



SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VOLUME 26

"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

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THE BEGINNING OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

326 Lesson

PROHIBITIONS IN THE PRIESTHOOD

MEMORY VERSE: “For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26).

TEXT: Leviticus 21:1-24; 22:1-33

The divine requirement and emphasis on saints’ perfection, revealed through the Priesthood and sacrifices offered to God is the thematic preoccupation of our text. God demanded that the priests should be perfect morally in their marriage and family lives as well as in their physical appearance and social conduct. Obviously, God requires a high standard of holy living from those who serve Him. By looking at those things which could either disqualify the Levitical priests from ministry or else make their sacrifice unacceptable to God, we are able to pin-point what Christian servants should avoid in order to render acceptable service unto God.

Question 1: Why is it necessary for believers to be perfect?

Some of the things that could disqualify a person from the priesthood might appear insignificant by man’s judgement, but not with God. On God’s altar, the minutest of stains disqualifies the professing believer from rendering acceptable service to God. Wisdom demands that believers should place priority on the quality of their Christian lifestyle before and during service to be acceptable to the Lord. This is because absolute perfection befits the courts of the Lord. It is not strange then that God demanded that both the priests and the sacrifices they offered must be perfect. God’s demand for perfection from the

priests cuts across biblical dispensations to believers in Christ, who are also called priests in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6).

SEPARATION FROM UNGODLY SOCIAL CUSTOMS AND RELATIONSHIPS (Leviticus 21:1-15; 10:6,7, 13,15; 19:27,28; Numbers 6:7; 19:14; Deuteronomy 14:1; Isaiah 15:2; 52:11; Ezekiel 24:15-18; 44:15-31; I Peter 2:9).

God instructed the priests through Aaron that they should not defile themselves either for the dead or in any way that would disqualify them from performing their duty. In chapters 17 to 20 of the book of Leviticus, God had told the entire congregation of Israel to be holy (18:1-3; 19:1,2) but now in Chapter 21 He commands the priests in particular to be holy. God demands holiness from all His people but more so from the priests who were supposed, not only to be teachers of the law, but also examples and models for the entire Israelites.

The standard of holiness that God expects from all His people is essentially the same in terms of moral perfection but he expects that those in leadership go the extra mile and become models of moral excellence and self denial. This is to be expected because the higher the privilege the higher the responsibility. Those who are privileged to occupy special offices in the church are also under a special obligation to live holy and maintain a higher standard of devotion to God both in their ministerial duties and in their personal character.

In our text, God directed the priests to dissociate themselves from all ungodly social customs and maintain the highest ideal in marriage and family life. This was because they were in charge of **“the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and the bread of their God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy”** (Leviticus 21:6b). In this regard, the standard for the high priest is still higher than for the ordinary priests. The high priest, when on duty, was not

allowed to be defiled for anyone, not even for father, mother, wife or any relation.

Question 2: Mention some social customs that God prohibited in the priesthood and give examples of such practices that we also need to avoid in our present dispensation.

God had forbidden the entire congregation as well as the priests to round the corners of their heads or mar the corners of their beard. They were not to make any cuttings in their body nor print any marks upon themselves for the dead (Leviticus 19:27,28). These customs were associated with mourning the dead and Israel had copied them from the Egyptian and the Canaanites.

In addition to these general commands, God specifically directed that the priests should not defile themselves for the dead. Defilement for the dead in this context is not moral defilement but ceremonial. According to ancient tradition anyone who touched, went near or made lamentation for a dead person became defiled. Even to enter a house where the dead laid or to be present in a house when a person died rendered someone unclean for a whole week (Numbers 19:14). The ordinary Israelites could be defiled in this way but the priest must not allow themselves to be defiled at all. The exception to this rule, permitted for the ordinary priest but not the High Priest, is in case of very close blood relations like father, mother, child, brother and unmarried sister. In simple terms, God prohibited the priests from touching a dead body, going near or mourning for the dead or even entering a house where someone had recently died.

