aware of what was going on, I still recall feeling rather troubled about it. I prayed simply that God would resolve the problem and restore peace and unity in the church.

The Corinthian church faced something similar. It had been brought to Paul's attention that *“there are contentions among you”* (1 Corinthians 1:11). The church had split themselves into several factions, leading to fierce rivalry between those in the various camps. Some said that they were of Paul (the founder of the church); some were of Apollos (the pastor); others were of Cephas (i.e. Peter – the leader of the Jerusalem Church). Some even said that they were of Christ – taken positively, this could mean that perhaps this was the group who were more discerning and able to rise above the conflict, or perhaps this could be taken negatively to mean that they had a holier-than-thou attitude. The conflict had become so serious that Paul was pressed to write this letter to them to strongly urge them to *“speak the same thing”* and to *“be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”*. What he desired from them was that they put aside their pride and divisiveness, and be of the same mind, having the same faith, believing in the same Word, and worshipping the same Lord.

For a church to function properly, it is imperative that the members are united in a common purpose, a common heart, a common will. Christians are called upon to be soldiers for Christ, but how can we fight the good fight of faith if we are too busy fighting amongst ourselves! Without unity and peace, how can the gospel of Christ be advanced? But do note however, that this unity cannot be had at the expense of compromise. When Paul exhorted them towards unity, it was on condition that they be perfectly joined together, not only in their attitudes, but in their doctrines as well.

Dear teen, do you see the importance of unity in the church? May this not be something that you take for granted, but may you instead pray daily that God will continue to grant peace in the church, that we may truly be one body of Christ, serving the Lord together in one spirit and one mind.

Thought: 'Blest be the tie that binds!'

Prayer: Lord, may You always grant peace and unity in my church.

WHAT IS THE TRUTH ABOUT TONGUE SPEAKING?

With the prominence that Charismatism has come to enjoy in the Christian scene today, I am sure that you have many friends and classmates who worship in Charismatic churches. You may even have witnessed some of them praying in tongues before. But are such so-called spiritual gifts truly of God?

In his letter to the Corinthian church, one of the big issues that Paul had to deal with concerned spiritual gifts - in particular the gift of tongue speaking. A situation had arisen whereby the members were all clamouring to be heard speaking in tongues in the church. Paul thus had to educate them of the right attitude with which to regard this gift - that what matters most is that there be understanding, through the help of an interpreter to interpret the unknown tongue into a language which is commonly understood by the hearers. If not, none of the hearers would be edified and there would be no benefit at all! Paul made use of a hyperbole to emphasise his point - he would much rather speak five words with understanding so as to “*teach others*”, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue which would be understood by no one (1 Corinthians 14:19). Do note that the tongues spoken of in the Bible refer not to gibberish or nonsense, but to known languages, just that they were foreign to those who miraculously developed the ability to speak them.

How does this relate to the modern tongue-speaking movement? Unlike during the time of the early Church, tongues today are simply gibberish, so-called “ecstatic utterances” which do not come from any known language in the world. How, then, can there be any understanding and edification at all? And if there be no understanding nor edification, of what benefit can there be to the hearers? Realize that “*God is not the author of confusion, but of peace*” (1 Corinthians 14:33). The modern tongue-speaking movement only promotes chaos and confusion! Instead, in church, all things should be done “*decently and in order*” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Dear teen, may you thus seek to equip yourself with a better understanding of tongue speaking, that you will be able to be fully convicted in your heart and to explain it to your friends too.

Thought: Spiritual gifts are always for the edification of others.

Prayer: Lord, grant me understanding regarding the truth about tongue speaking.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF 2 CORINTHIANS?

Have you ever imagined what it is like to be a pastor? It is not just a routine job, as some might imagine it to be. Beyond the regular preparation of messages and preaching, there is so much more that a pastor does. Just as a good shepherd lovingly cares for and protects his flock, likewise a good pastor has to have the same love and affection for the congregation that God has placed in his care. And just as a good shepherd would defend his flock from wolves and attacks from whatever sources, a good pastor would similarly defend his congregation from the attacks of Satan.

This is exactly what we see in Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church. In Chapter 11, we read that certain false apostles had crept into the church and preached "*another Jesus...another spirit...another gospel*" (vs 4). Through their deceptive words, they also tried to undermine Paul's ministry and authority, by making many false accusations against him. Paul thus had to write this epistle to defend his apostleship and God-given ministry, as well as to warn against the Satanic attacks from these false prophets. Despite the trials and personal attacks which he faced in the ministry, Paul's great love and care for the Corinthian church remained, and is displayed so clearly throughout the epistle. Why was he so willing to give of himself to labour so tirelessly and selflessly? Today's reading gives us the answer – simply because he was preaching not of himself for his own sake, but "*for Jesus' sake*". That is why he was willing to become even as a servant for them. Elsewhere in the book we read that he was constrained by "*the love of Christ*" (5:14); because of that, he was able say that "*all things are for your sakes*" (4:15), and that he did all things "*for your edifying*" (12:19).

Dear teen, do you have a pastor who similarly fights valiantly for the sake of his flock, speaking out boldly and fearlessly against false prophets and false teachings? If so, thank God for him, and do not take it for granted but instead pray that God would continue to preserve and keep him, that he may be used mightily of God for His service.

Thought: A good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.

Prayer: Lord, continue to keep my pastor faithful to You.

HOW IMPORTANT IS BIBLICAL SEPARATION?

If you are not already aware of it, one of the hallmarks and founding principles of the Bible-Presbyterian faith is its emphasis on the doctrine of biblical separation. You may wonder, is it really that important? Why is there a need for such great emphasis? Doesn't the Bible teach us to love one another and to have peace and unity with others?

Reading today's passage, you will realize that biblical separation is a biblical doctrine that is founded on the Word of God. It is found in a key passage of II Corinthians that so clearly teaches of the need to separate. Paul gives here a straightforward command – “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers”. A yoke is a wooden beam used to bind a pair of cattle so that they can pull together on a load when working in pairs. If 2 different animals of varying height, ability or speed are yoked together, they simply will not be able to do anything, because they are of incompatible natures. Rather than enabling them to work faster, the yoke would constrain and hinder them, causing great difficulty and misery in their labour. Similarly for us as Christians, we become “yoked” with unbelievers when we form certain associations or alliances with them. On the individual level, it could refer to things like marriage or a business partnership; on the church level, it would refer to fellowship and cooperation with other religions or other churches with erroneous doctrines, especially where there is dialogue for the purpose of reaching a compromise.

Why does the Bible give such a strong command to separate? This doctrine arises from the holiness of God (I Peter 1:16). Our thrice-holy God requires of us a life of utmost purity and righteousness. How, then, can we who have been made righteous by the blood of Christ have fellowship with the unrighteous? Or how can we who have had the marvelous light of the gospel shone in our lives be communing with the children of darkness?

Dear teen, may you thus recognize the importance of this fundamental doctrine, and put it into practice in your life. Are you involved in any close relationships with an unbeliever? Seek the Lord's help today in knowing how best to deal with it.

Thought: An unequal yoke is always a burden, never a blessing.

Prayer: Lord, teach me the importance of separation.

WHAT ARE THE ESCHATOLOGICAL EPISTLES?

If you have been paying attention to Sunday sermons and various other messages, you will probably have heard the phrase “the last days” on multiple occasions. But what does “the last days” refer to? And how can we find out more about them?

Among all his writings, the eschatological epistles of Paul, I and II Thessalonians, are where we can find the most detailed and extensive information about the last days. The word “eschatology” literally means “the study of last”, and refers to the branch of theology dealing with the events related to the end times and the 2nd coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you were to skim briefly through I and II Thessalonians, you will find multiple mentions of things related to the last days. For example, the end of every chapter in I Thessalonians contains a clear reference to the 2nd coming of Christ. There is mention in the 2 epistles also of a time of God’s wrath on Earth (also known as the period of tribulation), a time of apostasy by the enemies of God, as well as the rise of a great figure who will unite the world in opposition to God, otherwise known as the Antichrist. Also, I Thessalonians 4 contains the most explicit reference in the whole Bible of the rapture of the church – a most wonderful occasion when all believers on earth will be “caught up...in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (vs 17).

Dear teen, isn’t it exciting to read of such things? “Eschatology” may seem like such a big and technical word, but if you are truly a child of God, such things should only serve to excite you and to motivate you in your zeal and fervor for the Lord. May you search the Scriptures earnestly to learn more about things of the last days, for they are of such great importance. Equipped with such knowledge, you will be able to better prepare yourself for the Lord’s impending return, as well as to share with your friends, especially those who are yet outside God’s kingdom, of what the Bible tells us will surely happen in the days to come.

Thought: Am I excited to know that Jesus is coming again?

Prayer: Lord, grant me the desire to be equipped with more knowledge.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF 1 THESSALONIANS?

At some point in your life thus far, you would probably have known of at least 1 person who has passed away. It could be an older relative, or it could even have been a friend. Such times of death and parting are certainly sorrowful and painful. But what should be the right response to death?

The Thessalonian Christians faced a similar situation. Most likely, several members of the church had recently passed away, causing much sorrow and grief in the church. That is why Paul had to address this issue in his first epistle to them – he didn't want them to be ignorant about things associated with death, and so he wrote the letter to instruct them and comfort them (1 Thessalonians 4:18). He taught them about the hope of resurrection and rapture so as to bring comfort and encouragement to their hearts. Today's reading tells us that, when faced with the death of loved ones, we should “sorrow not, even as others which have no hope”. Note that this is not a cold-hearted command to have no sorrow at all; certainly, there is to be sadness and mourning when loved ones pass away. But the key thing to note here is that we are not to mourn as those who have no hope. What is the hope that is spoken of here? If you read on to the end of the chapter, you will find that it is the hope of the resurrection and eternal life. It speaks of a confident expectation of blessings, which come as a result of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you read through the book of 1 Thessalonians, you will find repeated promises and assurances of this eternal hope which believers have.