This command shows the high premium that God places on the work of the ministry. A minister must not allow his attendance to inferior duties to hinder the performance of his legitimate calling. If the priests were permitted to be defiled indiscriminately, for seven days on each occasion, then they would have no time to attend to the more important service of the tabernacle. This is the main point of God's directive to

the priests, and of Christ's answer to the prospective disciple who sought to first go and bury his father. **“Jesus said unto him let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God”** (Luke 9:60).

Burial and mourning the dead should not take priority over the more important duty of preaching the gospel. Though it is very commendable and proper to give our departed loved ones a decent funeral, we should not allow that to degenerate into or constitute a hindrance to the performance of our primary assignment in the ministry. It is not reasonable to allow our preoccupation with the dead, whose eternal fate is already sealed, to hinder our duty to the living.

God prohibited the priests from making baldness on their heads. They were to be moderate and guided by discretion in their mourning and not to copy the heathen. In the New Testament, believers are also cautioned when mourning a departed saint, not to sorrow like the unbelievers who do not know God and who have no hope of the glorious resurrection of saints (I Thessalonians 4:13,14). Even in our mourning, while enveloped by the present cloud of death, we should look forward to the bright hope of the rapture and our eternal fellowship with the Lord. The essence of these instructions that God gave the priests and by extension to us also, is that there should be difference between the people of God and the infidels who do not know God. We must avoid ungodly customs and practices under the guise of tradition during ceremonies.

Question 3: Why must the priest maintain a high standard of holiness in his marriage and family life and how does this apply to believers?

The priests were also required to be different in their marriage and family lives. They were to be above board in their choice of a spouse and in the general tenor of their domestic affairs. The priest must marry a virgin not a widow, a divorced woman or a prostitute. He

was not even permitted to marry from another tribe other than the priestly tribe (the tribe of Levi).

The reasons for this command are very obvious. (1) If a priest married a widow or divorced woman, it could give occasion for suspicion or insinuations that there was immoral connection between the priest and the woman before her widowhood or divorce. (2) Marriage to a divorced woman is adultery in the sight of God (Matthew 5:32; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2,3) and it would be very absurd for an adulterer to minister in holy things on God's altar. (3) To avoid the confusion and contempt that would certainly arise; for instance, if the priest on duty were to handle the sacrifice of a man whose divorced wife he had married. (4) To keep the priestly line pure and free from mixed blood. If the priests were permitted to marry from other tribes, then the offspring would be half priestly and half ordinary and before long the sanctity of the priestly line would be effaced. However, we must not misapply this injunction, which was designed for the purpose of preserving the purity of the priestly line, to justify the practice of tribalism either in marriage or in other areas of social life. Obviously, no human tribe is holier than the other. God has one holy tribe: blood-washed believers of all nations and people.

The standard of marriage and family life for the priests is the same as the New Testament standard for the marriage of believers. A Christian must not marry an unbeliever or anyone who claims to be a believer but is not living right. We must avoid unequal yoke in marriage. Also, a believer must not marry a divorced person. However, the New Testament permits a widow or widower who is still young and willing to marry another Christian (I Corinthians 7:39; I Timothy 5:9-14).

Believers should be prayerful and discreet in the area of choosing a marriage partner because being married to a wrong spouse can disqualify a person from the ministry. In most cases, even if one is not completely removed from ministry, a defective marriage can

exert a negative influence or limitation on a believer's effectiveness in ministry. In the Old Testament, there were cases of priests who married wrongly and as a result they were put out of the priesthood (Ezra 2:61-63). If we marry a person who is not devoted to the Lord but worldly and carnal, it will be impossible for us to reach the height God wants us to reach in ministry.

Equally important and worthy of proper attention is the issue of child training in the family. God commanded that **“the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire”** (Leviticus 21:9). God expects that the children of believers should be good examples and models for other children in the society. Children of Christian servants in particular should not do anything that can lower the honour and dignity of their parent's ministry or bring a reproach to God in any way. This will demand that the parents also spend quality time to train and pray for their children and the children also must follow the godly example of their parents.