Of course, we know that this promise applies only to believers. For unbelievers, though, death marks not the beginning of a glorious hope, but of an endless suffering. Do you have many friends and loved ones who have not trusted in Christ for their salvation? May the Lord use you as an instrument to bring His salvation message to them, that they, too, might be partakers of this glorious hope together with you!

Thought: With Christ, an endless hope; without Christ, a hopeless end.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the right perspective on death.

ARE YOU COMFORTED BY THE THOUGHT OF RAPTURE?

The rapture refers to this future event that will happen when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, whereby believers on Earth will be suddenly and swiftly caught up physically into the skies to meet with Christ, and then given a glorified body. As a teen, the rapture used to be something that we would joke about. During exam periods, you would hear others saying, “I wish the rapture would come now – then I won’t have to take my exams!” Come holiday time, though, you would not be likely to hear a similar statement, because everyone would be enjoying their holidays so much, that the thought of heaven does not seem so enticing to them anymore. In times of leisure and fun, who would be looking forward to the rapture?

Should this be the right attitude to have towards the rapture? Today’s passage speaks most wonderfully about one of the greatest events that will take place in the history of mankind. There will come a day, perhaps very soon, when believers which remain on the earth will be “caught up... in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air”. Can you even begin to imagine how glorious and joyful that day will be? And this will all take place “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52). One moment, we would be going about our lives on this earth; the next, we will suddenly be caught up to heaven, in the presence of our Saviour who died for us and loved us so. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, we read also that our mortal bodies will be changed to an incorruptible and immortal form. What a blessed hope! What a glorious promise! Only in such a state would we be worthy to enter into the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

How long will this blessed union with the Lord last for? Days, weeks, months, years? Paul writes, “and so shall we ever be with the Lord”. Forever! Our finite human minds cannot even begin to grasp the concept of eternity, but it will suffice us to know that it is a very, very long time indeed. Does such a thought thrill your heart? If it does not, perhaps you have become too entangled with the things of this world, such that the things of eternity do not excite you. As a believer, the rapture should be the greatest comfort and consolation. In times of trial and trouble, we look forward to this hope of eternity; in times of peace and tranquility, too, we look forward to a time of perfect and greater peace. Dear teen, may this comfort fill your heart today and motivate your every word and action.

Thought: “Until that day my eyes shall see my Saviour descend the clouds – O glorious day!”

Prayer: Lord, help me to desire and long for Your coming.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF 2 THESSALONIANS?

The past few days' readings have been dealing with the things of the last days. Indeed, Christ is truly coming again soon. We see so many signs around us that point towards the imminence of Christ's return. Do you truly believe, though, that Christ may really return sometime in your lifetime? Or do you simply shrug it off, thinking that “Nah, it can't be that soon...”?

2 Thessalonians was written by the Apostle Paul somewhat as a follow-up to the previous epistle, 1 Thessalonians. While the latter dealt with the doctrine of the 2nd coming of Christ, the former relates more to the practical aspects. In light of all the knowledge that the Thessalonian Christians had gained concerning this event, Paul wanted to further instruct them as to the right attitude and perspective to have. As we read in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2, we see that the faith of some of them had been shaken as a result of false teachers that had sowed the seed of doubt in their minds regarding Christ's return. Probably there were some false teachers who made a mockery of Paul's teachers, and told them that the Lord had already come, and that they had missed the rapture! As a result, rather than serving as a comfort to them, they had become troubled and confused by the teachings regarding the 2nd coming. They were not using this knowledge that they had obtained to the glory of God.

For us today, likewise we have received much teaching on the 2nd coming of Christ. In fact, with the complete Bible in our hands, all the more we should be knowledgeable regarding the things of the last days. Many false teachers have also arisen in recent years, claiming to predict the exact date of Christ's return, or teaching some elaborate conspiracy theories about it, which we know are all not true. But for us, knowing that the Lord's return is sure and soon, are we living for God each day? Do we take heed to the warnings of Scripture? Or do we choose rather to be so caught up with studies and fun and other temporal things?

Dear teen, God has graciously given abundant instruction in His Word about Jesus' 2nd coming because it is of utmost importance that we prepare for it. We can be sure that our faithful God will certainly fulfill what He has said will take place. Let us not be faithless or doubting, but let us instead have full conviction in His Word, and to show from our lives what we are doing to prepare for His Son's soon-coming return.

Thought: Will Jesus find me watching?

Prayer: Lord, grant me an unwavering faith and confidence in Your Word.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN BEFORE THE LORD'S RETURN?

We often hear from our pastors and preachers that Christ is coming back to earth again soon. We do not know the exact timing, though, for Christ Himself has said that no one but God knows the day and hour of His return. But surely there must be some sign, some indication that Christ's return is imminent?

The Thessalonian church faced questions about the timing of Christ's return, too. As mentioned in yesterday's reading, false teachers that had crept into the church had erroneously taught them that Christ had already come. This had led to the Thessalonian Christians being deceived into thinking that they had entirely missed it! Paul thus had to write this second epistle to them in order to clear up the misunderstanding and to give them the right instruction regarding Christ's second coming. He explained to them certain clear signs that would precede His return. Today's passage tells us that there would first be a "falling away", i.e. a time of great apostasy when many would turn their backs on the Christian faith and forsake the truth. There would also first be the revelation of "that man of sin...", the son of perdition". This would be the 'capital A' Antichrist, the one spoken of in Revelation 13 who would deceive the whole world during the last days and blaspheme the name of God. Verse 4 goes on to say that he would be in direct opposition to God, and would make himself out to be God.

More than ever, it seems likely that these signs will be fulfilled within our lifetime. Do we not see a great falling away in our world today? Do we not see so many so-called churches being compromised, teaching false doctrines and becoming more and more like the world? Do we not see this great decline of moral values in our generation? Do we not realize that the Antichrist will soon arise and take over the world? Dear teen, God has graciously given us such clear indications, that we may be better able to prepare for His Son's coming. What are you doing with such knowledge? Are you earnestly preparing for this most momentous event? Have you been telling your friends about it? Or do you simply brush it aside, choosing rather to focus on your present earthly cares? When Christ comes back to earth, may you not be caught offguard, but be ready and watching.

Thought: To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be prepared for Your return.

WHAT ARE THE PASTORAL EPISTLES?

The pastoral epistles consist of First and Second Timothy, and Titus. Unlike the other Pauline epistles, these are personal, each addressed to two individuals rather than churches or a group of believers. Written by the Apostle Paul – the senior, experienced pastor – to two young pastors Timothy and Titus whom he considered dear spiritual sons. These epistles center on the office of the pastor, as the under-shepherd of God’s flock. Hence the term, ‘pastoral epistles’.

In the pastoral epistles we witness the transition of the early church from the days of Acts led by the itinerant apostles and their disciples, to a time when the church was becoming a more established institution. Paul left Titus in Crete for a specific purpose: to put in order things in the church, and appoint elders in the other cities in the island of Crete to oversee the churches. This task and responsibility rested with Titus. The pastoral epistles are like an ‘instructional manual’ for pastors as to how the local church should be administered, from the appointment of leaders, to the conduct in public worship, teaching and rectifying false doctrine, and dealing with sin. One of the most important tasks is the appointment of spiritually qualified leaders to aid the pastor. A church governed by spiritual men will be a spiritual ordered one.

The same specific pastoral responsibilities appointed to Timothy and Titus are given to pastors today, just as the pattern for how local churches should function remains unchanged. The church is a spiritual institution and the Bible prescribes how it should be run and by whom. In the Presbyterian church, pastors play a critical Biblical role in their selection of the elders and deacons who will stand for election. Nevertheless, we also play a part in how our church is run when we vote for these leaders. Let us take this role seriously, as we are accountable to the Lord also!

The pastoral epistles also gives us a basis to assess our churches. What is the focus and conduct of your pastor like? Is there order in your church today as prescribed by the pastoral epistles? Does spiritual order, un-spiritual chaos, or worldly inclinations prevail? Is the church fulfilling the purpose Christ intended? As we delve further into the pastoral epistles the answers to these questions will become apparent.

Thought: How do you evaluate whether the pastor and leadership is ‘good’?

Prayer: May the pastor and leadership of my church govern the church in accordance with Your Word.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF 1 TIMOTHY?

Young Timothy, ministering to the church at Ephesus as Paul's representative, faced the challenging responsibility of correcting false doctrine, ensuring correct public worship and appointing godly leaders. Paul wrote this first epistle so that Timothy would know he must behave in the house of God (1 Timothy 3:15) which is the main theme of this book.

The church is not just another secular body or organisation, or mere gathering of people with a common interest. The definition of 'church' is to be 'called out', and this is from the world. Moreover, the church belongs to our Living God. It is His house – He is the ever-present master. A pillar sustains and upholds a superstructure, whilst the ground is a firm and solid foundation. Is it in the church that the truth is to be found and proclaimed, and so when it holds firm to sound doctrines, it functions as this pillar and ground of the truth. This is why how a pastor conducts himself is incredibly important. Paul's instruction applies not just to not just Timothy's public pastoral duties, be they administrative or teaching, but personal – private conduct. His public and private testimony are inseparable, they are one and the same.

It is in the church that we can see the full revelation of God's truth – through the preaching, teaching, and studying of the Bible, worship, and godly testimonies of believers that witness of the transforming power of God. Thus it is vital that the pastor be a blameless stalwart of truth in all that he does, according to the Word of God. It is not for a pastor to decide how he should conduct himself and the work of the church according to his secular knowledge, philosophes, personal fancies, personalities nor those of others.

However, the conclusion of the matter is not with a pastor conducting himself according to God's Word. This verse applies to believers as well, as it is individuals who collectively make up the local church. Principles for leadership and righteous living apply to us all. Do you know how to behave yourself in the church? Have you obeyed the instruction and teaching from your pastor and leaders? Are you strengthening the testimony of God's church and contributing to the revelation of God in the world or are you damaging it?

Thought: What's your attitude toward godliness? Is it subjective and optional?

Prayer: May I know how to behave myself in and outside the house of God for His glory.

WHY MUST OUR PASTOR DEFEND DOCTRINE?

Doctrine is a principle or truth, and in essence the Bible in its entirety is doctrine. The pastor is the spiritual head of the church. When he defends doctrine, he is defending the Word of God. However, the requirements to fulfill to be an exemplary minister are twofold. Not only must Timothy “put the people in remembrance” of doctrine by the public and private teaching of the people the Word, he must also refuse ‘profane’ – worldly, irreverent ‘fables’ – fictitious stories and beliefs. To refuse something is not a passive act, but conscious and active. He must preach the correct doctrines and expose those that are incorrect. This is what it means to defend. As Timothy himself was well nourished in the faith by his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice, and now as a minister he must nourish the flock he has been entrusted with. To be truly nourished, one must not only consume what is good, but also abstain from what is bad and detrimental. The result is godliness. Just as we never cease to need physical nourishment until we die, spiritual feeding and defense is a continuous duty for the pastor. Furthermore, consider our adversary Satan. He is the author and master of profane old wives’ fables – worldly lies. Most certainly he never and will not rest, and therefore he must be strong in the defense of the faith.

The problem of ‘fables’ is a problem that continues to plague the church today. The best way to destroy the church is to attack doctrine – God’s truth. Satan is wily and mixes truth with error so that it resembles truth. The church cannot protect herself from corruption by her own might, the world’s methods or philosophies. Doctrine is the only antidote to sin, apostasy and falsehood. It exposes error and false teachers. Satan abhors it. A church that knows what truth and error are is better armed than one that just knows what truth is but is ignorant of error, or vice versa. Often Christians and churches lacking doctrine will label fundamentalists as unkind, unloving and obsessed about doctrines. They choose rather to focus on good works and positive doctrines and purport to be more godly. Doctrines are truths from God and set out a pattern for which Christians should follow, the result of which is godliness. If a church has no doctrine, how can it be godly and holy? And if it is not, what purpose does it serve in this world?

Thought: Should we point out the doctrinal errors of friends and their churches? Is there a right way of doing so?

Prayer: May my pastor and church always faithfully preach and defend of the entire Word of God.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF 2 TIMOTHY?

The main theme of 2 Timothy concerns being a good soldier of Christ. The ministry of a pastor can be likened to one of warfare, fighting against Satan and striving to advance the cause of Christ. Timothy must wage a 'good' fight, one that is in accordance to God's Word and for His purpose. In his ministry ahead there would many battles, and he would have to fight them all – it was his course. He must remain faithful to Christ to the very end. Written from prison in Rome not long before he would be martyred, this is Paul's final epistle. In contrast to 1 Timothy and Titus which are instructional, 2 Timothy is more personal - written to encourage and strengthen his young protégée for the great and difficult task of ministry that lay ahead. Paul himself experienced it firsthand. He toiled without ceasing, in all circumstances, against opposition, with or without co-labourers, in all seasons. He had also experienced and witnesses co-labourers who had deserted the faith (2 Timothy 4:10). Yet, he remained faithful. The calling of a pastor to lead a church is a grave and difficult responsibility. A pastor's calling is to spiritual warfare from which neither respite nor is retreat an option.

Whilst you may not be a pastor and may never be called to the full-time ministry, all believers are called to be soldiers of Christ. Many of us start out well, brought up in a godly environment just as Timothy was. We received good training. What is the purpose of it all if you are not fighting a good fight right now? Even if you are, do you wonder whether you will always fight a good fight? It is sometimes tiring to always be 'fighting' for the LORD. I have seen many Christians fall by the wayside, backslide for many years, marry unbelievers. Sometimes even supposedly fundamental ministers leave the faith or join charismatic churches, departing from the Word. In your life now there will be many battles that will come in all form and magnitudes. Will you be ready and equipped to fight them? Or will you fumble and falter.

The course ahead is a daunting one, but take encouragement and instruction from Paul's letter to be a worthy soldier that fights a good fight, in all seasons, no matter the foe, faithful till our final breath.

Thought: What will the LORD, the righteous judge give you when you stand before Him? (2 Timothy 4:8)

Prayer: May I fight a good fight and be a faithful soldier to the very end.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE WORD OF GOD?

The origin of the word ‘pastor’ means shepherd and embodies the idea of feeding. A good shepherd will not only care for his flock in practical ways but care for their entire wellbeing. A pastor’s charisma, strength, connections, education, and personality will only bring him so far in the ministry and for so long. The Word of God is vital to the life of all Christians, especially the pastor. It is from Scripture that he derives spiritual wisdom and strength for himself, and authority to teach and correct so that his flock may be spiritually transformed.

All scripture is the inspired Word of God – the entire Bible is authoritative, not just some parts. It is profitable for doctrine – the correct principles and teaching. It is profitable for reproof – express disapproval for sin and reprimand. It is profitable for correction – shows us the right way. And it is profitable for instruction in righteousness – it teaches us how to lead a righteous life. The result of all this spiritual instruction is that the believer can be perfect – not that we are sinless, but that our lives will be blameless and complete, able to walk in the right way, to serve our Lord and bear fruits for Him!

Paul faced persecutions, afflictions, and evil men; trials and testings that Timothy would surely face. It was the precious and indispensable Word of God that enabled Paul to endure all this unimaginable hardships and emerge blameless unto all good works. He knew how essential it was, and therefore he exhorted Timothy to cling on tightly to these Scriptures, the same scriptures that he had been taught from young.

A problem with Christians is our low view of Scripture and high view of ourselves. We are sometimes too selective when it comes to the application of certain doctrines. When it comes to studying it, we are slack or indifferent. We forget or doubt its power to transform our life. We must realize that all of the Bible is profitable, we will surely gain! This is guaranteed. It is only by Scripture we can live a godly, sanctified life godly life. It’s tragic that we choose to remain spiritual paupers and ineffective Christians.

Thought: What is the purpose of the Word of God in your life? Do you read it, abide by it, cherish it, and thus show forth good works in your life?

Prayer: May I value and know all Scripture to be blameless and good testimony.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF TITUS?

The Cretians were notorious for their wickedness (1:11) and one of the problems facing the church was false teachers. Jews were preaching their 'fables', deceiving, teaching the 'commandments of men'. These Jews not only preached false doctrines, they also led wicked lives. Paul instructed Titus to remedy all this sin by speaking sound doctrine. Doctrine that is good, reliable, trustworthy. Doctrine to which nothing has been added, subtracted, nor amended to change it according to the personal agenda of men. The "things which become" sound doctrine goes further than the faithful preaching and teaching of correct doctrines. Titus must also live a life in which all aspects – speech, behaviour are framed in the fear of God, thus demonstrating sound doctrine. His life must be one where good works are the norm, and all speech is above reproach so much so that the wrongdoers in the church would be ashamed having nothing bad to say of him! (2:7-8) It *"adorn[s] the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."* (2:10) The word Paul uses for "adorn" comes from the Greek word "kosmeo" from which we derive our English word "cosmetic" Such a life is one that becomes sound doctrine. It shows to advantage, suits and 'flatters' as cosmetics do. Speaking and living a life that adorns sound doctrine is the theme of Titus. Principle and practice go hand in hand, they simply must.

A problem today is pastors and the leadership place little emphasis on sound doctrine or disregard it altogether. Neither do they live lives that become sound doctrine. Consequently, the flock either care little for it or remain completely ignorant. Unbelievers look at the church and can see no difference between the church and the world. For those of you who have been taught sound doctrine, are you living a life that adorns it? Does your speech, your interactions and relationships with others, hobbies, hopes and ambitions beautify God's Word? Do you strive to practice what you have been preached, to have a testimony to which your enemies can find no fault? Or are you living a hypocritical life? Does your life demonstrate how sound doctrine has amazingly transformed you from a wicked sinner to be a young man or woman who is sober, godly and holy? Or are you living a life that adorns another doctrine, Satan's?

Thought: What is the focus of your life? Spiritual everlasting cosmetics or physical temporal cosmetics?

Prayer: May I adorn the God and His Word in everything that I do rather than the temporal, material outward things of this world.

HOW SHOULD WE FIGHT GOD’S ENEMIES?

Many of us have been in physical fights or squabbles with a sibling or friend. What feelings or emotions led to it? What did you hope to achieve, something noble? Did Christ and His disciples ever use physical violence to quell opposition? Christ never taught His disciples to use violence, nor should we. Our objective in relation to unbelievers – enemies of God – is conversion. *“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another”* (Titus 3:3). In the New Testament, believers battle against God’s enemies by the preaching and teaching of the Word, and by their living testimonies. In Titus 1:9, Paul instructs Titus to use the pure doctrine that he had been taught, as his weapons to strongly encourage, urge and ultimately convince those who oppose Christ. The task to exhort and convince would not be an easy one. Titus would face opposition and discouragement. He would need to hold tightly to sound doctrine, not letting anyone or anything take it away from him, nor letting it go, ever. Because it is sound doctrine that would convert the soul and ‘defeat’ the power of sin over the converted.

Often what causes us to want to fight or get involved in a conflict is anger motivated by pride, and the belief that a personal injustice has been committed. It is about self, rather than Christ when in fact it should be the opposite. Whilst we may not ever be placed in a position to physically fight, nor want to, are you guilty of being derisive of unbelievers’ values, customs and beliefs? Do you love to argue to prove yourself right? This demonstrates self-righteousness and spiritual pride rather than righteousness and spiritual love. This should never be the case. As believers, we must always be humble, and in love seek out opportunities whereby we can reach out to the unbelievers around us. We never trust in the arm of flesh, but we must steadfastly trust in the power of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit to transform someone. In this concluding devotion on the pastoral epistles we see the importance of sound doctrine as a reoccurring theme. Without pure doctrine, pastors, believers and the church are powerless.