THE PHYSICAL FITNESS OF PRIESTS – A MODEL OF BELIEVER'S PERFECTION (Leviticus 21:16-24; 10:3; Deuteronomy 23:1-3; Psalm 65:4; Matthew 5:48; Luke 6:40; Colossians 1:28; I Thessalonians 2:10; I Timothy 3:2; Hebrews 7:26; 13:21; I Peter 5:10).

God prohibited any priest who had bodily defects or blemish from ministering at the altar. For example, the following were not qualified to make sacrifices on the altar (1) the blind (2) the lame (3) a person with flat or broken nose (whose face is disfigured) (4) someone who has superfluous bodily part, such as extra fingers/toes, longer limb, etc. (5) a man with broken foot or broken hand (6) a humped back (7) a dwarf (8) a person with defective eye, such as colour-blindness, crossed-eye, etc. (9) someone with skin disease such as scabs, pimples, itches, etc (10) a man whose testicles are damaged or imperfect. Such

people, as descendants of Aaron, were permitted to eat of the holy things but they were not permitted to minister at the altar.

Question 4: Give reasons why those who had physical defects were disallowed from making sacrifices on the altar.

These bodily defects disqualified a priest from ministry at the altar because (1) it would make the priest contemptible and liable to ridicule before others. (2) It could constitute impediments in the discharge of their priestly duty. (3) If the sacrifice must be without blemish, the priest also must be without blemish because both of them (the sacrifice and the priest) typified the Lord Jesus Christ, our perfect High Priest. (4) The priesthood was meant to underscore the fact that only the best is good for the courts and altar of the Lord. Therefore, the choicest and the most perfect of the sons of Aaron should minister at the altar. (5) The priests also typified true believers in Christ and as such God wanted to portray the absolute perfection and unblemished sanctity that should characterize their lives and ministry. Therefore the physical fitness required of priests was a model of the believer's spiritual purity.

Now, it is possible that some people who have bodily deformity may feel discouraged or touched in some negative way by this command. However, they should remember that (1) the priesthood was only typical and it prefigured better things to come. The right place to look for a proper interpretation and application of these details contained in the book of Leviticus is Calvary. At Calvary no one is excluded on account of bodily defects. (2) Exclusion from service at the altar for a reason other than defilement, was not a stigma in itself. At least there were other descendants of Aaron who were not permitted to offer sacrifice, for example, because of their gender. So also there were countless others who belonged to the tribe of Levi but were assigned different roles altogether apart from the ministry at the altar. (3) There is no doubt that God cares and loves His people despite their handicap

or bodily defects. Already, we have learnt how He made provision for the welfare and comfort of the blind and deaf (Leviticus 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:18). (4) Looking at other types and illustrations in the scriptures we are assured that physical deformity is not a limit to fellowship and intimacy with God. For instance, Mephibosheth, though lame on both feet, ate continually at king David's table (2 Samuel 9:13); and Elisha, though bald-headed, possessed a double portion of Elijah's anointing. Thank God, physical disability need not be a liability or a stumbling block to a fulfilling and enriching spiritual life and ministry. Fanny Crosby is one contemporary saint and Christian songwriter whose songs richly minister to believers even today. Yet, she was blind. Even in this levitical order, the physically disabled person was permitted to eat of the holy things of God whereas the physically fit priest who was unclean was not allowed (Leviticus 22:3-7). This is an indication that God did not count the physically disabled son of Aaron detestable, unholy or unworthy of His fellowship.

Question 5: What lessons can we learn from the prescription that the levitical priests be physically fit to qualify for ministry?

We learn from the physical fitness that God prescribed for the Old Testament priests that those who would be appointed as leaders in the Christian church must be blameless and morally upright. They must be above reproach and live in such a way that the ministry of the word of God will not be held in contempt by the world around. People of questionable character or lifestyle, notorious for immorality, fraud, unsettled marriage, drunkenness, quarrelling, etc. are disqualified from leadership or ministry (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-8).

Those who are in leadership must always be examples of godliness, love, faith and purity in language and behavior to the members. They should be people who are free from impediments or entanglements that can hinder them in the ministry. Things like financial encumbrance, debts and involvement in social groups

or societies will limit their effectiveness in ministry and therefore must be avoided.