Thought: Has your knowledge and view of sound doctrine changed over the course of the study of the New Testament?

Prayer: *“Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.”* (1 Timothy 4:15)

WHAT ARE THE PRISON EPISTLES?

The prison epistles –Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon – are so named because they were written by the Apostle Paul during his imprisonment in Rome. His imprisonment was actually a house arrest as described in Acts 28: 16 where we are told that he was guarded by two soldiers, permitted to receive visitors (Acts 28: 30) and had opportunities to share the gospel (Acts 28: 31). Paul was indeed an ambassador for Christ as he was there in chains. His imprisonment produced three great letters to the churches of Ephesus, Colosse and Philippi, and a personal letter to his friend Philemon. Epaphras, the leader of the church in Colosse in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) came to Paul to report that a new false teaching had arose in the church there. To deal with this, Paul wrote strongly to them, presenting Christ as the all-sufficient head of the Church, *"that in all things he might have the preeminence"* (Colossians 1: 18). In the letter to his beloved church at Ephesus, Paul wrote to instruct the body of Christ in the great doctrines of the faith (Ephesians 1-3). It was followed by instruction in the practical outworkings of that doctrine in Christian behaviour (chapters 4-6). Tychicus, a co-labourer together with Paul, personally delivered both letters, together with the letter to Philemon, as Onesimus the slave was returned to the owner Philemon. Epaphroditus' arrival in Rome was the occasion for Paul to write the epistle to the Philippians. He came with a gift for his support, and the joy that Paul experienced prompted him to write this letter to thank them for their love and to strengthen them in the hope and joy that was theirs in Christ.

Dear teen, Paul's time in prison brought about a great spiritual contribution to the cause of Christ. With the coming of Paul to Rome the gospel was brought from the Jewish capital of Jerusalem in the east to the Gentile capital of the world in Rome in the west. Do you see God's sovereign hand in this? As Paul was bound captive to Rome but the glorious outworking of God's purpose was served. It might be so in your life too. While you toil in your studies or in national service, remember to honour the Lord in your hardships and the Lord can use you in His own time.

Thought: The Lord's ways are indeed past finding out.

Prayer: Lord, remind me to trust and honour Thee in all circumstance, walking by faith and not by sight.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF EPHESIANS?

This church in Ephesus was founded by the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18-21). On his third missionary journey, he returned to Ephesus and spent three years there teaching them the Word of God. It was a church dear to his heart as he spent a longer time there than in any other church. He wanted to instruct them in the riches they have as part of the body of Christ, the church. Broadly, the book is divided into two sections. The first three chapters deal with the doctrinal aspects of the church, Christ's body. The last three chapters deal with the practical outworking of that doctrine. Chapter 1 tells us about the great work of salvation and thus the *“all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”* that has been bestowed upon all believers, the body of Christ. Chapter 2 describes the fruits of good works and unity that comes as a result of salvation. Chapter 3 further reveals the glorious creation that is the church and exhorts the saints to know the love of Christ therein. In chapter 4, we read his exhortation to walk worthy of the calling to be Christ's body, chapter 5 stresses walking in love, separating from sin, walking circumspectly, and having godly relationships. Finally, Paul tells us that we are to put on the whole armour of God as we strive to live for Christ. The passage you have just read, Ephesians 1:17-19, is Paul's prayer for the church. He prays that they might realize to the full extent of the rich spiritual blessings that God has bestowed upon His children. Paul had himself scaled those spiritual heights and he wanted them to be similarly blessed. The greatest need is to know God, always and at all times. In particular, here Paul prays that their eyes of understanding might be enlightened about three things – God's calling us, the inheritance for us, and God's power in us.

Dear teen, are you ambitious in knowing God? The Holy Spirit, who dwells in you and in every believer, aids you in growing and knowing God intimately. Your responsibility is to seek Him, set your mind to think and to dwell on the hope and assurance of His calling, the glorious inheritance awaiting you and the greatness of His power already at work and will continue, to bring us to glory. These things are yours and prepared for you. Seek the Lord daily as you open your Bible.

Thought: Spending time with God is living for eternity.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes that I may know the sure hope of eternity in Christ, the glorious inheritance that You have given me and the greatness of Thy power.

WHO IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH?

Christ is the head of the Church. Using the husband and wife relationship, where the husband is head of the house, Paul shows the spiritual picture of the Church. In crystal clear language, he writes that the head of the Church is not the pope, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. Neither is the pastor the head of the church, as most Protestants might vaguely think. No man but Christ is the head of the body, the Church: *“...that in all things he might have the preeminence”* (Colossians 1:18). This means that we are followers of Christ and not of men. Christ is to be the source of the life of the church, the body of Christ. He rules over her with divine authority. Christ is the only head of the Church because the Church is His body. In this body we see unity and harmony because Christ rules and governs the body. We must be followers of Him, and not of the teachings of men. If we follow some other head than Christ, then we are members of a different body. His authority is given to us in His Word. He has set in the church the proper government to guide under His direction. The church session or leadership is made up of the Elders and Deacons. They govern, not by their own wills, but by the commandments of Christ through His Word.

This verse also speaks of Christ being the Saviour of the body. He gave Himself to save her and will see her through her trials to preserve her to the end, so that He can one day receive her as His pure and spotless bride, holy and without blemish.

Dear teen, are you in a church that recognizes Christ is the head and is subject to only the authority of His inerrant, infallible and fully preserved Word? Does that church's action and practices honour the name of Christ? As long as the Word of God is our supreme authority, we are following the directions from Christ. Also, remember that Christ, our divine head is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever (Hebrews 13: 8) in contrast to human leaders that can be replaced, and are ever changing and changeable. Rejoice evermore in this glorious truth.

Thought: *“For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell”*
(Colossians 1:19).

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, may my church be ever faithful to Christ, the head and honour Him in all things.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF PHILIPPIANS?

The main theme of Philippians is joy. Forms of the words joy, rejoice, and gladness appear fifteen times. Throughout the book Paul himself rejoices and he encourages the Philippians to rejoice (and again I say, rejoice!). Paul finds joy in the midst the sufferings he went through and even then in prison. The reason is that even there in the prison, he was able to preach the gospel and people were coming to the Lord. This theme of joy is a continual reminder to the Philippians that joy is to be a part of the Christian life and a constant aspect of the Christian walk. Every chapter is a reminder that Christians are to live their lives with a sense of joy. There is joy that flows from faith in Christ (1:25); joy that comes from proclaiming the gospel (1:18), joy that is a product of church unity (2:2) and joy that is beyond difficult personal circumstances (2: 17-18). Indeed the brethren are exhorted to *“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice”* (4:4).

Philippians 1:21 is one of the key verses in this epistle. It should also be a key verse in the life of every saint. Paul is giving us his own view of living. This is the gold standard that we should aspire to. Paul was faced with the prospect of death at the hands of the Roman government. He faced the truth that truly life’s chief aim is not living for money, fame or pleasure but for Christ and Christ alone. All things pass away and are of temporal value. Furthermore, to die is gain. Paul knew that death is not a defeat or the end to the Christian but a promotion to glory, a “net gain” in accounting terms. When a Christian dies, he or she really begins to live to the full, for he passes into the perfect, eternal, glorious union with Christ free from the sin and evils of this world. It is only with such an perspective in life that we can attain true joy!

Dear teen, have you experienced the joy of the Lord? As you walk in close relationship to the Lord, your eyes and your heart will be touched by the wonderful, stupendous grace, mercy, love and power of the Lord. This realization will lead you to rejoice that you have a loving Saviour who cares immensely for you. As you learn more about His great redemptive plan and how it reaches even you, you will rejoice deeply. But do make sure that you have truly been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you come with a repentant heart to the Saviour?

Thought: For a Christian death is exchanging the burden of earthly life for the eternal joy of heaven. – A. T. Robertson.

Prayer: My gracious, merciful and loving Father, may the joy of the Lord be my strength. Make me a joyful Christian to shine for Thee.

"...made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant..."

WHAT DID CHRIST EMPTY HIMSELF OF?

Through the years, some theologians have used the passage Philippians 2:6-8 to teach the idea that the second person of the Godhead, at the time of the incarnation (when "the Word was made flesh – John 1:14) emptied Himself of deity. They mean to say that in His time on earth, Jesus was not fully divine. He gave up or lost some of the divine attributes. This is a heresy and an attack on the deity of Christ. The doctrine of the two natures of Christ maintains that Jesus was fully man (100% man) and fully God (100% God). His two natures were not combined or confused into some new nature. When Paul writes of Christ making Himself of no reputation (verse 7), these theologians argued that Christ emptied Himself of something. When Christ emptied Himself, He was pouring out His soul unto death for His people. He did this by taking the form of a servant and coming in the likeness of men. Unlike Adam, the first man, who made an attempt to seize equality with God (Genesis 3:5), Jesus, the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), humbled Himself and obediently accepted the role of the bondservant. There was no change in His divine nature. While Jesus was on earth, He was equal with God the Father (John 10:28) and allowed others to call him "God" (John 20:30). He also accepted worship, even though He plainly taught that only God is worthy of worship (Matthew 8:2). Christ did not empty Himself of His deity. Rather, to His divinity we can say that He added humanity. For the first time, He was subject to such things as hunger, thirst, pain, disease and temptation (cf John 19:28). Christ was fully God and fully man for only then could He be the Saviour of the world – our salvation rests on this truth, a truth which we must vigorously defend.

Application: Dear teen, have you thought of how important it is that Christ is fully God and fully man? As fully divine, Christ is the spotless and sinless Saviour that can save sinner. Can any other name under heaven save us? Why not? As fully man, Christ is our representative to take our place and be our substitute on the cross and dying in our place. Will God accept an angel dying for us? The great mystery of the Christian faith, that Jesus is both God and man is beyond our limited understanding. We stand amazed and in wonder and awe at this grand plan of redemption that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit devised from eternity past.

Thought: Christ was obedient unto death. Let me be obedient to God's truth.

Prayer: Gracious loving heaving Father, let this truth burn in my heart to understand it, love it and defend it when false teachers teach it.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF COLOSSIANS?

It was while Paul was in prison that he received a visitor from the church at Colosse. False teaching and heresy had crept into the church and the leaders of the Colossian church were unable to deal with it so they sent Epaphras to Rome to consult with Paul. He informed Paul of this threat and Paul wrote this epistle and sent it to the church through Tychicus and Onesimus (Colossians 4:7-9). There was a denial of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Many of these false teachers taught that Christ was a created being, perhaps the highest being that God created. This was an attack upon the Trinity and upon the eternal, sovereign deity of Jesus Christ. This led to the worship of angels (Colossians 2:18) and many other errors of asceticism and legalism. The dangers that affected the church were quite obvious to Paul. Thus Paul stressed the sovereign headship of Christ over creation and the Church (Colossians 1:13-29) and warned them against the moral and doctrinal errors of of gnosticism (Colossians 2:1-23). Gnosticism (Greek *gnosis* means “knowledge”) deprecated the value of the material world and exalted the mind and advocated the abusing of the body through licentious living). In this system, salvation was gained through knowledge by an elite few with no attention given to sin, guilt, and faith. In Colossians 2:9-10, Paul sought to strengthen the believers and to release them from the bondage of ritualistic, legalistic obligations of the false teachings of Gnosticism. As believers, they come under the headship of Christ who is equal in power and essence with God Himself for “all the fullness of the Godhead” is in Him. How then can they worship angels who were created by Him? They were also “complete in Christ” or positionally perfect in Christ and thus not bound by man-made rules.

Dearest teen, are you aware of the errors that false teachers seek to propagate? In modern times, the error of the health and wealth gospel has crept in and many have succumbed to it. Can you see through their error and deception? Always measure all teachings against the Word of God. If God does not instruct us to seek wealth, then how can it be true? Instead the Bible teaches clearly that *“the love of money is the root of all evil”* (1 Timothy 6: 10) and that *“godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 Timothy 6: 6). So do search the Scriptures and find out what God says in any matter before you believe what men tell you.

Thought: In Christ are *“hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Colossians 2:3).

Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, increase my zeal in the study of Your Word that I may learn more of Thee, O Thou fount of every blessing.

WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE IN SINGING?

We sing hymns, spiritual songs and sometimes Psalms in our worship services, fellowship meetings and other gatherings. This is what Saint Augustine, in his commentary on Psalm 148, wrote on the singing of such hymns and spiritual songs:

Do you know what a hymn is? It is singing to the praise of God.

If you praise God and do not sing, you utter no hymn.

If you sing and not praise God, you utter no hymn.

Thus when we sing in worship, we are offering *“the sacrifice of praise to God... that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name”* (Hebrews 13:15). Is our heart attuned in that way? Or do we sing in a perfunctional manner or just as a matter of routine? As redeemed people, we must come before the Lord with great thanksgiving and sing praises to Him out of the fullness of our grateful hearts. Yes, we will *“Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious”* (Psalm 66:2).

In Colossians 3:16, we learn that the Word of God is intricately linked to our music and our songs. The Word of God must first dwell richly in us before we can have the fruit for scriptural music for our singing. The Word of God is the beginning and the ending of all our musical activities, including singing. Singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord is an activity that all blood bought saints is commanded to practice.

Dear teen, do you know that there is a battle for godly music? Contemporary Christian music or CCM is gaining widespread popularity in many churches. As you study its history, roots and lifestyle of the performers you will realize that they do not practise biblical separation in their music. They openly and proudly use any type of music in the service of the Lord, including rock and pop music in the worship of the flesh. They borrow from the world’s sensual rhythms, and try to use such ungodly music to attract the crowds. Their end result is not the praise or glory of God, but rather the adoration of man.

Thought: Even before man existed, *“the morning stars sing together”* (Job 38:7) and one day there will also be singing around the throne of the Lamb (Revelation 5:9).

Prayer: Lord, grant me a deeper understanding of how I should offer the sacrifice of my lips and sing with my whole heart of the wondrous mighty acts of God.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF PHILEMON?

Of the four prison epistles, this is the only one written directly to an individual. Paul wrote to commend Philemon for his Christian compassion toward the need of fellow believers and especially to ask for forgiveness for Onesimus. Onesimus was a slave of Philemon who had stolen some of his master's goods and fled to Rome (Philemon 18-19). In Rome, he came into contact with Paul who led him to a saving knowledge of Christ. Paul, however, knew that the slave had to be returned to his legal master (Philemon 13-14). Since Tychicus was to journey to Colosse to where Philemon lived, Paul decided to send Onesimus back to Philemon with his messenger Tychicus. The letter was composed to explain the situation to Philemon and to instruct him as to how a runaway slave, now a Christian, should be received. The main theme of Philemon is the theological concept of forgiveness and imputation. Human forgiveness should reflect divine forgiveness. Paul graciously beseeched Philemon on the basis of love to receive Onesimus the slave as if he was receiving Paul himself (Philemon 12, 15, 17). Paul also wrote, *"If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account... I will repay thee"* (Philemon 18-19). This is the language of imputation. Our debt as a sinner was paid for by Christ's redemptive death. It is interesting to note that principles for the humane treatment of slaves are found in numerous passages in the Bible (Ephesians 6: 5-9; Colossians 3: 22-4:1; 1 Timothy 6: 1-2; 1 Peter 2: 18-25). They were to be treated as people, not property. By bringing the gospel to him, Paul also showed that the gospel is for all and not only for the rich and those in the upper class of society. All may come to the Lord, including the poor and needy outcasts of society. God is also no respecter of men and freely offers salvation to whosoever will come.

Dear teen, has anyone betrayed you and hurt you so that you find it difficult to forgive that person? I am sure that Philemon had treated Onesimus well but yet he stole his money and ran away. Paul was confident that Philemon would forgive his slave (Philemon 21). In Matthew 6:14,15 the Lord emphatically stated this truth with the following words, *"For if ye forgive men their trespases, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespases, neither will your Father forgive your trespases."*

Thought: When you forgive, you set a prisoner free. The prisoner is you.

Prayer: Most merciful Father in heaven, teach me to always forgive those who have hurt me, remembering how Thou hast forgiven me freely.

"Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me"

DO WE AVOID EX-CONVICTS WHO ARE NOW SAVED?

Onesimus was a slave and a thief who was saved. God, in the multitude of his mercies had forgiven him and accepted him as a child of God. There are many others like him down the ages who have been saved. Rahab, the harlot is one of the most outstanding examples of one despised in society but have found salvation in the Lord. Nowadays we also hear of ex-convicts and ex-drug addicts who have come to a saving knowledge of the Lord.

John 6:37 declares, *"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me: and him that cometh to me; I will in no wise cast out."* In declaring these words Jesus shows that He accepts all men regardless of their race, language and position in society. Here in the above verse, which you have just read, Paul's request to Philemon was that he receives Onesimus as a brother in Christ. Indeed, Paul commended him to Philemon as *"a brother beloved specially to me."* Furthermore, he was quick also to add that Onesimus would also be profitable to Philemon now that his slave is a believer.

As Christians, we are also to practice the same type of acceptance that Jesus practiced, regardless of what they had done in the past or what they have done to us. The Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 was a woman of ill repute but Jesus offered her the living water and she gladly accepted. She went forth into the city and witnessed to the men, "Is this not the Christ?" Many of the Samaritans believed on Jesus because of her. We must also follow in the steps of our Master.

Dear teen, are you able to receive all men, regardless of what they have done, what colour their skin is and where they come from? From time to time, you might meet with friends, classmates or even church members who have had a past. As Jesus has shown and as Paul has shown, we need to have a great heart of compassion and justice for all. Since all are sinners, all are in need of a Saviour to save them from their sins. Once saved, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will change, lead and guide them that they grow more Christ-like. Who are we to judge them when Christ has already accepted them?

Thought: Others should not have to meet our standards to be accepted by us.

Prayer: Our loving Father in heaven, teach me to have a compassionate heart for those who are down and out and help them along life's difficult journey.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF JAMES?

The book of James is a general letter or epistle, a classification given to any New Testament book written by someone other than Paul. The message of James is timeless and therefore speaks to the believers throughout all generations. The main theme of the book is practical Christian living. Throughout the epistle James showed that once we accept the gospel and believe, it is expected that we will demonstrate the reality of that faith in our day to day living. We are not only to know and hear the Word of God but to be doers too. How we live the life of genuine faith is seen in the way we face temptations and conquer them with God's help. Chapter two shows clearly how faith must result in good works while chapter three is the classic exposition of how our tongue, being so powerful, should be tamed. We are responsible for our words and must choose them wisely. Chapter four shows how a believer deals with pride and cultivates humility and chapter five exhorts the believer to continue in prayer with patience. All these are different aspects of the godly life of a believer. In chapter two James argued that a living faith would produce works of faith. He gave the example of a man who claimed to have faith but who had no works to show for it. Simply saying kind words to a poor brethren who has no food or suffering from cold without offering to help is of not much use or profit. What is needed is concrete and practical help to that needy brother or sister. Thus James says that a mere profession of faith without works is useless. Again, in verses 20 and 26, he emphasized this fact. A faith without works is dead because there is no transformation of life. It is valueless. Human life is marked by the presence of breathing; genuine spiritual life is marked by the activity of good works, for the glory of God.