SUNDRY LAWS OF PURITY FOR THE PRIESTS AND THE SACRIFICE (Leviticus 22:1-33; 7:20,21; 13:2,3,44-46; 15:2,3; Exodus 12:5; Numbers 19:11-16; Deuteronomy 15:12;17:1; Malachi 1:8,13-14; Matthew 27:4,19,24,54; Luke 23:41,47; John 19:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:18,19,22-24).

God commanded the priests to have deep reverence for the holy things which they handled. And apart from physical defects, He pointed out other forms of defilement that could disqualify a person from the priesthood. He warned the priests that anyone who handled the sacred things or ministered at the altar while he is ceremonially unclean would be cut off from God's presence and excluded from the sanctuary. In other words, he was removed from the ministry.

A priest, who was defiled, by reason of leprosy, bodily discharge, and contact with a corpse or unclean person, carcass of an animal or anything that could impose ceremonial uncleanness, was prohibited from ministering in the holy things. Also prohibited from the priesthood were strangers (people outside the family of Aaron), hired servants and sojourners. All these were not permitted to eat of the holy things. Even a priest's daughter who married outside the priestly line was prohibited from eating the holy things, except if she became a desolate widow and has returned to her father's house childless. But if a priest buys a slave with his money or is born in the priest's house, then he may eat of the priest's food. This is because the slave has legally become a part of the priest's family. Anyone who mistakenly eats the holy things must make restitution by returning to the priest the full value of what he ate plus twenty percent fine.

God also demanded that the sacrifice that the priests offered on the altar be perfect. The animals for sacrifice must have no wound, disease, defect, no part

missing and nothing superfluous, and must be of the right age (more than one week old). The mother and the young must not be killed the same day and also the sacrifice must be eaten in the proper manner. To make the sacrifice acceptable it must also be offered willingly and not by coercion.

These precepts concerning the purity of the priesthood and the sacrifice teach us several lessons. One, God wants us to jealously guard our purity lest we suffer loss of spiritual blessings and physical provisions. For instance, the priests were rendered unfit to eat the holy things whenever they were found to be unclean. In the same way, a life of uncleanness deprives us of enjoying God's abundant blessings. Two, the precepts portray the holiness of God and the dignity of the priesthood which should be maintained. This would encourage the Israelites to reverence God and also honour the priests. When a minister lives in purity and absolute yieldedness to the word of God, the members cannot but honour and be submissive to leadership. Three, the sacrifice and the priests typified Jesus the perfect substitute who was sacrificed for our sins. He was examined and declared blameless by Pilate, Caiaphas, Herod, Judas Iscariot, the thief crucified with Him, and the centurion who supervised His crucifixion (Matthew 27:4, 19,24,54; Luke 23: 13-15, 41,47; John 19:4). All shades of people examined Jesus and found Him perfect and pure. This is the kind of purity that should characterize our lives as true disciples of Christ.

Four, the priests who disobeyed God's instruction concerning the holy things would be cut off from God's presence. This tells us that even priests were not protected from the consequence of sin because God is no respecter of persons. If we sin against God, then, we shall be punished unless we repent. Obviously, there is no truth in the doctrine of eternal security of believers. Five, only children of priests or those who have taken permanent residence in the family of the priest were entitled to eat the holy things. Even the bona fide daughter of a priest forfeited her right to

partake of the altar if she chose to marry an outsider. In the same manner, only children of God can enjoy the benefits of salvation. Backsliders forfeit their right of sonship until they repent and return to God their Father. Six, our service will only be acceptable to God if we offer them in purity, willingly and not grudgingly.

Question 6: What lessons can we learn from the precept concerning the purity of the priests and the sacrifices?

DAILY BIBLE READING				
	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Mark	11-12	2 Samuel	3-4
TUE	„	13	„	5-6
WED	„	14	„	7-8
THUR	„	15	„	9-10
FRI	„	16	„	11-12
SAT	Luke	1	„	13
SUN	„	2	„	14

327 Lesson

THE FEASTS OF THE LORD

MEMORY VERSE: “Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8).