Dear teen, have you been transformed by the Spirit of God to serve Christ? In doing so, do you notice yourself thinking of how you can help others? There are myriads of ways you can do it. You can pray for your friends who are experiencing some difficulties in their lives. You can befriend the shy, the lonely and the weak. You can offer to buy lunch perhaps for those in financial trouble. You can cheer up the sad and downcast. You can encourage those who are down and disappointed. You should always be mindful of the needs of others including those in your family. In other words, put others before yourself!

Thought: Do good to all men but especially to those in the household of faith.

Prayer: Father in heaven, make me more sensitive to the needs of those around me and help me to do a good deed everyday, for Thee.

DO YOU HAVE JOY IN TRIALS?

A living faith will endure the trials of life with grace and even with joy. That is what James 1:2 teaches. We are exhorted to count it all joy when trials come our way. Trials are to test us. We become mature in our faith when we face temptations bravely and even joyfully, knowing that it is refining and strengthening us. How do we find joy in tough times? We could choose to either look at our trials negatively and consider it our cruel lot or we can look at it as an opportunity to make us better. James is admonishing us to choose the same attitude as Jesus Christ, *“who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross”* (Hebrews 12:2). How can you and I be joyful even in the midst of our trials and troubles? We can be joyful because we know that this trial is for our good! We can choose to focus on Christ rather than upon our circumstances. Joy is the inward source of our strength in tough times and that joy comes from our relationship with the Lord.

Did David have many trials and troubles in his life? He certainly had more than his share of trials when he was persecuted by King Saul and had to hide in caves and in the desert to escape death. But if you read his Psalms, you will be struck by his strong faith and praise of God. He endured the years of his struggles in the wilderness patiently and the joy of the Lord was always his strength. Indeed when he became king of Judah and then Israel, he became the best king that Israel ever had. He became a man after God’s own heart.

So you see, dear teen, how important it is to patiently endure your trials, trusting that *“our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (2 Corinthians 4:17). The road to Christian maturity winds through many difficulties. Perhaps you are going through a trial of faith even now. Believe that this and every trial, trouble and hardship we go through is part of God’s process of getting us from where we are to where He wants us to be. The place He wants us to be is the place of triumph and victory over sin and temptation. Along the way, His grace, the Holy Spirit that indwells you, much prayer and reading of God’s Word are our divine help and resource. God means to make you stronger.

Thought: The early Christians were often tortured for their faith but they sang praises to God and prayed for those who persecuted them.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, may I consider it a privilege to suffer for You, for You have counted me worthy to suffer for Your great name.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF 1 PETER?

This is the Apostle Peter's first letter to the Christians in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia who were suffering for their faith (1 Peter 1:1,5). The main theme of Peter's letter was to assure the believers that the heaviness of their trials for Christ was known to God and was part of God's plan for their lives. God purposed that their faith would be purified through such trials. They were challenged to follow the example of Christ and to suffer patiently (1 Peter 2:20). Indeed the suffering motif permeates the epistle and forms the background for Peter's exhortation. "Suffering" is the key theme of this epistle.

The book of 1 Peter thus addresses this issue of suffering, and helps us to understand it in the light of God's will. Peter's encouragement to them is that persecution is inevitable. He exhorts them not to be shocked or surprised by the persecution and suffering that they were facing, but instead to look to the example of Christ, rejoicing that they can be privileged to have a part in His sufferings. They were to realize that the world is not a friend to those who follow Christ faithfully. If our Master was persecuted, we his servants are not greater than our Master. Jesus had said, *"If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you"* (John 15:20). Thus persecution is a sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. We are walking the way our Master walked and sharing the Cross our Master carried. If we suffer with him, will be glorified with him (Romans 8: 17) and we shall reign with him (2 Timothy 2:12). If we remember that, our sufferings for Christ become a privilege and not a penalty.

Dear teen, are you willing to be mocked at for your faith? Some of you might have come across those who think that men ought to be self-sufficient and master of their own fate and destiny. Others would believe in evolution and mock your creationist position. As you take a stand for Christ, you might be despised in their eyes as fools. Are you willing to be thus mocked? Beloved, thank God that you are not only saved, but also counted worthy to suffer for the Creator of heaven and earth.

Thought: *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him"* (James 1:12).

Prayer: Lord, make me brave and strong in my love for Thee. Help me to not only take a stand for Thee but also always count it an opportunity to magnify Thy great name.

HOW SHOULD YOU PRAY FOR OTHERS WHO ARE SUFFERING?

Peter's prayer was a great comfort to his readers. A true pastor will wish to encourage the believers and here Peter gives many sources of comfort to those who are suffering. First he tells the believers that they have a God who is the God of all grace. This beautiful name for God tells them that God's manifold and abundant grace will see them through the difficulties and trails of life. His grace extends to every aspect of a believer's life – our salvation, our obedience, our love, our faith and the trials of life. His unmerited favour will be upon us constantly till the end of our life.

Another source of comfort is that our troubles will be only a while. It will be of a short duration, in comparison to the eternity of glory that is ahead. Another way to compare is with the sufferings of Jesus on the cross. Suffering saints can also take comfort that God's purpose for their suffering is to enjoy His eternal glory and love. In the process, he will achieve perfection, stability, strength and steadfastness. Each of these words, “perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle” speaks of an ongoing process that God is directing to grow us in His grace, till we see Him face to face.

Finally, Peter ends his prayer with a doxology. “To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever” His prayer of divine comfort had led him to burst out in praise. He knows that the God of all grace will give him a wonderful future and encourages the saints to rest fully in the God's sovereign power.

Dear teen, are you suffering for Christ? If not, know that every true believer, in taking a stand for Christ, in an ungodly world will inevitably meet with hostility and persecution of some sort. Remember that the world is not a friend to believers and if they persecute our Master, we His servants are not spared. Comfort yourself then with the words of Scripture and especially this epistle. We in the 21st century will also meet, the same antagonistic attitude of mockers and scorners of God's Word. Consider taking a stand for creationism, of how the world was created as against the evils of evolution and you will soon find that you are alone. Will you then gladly suffer for Christ?

Thought: Suffering is necessary to conform us to Christ.

Prayer: O Father in heaven, may I be of good courage when I need to take a stand for Christ in this wicked and perverse generation.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF 2 PETER?

In 1 Peter, the apostle wrote to encourage the suffering Christians. In 2 Peter, he followed up to write about the need to be equipped with the knowledge of God and His Word in order to face the skillful deceivers and false teachers. These enemies of the faith may succeed where fierce persecution failed. Believers both then and now need to have a solid foundation of knowledge of the true teachings of our Lord. This will ensure that Christians will not be easily “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). The apostle Peter was concerned to inform and comfort the believers that there are divine provisions that God has given to His people. Indeed God has *“given to us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.”* This shows that God has already in eternity past intended to show his gracious and loving favour upon His children. Moreover, the word “all things” should be stressed as it speaks of how complete God’s provisions are. There is absolutely nothing that God cannot do for us, if we walk according to His will. It is the *“knowledge of him”* that will lead a child of God to growth and maturity. It is not experience or even feelings. The infallible, inerrant and fully preserved Word of God is the faithful believer’s only reliable and acceptable rule of life and faith. The ancient Gnostic error held to a body of secret verbal knowledge that only the inner circle knew. The modern New Age movement is a rehash of their teachings. We need to be vigilant regarding such false teachings. Satan is the mastermind behind all these to foster either ignorance or false ideas – to destroy us. Compare this with God’s goal and glorious end for us – that we might share in His glory and virtue.

Dear teen living as Christians in the 21st century, the dangers you face are no less. Though the mass media and Internet you should be aware that there are many quacks tele-evangelists parading as true Christian leaders. Many immature Christians have been “taken in” by their quackery and false interpretation of Scriptures. Our responsibility as all born-again Christians is to be so grounded in the Word that we will be able to discern truth from error. Yes, think of how you can diligently study the Scriptures for then you will be richly rewarded *“into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (1:10-11).

Thought: *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”*
(Psalm 119:105).

Prayer: Help me, Lord, to carefully plan how I can spend more time in the study of Your Word and by thy grace, be disciplined to carry it out.

IS EXPERIENCE OR SCRIPTURE MORE IMPORTANT?

We have already learnt that Scripture is the supreme authority for life and faith. But let us explore further and be thoroughly convinced and convicted that it is so. Peter presents to his readers two lines of verification of the truth of Scripture. The first line of supernatural experience is in verse 16-18. There Peter tells us that he and the Apostles were eye-witnesses themselves of the second coming glory of the Lord Jesus Christ on the mount of transfiguration. Thus the things he had made known to them were things he had personally experienced. Secondly, there is supernatural revelation as mentioned in verses 19-21. Both supernatural experience and supernatural revelation attest to the veracity, validity of Scripture as the Word of God. Together they affirm that the Bible is true.

However, note that even the Apostles' first hand account was not sufficient by itself. God, by means of the Holy Spirit, superintended the recording of all their experiences and all of their writings so that they, in effect, were the revelation of God Himself. Despite all the wonderful experiences that Peter and all the Apostles had, there must be a more sure word than their experience. As true as it was, as valid as it was, there must more than that. Peter was able to proclaim clearly to those who want to question his experience that there is a more reliable source, that is the Word of God. Sights and sound can be deceptive. The Word of God is inspired or God-breathed. Any prophetic word from God is a more sure word than human experience. We do well to pay attention to it for it is like a lamp to give the light of truth and virtue to a dark, ignorant and wicked world

Application: Have you noticed the increasing moral decay and depravity of the world, especially with the President of the United States of America announcing that he accepted same sex marriages? Beloved teen, the days of Noah and Lot are indeed upon us and our refuge is the light of God's Word. Scripture is a kind of night-light. It shines as a light in the dark places of this earth. It's the only light we have until the Morning Star who is the Lord Jesus Christ, arises and brings with Him the dawn of a new era. Meanwhile, have nothing to do with the darkness that surrounds this world but seek the light of Scripture with all your heart.

Thought: Our greatest treasure is the more sure Word of God.

Prayer: Father in heaven, we live in a darkened world. May we occupy ourselves with the light of Your Word and may our lives be lit by its clear light. These things we ask for the glory of Christ Jesus. Amen.

“That ye earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF JUDE?

The main theme of Jude is expressed in Jude 3. All Christians are called and commissioned to fight and contend for the faith – the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. The reason why we must do so is that this faith is under attack from within. False teachers had crept stealthily into the church to undermine the teachings of Jesus. Jude is almost similar to 2 Peter in that it confronts the threat of false teachers. Both epistles are devoted to stern denunciations of false teachers in order to impress the readers with the seriousness of the threat. However, Jude is distinctive in his rich description of Old Testament apostasy. Jude gave historical examples of the wilderness generation of Israel, the fallen angels and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah to show the certainty of divine judgment upon those who practice sin. He goes on to describe the character of the apostates: evil speakers, ignorant, beastly, corrupt (10), dangerous, immoral and untrustworthy (12-16). Their fate is as prophesied by Enoch, *“the Lord cometh...to execute judgment upon all...that are ungodly”* (14,15). In verse 17, Jude also reminds his readers of what they had already learnt from the Apostles, for these would help encourage them in their fight against the ungodliness of the false teachers. Thus Jude begins and ends with an appeal to contend for the faith handed down once for all to the saints. Note too that Jude’s epistle is more than negative opposition. There are positive prescriptions to combat apostasy. First there is his clarion call for all believers to bear a firm witness for the truth (3) and it is good to remind us constantly of this need. Then he urges his reader to grow in their knowledge of Christian truth, of the *“most holy faith”* (20) and to seek to reclaim those whose faith was wavering (22,23).

Application: Dear teen, do you now know the prescription for confronting spiritual error? Today, as was in the days of Jude, apostasy is just as rampant, if not more. Realize that we all have a part to play in the defence of the faith. Every generation has their battles to fight. It is a faith that has been delivered to all saints, not just church leaders and pastors. Do you care that error is creeping into churches? Do you care that people are being led astray?

Thought: If the truth is not guarded, protected and passed from one generation to another, future generations will not be able to hear the Word of Truth.

Prayer: Our gracious heavenly Father, let me be a faithful follower, to know Your truth and to guard Your truth.

WHAT DOES THE BENEDICTION MEAN?

At the end of a worship service, a benediction of God's blessing is pronounced upon the worshippers in a congregation. Most epistles also end with a benediction. In Jude, this is found in the last two verses, Jude 24;25. This benediction exalts God's power for it is able to keep us till the very end. We are assured that God's power will keep us from temptations till we see Him face to face. This strengthens the believer's hope in God and to see Him in his glory with great joy. It also reminds us of the unsearchable wisdom of God who had sent His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to be our Saviour. So the focus here is the love and salvation of the Heavenly Father. Some pastors have also agreed that the benediction is also a doxology. In a doxology, we give praise to God, in contrast to a benediction where we receive a blessing from God. Both are intertwined in Jude 24-25. There is praise directed towards God too. There is praise given to God for He preserves us by His power so that we do not fall away from the faith. We praise Him for His power to make us stand before Him with exceeding joy. It is not anything in us but entirely because of what God has done for us and because of His power we will stand at the last judgment day. Yes, we praise and adore Him for His great work of salvation in us. All praise to Him because He is worthy of all our praises.

Dearest teen, have you paid much attention to how you come in worship before the Lord on the Lord's Day? Do you prepare your heart to seek him? Do not come carelessly or as a matter of routine. You come before the only wise God, our Saviour to whom is all glory and majesty, dominion and power – from eternity to eternity. Prepare your heart, pray and come with reverence and awe before His majesty. If need be, sit with those who are serious in their worship of the Almighty God. Avoid frivolous conduct in a worship service. Come with praise in your heart and gratitude for all that He has done for you. Then when the benediction is given, thank God again that you have been blessed. Go in the strength of God's blessings in the days and weeks ahead. That is how your spiritual life will grow day by day.

Thought: Learn that there are reasons for the things we do in our worship to God

Prayer: Our only wise God and heavenly Father, in these dark days of apostasy, may Your power keep me from falling, and help me to be always defending and keeping the faith once delivered to the saints.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF 1 JOHN?

The main theme of the epistle is introduced in 1 John 1:3. There it states that the Apostle John wrote the epistle *"that ye may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."* First, in order to have true spiritual fellowship, believers must have a proper knowledge of Christ's person. His full deity and humanity must be stressed. False teachers were denying the humanity of Christ. Thus John had to combat their error and deception. He reaffirmed this in 1 John 4:1-3 where believers are exhorted to find out whether these teachers confess to the 100% deity and 100% humanity of Christ. To attain genuine spiritual fellowship with God, it is necessary for believers to be discerning in spiritual matters. The reason is that Satan and his forces are at work in the world (4:1). How do we discern? A false teacher may be gentle and loving. He may speak prophecies that come true. He may even perform miracles or cast out demons. Specifically, John lays down the rule (4:2-3), *"every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God."* Here John is referring not only to Christ's true deity but also His true humanity. The Docetists taught that matter is evil. Thus Jesus was only a spirit being. The Gnostics, taught that Jesus was a mere man, but that "the Christ," a divine emanation, came upon Him at His baptism and left Him before His crucifixion. John's test refutes both of these heresies. To deny that Jesus is both fully God and fully Man is to deny the historic Christian faith. Implicit in John's warning here is that the content of our theology matters greatly. True spiritual fellowship also means walking in the light of His Word and having no fellowship with darkness and falsehood. It is overcoming the world with its sins and pleasures. Also if we know Him, we must love Him and love what He loves. We express our love by keeping His commandments and by loving one another.

Have you thought of what would happen if Jesus were not fully God? Can He save us? Why? If Jesus is not fully man, will we have a Saviour to save us? Why not? Think on these things. If Jesus were not God, He would have been a sinner and His death on the cross could not have atoned for anyone. If He were not man, He could not have taken our sins and bore it on the cross to represent us.

Thought: Any teaching that denies that Jesus is true 100% God and true 100% man is a doctrine of demons.

Prayer: O mighty God, our everlasting Father, teach me Thy truth and Thy light and may I constantly and continually guard Thy precious truth.

"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments"

HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM OF GOD?

John 2:4-5 show us that it is our walk that is important, and not just our talk. There will be people around us who profess Christ, attend church and even be active in fellowship groups but who never really come to a saving knowledge of God. It is scary. They grow up, work and pursue careers and may become very successful but they never come back to church. It is vitally important therefore that we make sure that that we are in Him. In our memory verse above, we are told that whosoever abides in Christ and who will never fall away are those who truly keep God's Word. They obey God's commandments. Sometimes we may fail but we repent, confess and continually seek to please Him. God forgives us when we do that and we move on, pressing toward the mark of His high calling daily. When that happens, this verse tells us that the love of God is perfected in us. The word "perfected" has the idea of fulfilled. It is God accomplishing what He wants to do with His love. We show our love for God by obeying his commandments. In this manner, God's love is perfected in us. Thus we must manifest our love for God by keeping His Word. True love for God is not expressed in sentimental language or emotional experience. It is expressed in trusting and obeying Him. Love delights to do God's will. Jesus delighted to do His Father's will for he said, *"My meat is do the will of Him that sent me"* (John 4:34) and so, if we're like Jesus, then we will love to do God's will as well. Our obedience will show our true love to God and that we are of God.

Dearest teen, are you living in accordance to God's Word? If you have no desire to do so. John is saying to you now that you are not a Christian. The way is still open for you to come to Jesus. Acknowledge your sins and come to Jesus for grace to help in time of need.

On the other hand, there might be some of you who have imperfections in your lives. Do not despair. John is not asking for perfect obedience to God's Word. All of us sin daily as we examine ourselves and always resolve to repent and seek God's help do better.

Thought: A Christian lives in accordance with the teaching of Scripture, not the norms of the world.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, if I have not separated myself from the lust and pleasures of the world, convict me and show me my folly. Grant grace that I may repent and turn from the world and turn to seek the glories and eternal joys of Christ.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF 2 JOHN?

While the main theme of 1 John can be summarized as the “Tests of a true Christian life”, the main theme of 2 John is the “Tests of the true Christian care.” After knowing and worshipping the incarnate God in the Lord Jesus Christ, the believer must manifest the love of our incarnate God, for this brings victory over the antichrist. Having known the truth, John insists that true believers walk not only in the truth but also in love for one another. But realize that love is discriminating in that it does not receive and agree with those who compromise the faith. To these people, John instructs us that we do not receive them in our houses, neither bid them god speed. At the same time, John is careful to teach that we speak the truth in love. John’s message in 2 John 5 was not some new revelation. It was a reminder to keep walking in obedience to God’s truth by continuing to love one another. As we walk in the commandments of God, we must at the same time walk in love. It is so easy for us who are concerned about the doctrinal matters of Scripture to forsake the courtesy and charity that is expected of every Christian. We must be careful not to be offensive people. Though love should be bounded by truth, this does not mean that we stop being courteous and gracious. Ever more so because we know the truth, we must live out the truth by demonstrating to others what true Biblical love is. We must be careful in both our words and in our conduct that we show forth a good testimony for our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the idea that John sets before us.

Dear teen, are you able to strike a balance between standing for the truth and yet speaking the truth in love? If a brother is overtaken in a fault, or if someone has strayed from the truth, are you able to gently restore that brother? It is not easy even for a mature Christian. But we must all try our best. Yet we cannot become rigid, narrow and say hateful things. We must try to be gentle and understanding. On the other hand, our love must not be so wide and tolerant that we become weak and feeble in the things of God, and compromise with those who attack the name of our Lord. We must be wise and know what true Christian care and discernment is all about, and practice love only in the truth.