TEXT: Leviticus 23:1-44.

Chapter twenty-three of Leviticus deals with the subject of the yearly religious feasts or festivals which God ordained for the children of Israel. In addition to the regular weekly and yearly Sabbaths, God ordained seven annual feasts for the Israelites. These are the Feasts of Passover, Unleavened bread, First-fruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of atonement and Tabernacles. Of these feasts, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles were the three major ones while the four others were associated with them. The three major feasts were also called pilgrimage feasts because God commanded that all males among the children of Israel travel to Jerusalem to observe them in the temple (Exodus 34:22,23). During the pilgrimage, religious Jews would often wait behind in Jerusalem to observe the other feasts since they were not too far apart.

Question 1: State the seven feasts that God commanded the Jews and their respective dates.

The feast of Passover: the first in the year, took place on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish religious calendar that is month Abib (which approximates March/April). Unleavened bread began the following day, 15th Abib, and lasted a whole week till 21st Abib. The feast of first-fruits also took place on 16th Abib, the day after the commencement of unleavened bread. Therefore one pilgrimage would take care of these three feasts in the first month of the year.

The feast of Pentecost came next, fifty days after the feast of first-fruits on the 6th day of the third month, Sivan (approximately May/June). The feast of Pentecost had no minor feast associated with it and as such pilgrims attended this feast only and went back home. The next feast after Pentecost was the feast of Trumpets which came up on the first day of the seventh month, Tishri (approximately September/October). Ten days later on the 10th of the same month the day of atonement took place. Then the last feast, Tabernacles, came up from the 15th till 21st of the same seventh month. Once again, those who came to Jerusalem on pilgrimage for the feasts could spend three weeks in the city to attend the three feasts in the month Tishri.

After the Jews returned from captivity they added other feasts, some of which we read in the New Testament, to commemorate special events in their history. Some of these later additions are (1) the feast of dedication (John 10:22) held the 25th of the ninth month, chisleu (approximately December), to celebrate the dedication of the temple after it was cleansed from defilement caused by Antiochus, Epiphanes between 166-164 BC. (2) feast of Purim (Esther 3:7-9, 18-24,31,32), held the 14th of the twelfth month, Adar (March), to commemorate the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's plot under Queen Esther and Mordecai (3) Fasts of 4th, 5th and 7th months (Zachariah 7:3; 8:19) to lament the destruction of Jerusalem.

Jesus attended the Feasts during His earthly ministry in order to show His total submission and obedience to the word of God (John 2:13-25; 5:1; 7:1-11, 39; 10:22-24). Even though He knew He would later fulfil what these feasts signified, He attended as every Jew was required to. This is a challenge to every believer that no matter our rank or title in life or ministry we should submit ourselves to the word of God and consistently obey His commands. We should attend Retreats and special programs that the Lord has appointed for the church. Such periods, like the feasts, are times to hear and learn from the word of God, to be renewed and refreshed spiritually.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE FEASTS (Leviticus 23:4-36, 16; Exodus 23:14-17; 34:22-27; Numbers 28:16-29; Deuteronomy 16:1-17; Joshua 5:10; 2 Kings 23:22,23; 2 Chronicles 8:1,13;35:1; Nehemiah 8:2,14; Ezra 3:4)

There are some general features common to all the seven feasts that are described in our text. (1) They were times of joy and thanksgiving (Psalm 122:1-4), except for the day of atonement which was a day of soberness and humiliation for sin. (2) All males attended the feasts (Exodus 23:17; 34:23). (3) Children attended the feast as from age twelve (Luke 2:42). (4) Each of the feasts had special offerings attached to them (Exodus 34:20; Deuteronomy 16:16, 17). (5) Each feast had a special Sabbath associated with it.

Question 2: Mention the features common to all the feasts and point out at least one peculiar feature of each feast.