Thought: Jesus is both full of grace and truth.

Prayer: Our gracious heavenly Father, as we desire to love Thee with all our hearts, mind and strength, may we also translate this in Christ-likeness in the way we treat one another.

WHAT DOES BIBLICAL SEPARATION INVOLVE?

One of the distinctives of a Bible Presbyterian is that we hold to a strong biblical separation stand. One Bible teacher has described it as such: ‘Bible separation is the practice of separating from sin and error unto truth and righteousness. We are commanded to separate from sin in order to grow in holiness. We are commanded to separate from those whose teachings are contrary to that of the apostles. We are also commanded to separate from believers who are committed to disobedience.’

In the statement from 2 John 10, the apostle John commands believers not to receive false teachers into their houses because of their false doctrine. They were teaching that Jesus Christ is not come in the flesh and that was a fundamental error. This is what the Apostle Paul described as the doctrine of devils (1 Timothy 4:1). Therefore John instructed his readers not to allow these heretical teachers to come in to the house. John is here forbidding an official welcome to the congregation, that we do not encourage them in their apostasy and endorse their false teachings.

It is said that we are defined by what we reject as much as by what we accept. If we do not reject social drinking, we are also saying we are open to it. In the area of biblical separation, we should not only be obedient to God’s commands, but also exercise wisdom. Can one keep an “open mind” about which poisons a person might try? We may say “yes” to all the right things; but we must also say “no” to what is false and evil.

Dear teen, how good are you at rejecting what should be rejected? In this evil world that we live in, it is important that we are discerning and disciplined concerning what should be rejected. Satan is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Have you said a firm no to smoking and drinking? Have you rejected pop and rock music, as well as worldly movies? How are you to attain unto holiness if you do not reject these? Let the bounds of biblical separation guide you constantly and continually. It is the way of blessing and fruitfulness (Psalm 1:1-3). There must be moral, doctrinal and practical separation in all areas of your life if you want to please God.

Thought: Separation is faithfulness to God and His truth.

Prayer: Our loving heavenly Father, strengthen my resolve to obey You in matters of biblical separation for it is an expression of my love and obedience to You, trusting that is also the way of protection against the evils and wickedness of this world.

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF 3 JOHN?

3 John is a letter by the Apostle John addressed to a dear friend called Gaius, a wealthy and influential leader of the local church, concerning the activities of two men. One was Diotrephes, who not only loved to be first or have preeminence in the church (3 John 9) but also had become so powerful that he was even refusing to receive the brethren sent by the apostle John. Those who wanted to do so were commanded by him to stop. He is an example of a bad church leader who is arrogant and not walking in truth and love. He did not extend hospitality to itinerant teachers who had traveled from afar to visit the church. In contrast to him, John gave a good example which Gaius should follow. This was Demetrius who was walking in truth, and had a good report of all men. He was a faithful man and in following him, Gaius would be doing good. Gaius had been helping the visitors, which was good. This was what Christians ought to do. Thus John encouraged Gaius to follow after his good deeds.

God is the origin of all that is good. Those who are God's children should do good. By our good deeds, we show that we know God. Nothing that is bad comes from God. When we live with God, we cannot do evil things. The person who does evil things does not know God. Although Christians are not perfect yet, God is making us perfect. Thus the message of 3 John is applicable to all of us, that we should abound in love, and joy in hospitality toward fellow helpers in the Lord, and be aware of the danger of a domineering leadership which is not pleasing to the Lord and cannot be the way of blessing to the people of God.

Dear teen, do you know who to imitate among the believers in church? Like Gaius, you must follow those who are faithful in their walk with God. Do not admire or follow those who, although very intelligent in their studies, have no time for God and are not interested in the things of God. Worse still, they might even invite you to join their pleasure seeking ways instead of reading and studying the Bible. The memory verse today tells us to follow that which is good for he that doeth good is of God. Doing good includes caring for the poor, weak and needy in our church and certainly for the visitors who come to our church.

Thought: Jesus went about doing good.

Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, grant is a kind and loving heart to care for the weak, poor and needy that I see around me.

HOW SHOULD WE RECEIVE UNKNOWN BRETHREN?

In the early church there were itinerant evangelists and missionaries. They left their full-time labours and they devoted themselves to the spreading of the gospel. They travelled from church to church and they launched out to preach the gospel to the Gentiles in places where the gospel could not be heard, and Gaius welcomed these travelling evangelists and missionaries into his home. He knew some of them personally but there were those who were strangers to him. Some were sent by the church at Ephesus where John was residing and they reported back to him of the charity they had received from Gaius. Having received their good report, John writes to show his appreciation and commendation for Gaius' hospitality. At the same time, in verse 6b, there was also a call for Gaius to continue in that hospitality. How did Gaius receive his visitors? First, he welcomed them warmly. He opened his house to them. You can also be sure that they were not only housed but also well fed. Thus there was care and love shown for even the unknown brethren. In today's context, this care and love would also include attending to their health needs and medical problems! John needed to single out this kind deed of Gaius for there were those in the church leadership who did not support him in this. There was a Diotrephes who refused to receive the visitors and even forbade others to receive them. He was a disgrace to the church for he did not walk in truth and love. John wanted Gaius to be a good example and to keep on showing this kind of care and provision and encouragement for missionaries.

Dear teen if you are believer does not welcome them, they will have no other means of support. They will take nothing from unbelievers. They will have the freedom to preach to the Gentiles freely, not taking any money or payment from them. John says, that is incumbent upon us who are already believers to support the mission of evangelists to those who are unbelievers. We must not only support them financially, but we can also pray for them, encourage them when possible, and do all that we can to aid them in their ministry. If so, then we can all be counted as fellowhelpers to the truth.

Thought: “Always and everywhere that man is highly esteemed in the church, who combines firm convictions with a generous heart.”

Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word that convicts us that we have fallen short of that which You intend us to be. We ask that You would enable us to show this kind of love to those who labour for the gospel and spread the Word of God around the world.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF REVELATION?

I remember that when I was a teen, every time the book of Revelation was mentioned, there would be slight groans around the room, for everyone was daunted by this seemingly impossible to understand book. Full of prophetic imagery, it is true that it is sometimes hard to understand and interpret. It is important that we do not get scared away from studying this most precious book, though, for God has contained within it much instruction for us.

In today's verse, we can clearly see how the book of Revelation can be broken down neatly into 3 sections. The Apostle John was instructed by Jesus Christ Himself to *"Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter"*. *"The things which thou hast seen"* can be found in chapter 1, which contains the vision which John saw. Chapter 2-3 gives us *"the things which are"* – the 7 letters to the 7 churches which were existing during John's time. The large bulk of the book of Revelation records for us *"the things which shall be hereafter"*, found in Chapter 4-22. These would be the prophecies concerning the events which will take place in the last days, from the period of the Great Tribulation to the battle of Armageddon, the Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth, the New Jerusalem, and the New Heaven and New Earth. These end time events were revealed supernaturally to John, and they have been recorded in great detail for us so that we as God's people can know what it is that God has in store for the whole world.

Of course, it is difficult to fully understand things that remain unseen. For example, when we read about the 7 seal, trumpet and vial judgments, we might find it hard to picture how exactly they will be fulfilled. But what matters most is that we believe that these are real, literal events that will take place sometime in the (rather near) future. This final period of the world's history will be a time of great suffering and despair; at the same time, though, it will also be a period of God's great mercy, in giving the earth a final chance to repent and to turn to Him.

Dear teen, may you not shy away from the prophetic literature found in Revelation. Instead, may you seek wisdom from God in understanding this book, and to apply it in your life.

Thought: Will I be present or absent during the Great Tribulation?

Prayer: Lord, spare me from the wrath that is to come.

DO YOU LOOK FORWARD TO THE COMING OF CHRIST?

Back in my days in teenz, I recall hearing a brother saying that, while he did look forward to Christ's return, he would rather it not be too soon because he wanted to first enjoy life, get married, do all the things he hopes to achieve in life etc. I'm sure that many other young people in the prime of life would have a similar mindset too.

We read in the book of Revelation that Jesus has promised His people that *“Surely I come quickly”*. There is no uncertainty, no ‘maybe’ about it – we can be absolutely sure that Jesus will indeed come again. John's response to this promise is something that we ought to learn from. He says, *“Even so, come, Lord Jesus”*. Expressed in this simple statement is a sense of deep, intense longing for Christ – to be in His presence, to see Him face to face, to finally be free of all sin and imperfection in our mortal bodies. Such a desire was expressed by the Apostle Paul, too, when he spoke of his *“desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better”* (Philippians 1:23).

Yet, not everyone will be looking forward to Christ's coming. The promise of Christ's return is mentioned also in Revelation 22:12, accompanied by an assurance that *“my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be”*. To those who have been serving diligently, they would certainly be looking forward to being rewarded for their faithful labor. But for those who have not, the eagerness would be replaced with fear and reluctance. No servant who knows he has yet unfinished or poorly completed work would want to face the disappointment and displeasure of his master.

How about you, dear teen? Are you eagerly and joyously anticipating the Lord's return? Are you among those described by the Apostle Paul that *“love his appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:8)? Or would you rather Him delay His coming by a few more years? Perhaps you want to enjoy the pleasures of this life for a bit longer, or perhaps you know deep down in your heart that your life is not ready for His return. Perhaps you are not even sure that when Christ returns, He would bring you back to heaven as one of His people. Dear teen, may you seriously reflect on your life today, and ensure that you do sincerely and earnestly desire the Lord's return.

Thought: “O can we say we are ready, brother, ready for the soul's bright home?”

Prayer: *“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”*

Notes

To: *The RPG Ministry*

Calvary Pandan B-P Church

201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609 337

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

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