Apart from the common features of the feasts, each of them had their peculiarities, since they commemorated different events in the life of the Jews. The feast of Passover was characterized by choosing the Passover lamb on the 10th day of month Abib, killing the lamb on the evening of 14th Abib, staining the doorpost and lintels of their houses with the blood of the paschal lamb, roasting the lamb and eating it with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. They ate the meal in haste, standing, fully dressed with sandals on, loins girded and staff in hand, like someone ready to embark on an urgent journey. No uncircumcised person was allowed to eat the Passover and any Israelite who neglected it was executed. Some features were later added to the commemoration event which were not included in the original event back in Egypt. (1) The sacrificial animal could be from the flock or herd (Deuteronomy 16:1,2) whereas originally only lambs could be used for Passover. (2) The paschal lamb could be sacrificed only at the sanctuary (Deuteronomy 16:5) whereas originally it was sacrificed in their houses. (3) Ceremonial uncleanness disqualified a

person from celebrating the Passover. Unavoidable journey could also excuse a person from Passover, but such people must keep it a month later (Numbers 9:9-12). (4) Singing of hymns and relaxing on their couches while eating the meal (Matthew 26:30; John 13:23-28).

The feast of unleavened bread was closely linked with Passover and lasted for seven days. On the first and last day, that is 15th and 21st Abib there were holy convocations or Sabbaths regardless of which day of the week they fell. All through the week of unleavened bread, the Israelites avoided anything baked with yeast. They ate bread that was not leavened, hence the name of the feast. The feast of first-fruits was also associated with Passover. It took place the third day after Passover on the 16th Abib. For this feast, the first-fruits of barley harvest was presented before the Lord by waving a sheaf on handful of its first ripe fruits (Leviticus 23:10-14; Deuteronomy 16: 9; 2 Kings 4;42). A first year lamb was offered as a burnt offering together with together with meat offering. Israelites ate no new corn nor anything made of the new grain until after the feast of first-fruits.

The feast of Pentecost took place seven weeks after the feast of first fruits. Pentecost is also called Feast of weeks or Harvest because in determining its date they counted weeks after the first-fruits and also because the main harvest was done at Pentecost (Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:10). Pentecost was a celebration of harvest, a holy Sabbath and a time to give liberally to Levites, strangers, orphans, etc. The people also gave freewill offerings to God and offered additional sacrifices. The main distinctive of Pentecost was the presentation of two loaves of leavened bread, seasoned with salt to the Lord (Exodus 34:22,23; Leviticus 23:17,20; Deuteronomy 16:10-14).

The feasts of Trumpets, Day of atonement and Tabernacles were associated together. On the feast of Trumpets, Israelites blew trumpets all over their dwellings. It announced the arrival of the month of

atonement which was also the end of their religious year (Leviticus 23:24,25; Number 29:1-8). The day of atonement was a day of humiliation for sin, fasting, atonement by blood as the High Priest enters the holy of holies, offering of special sacrifices, the sending away of the scapegoat and the burning of the sacrificial animals outside the gates of Jerusalem. On the day of atonement the High Priest, rather than the ordinary priests, officiated in the tabernacle wearing a special white linen garment instead of his official robes of glory and honour (Leviticus 16). The last of the seven-feast cycle is the feast of Tabernacles. It was also known as the feast of ingathering. It began on the 15th of the seventh month and ended on the 21st of the month. The first and last days of the feast were holy convocations and special sacrifices were offered. During this feast, the children of Israel left their houses and dwelt in booths made of tree branches. The dedication of Solomon's temple coincided with this feast (Exodus 23:16,17; Leviticus 23:34-36; Deuteronomy 16:13; I Kings 8:2,65).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FEASTS (Leviticus 23:37-44; Romans 15:4; Exodus 13:3-10)

The seven feast of the Lord had special significance for the children of Israel in particular and for believers in general. One, the feast had historical significance in that they reminded the children of Israel of some things that God had done for them in the past. Two, they also had spiritual or prophetic significance because each feast pointed to some events that would take place in future. In this way, the feasts were symbolic or types of future events which the children of Israel should expect to be fulfilled in their time. Three, the feasts had present or agricultural significance for the children of Israel because each feast was associated with a key phase of their agrarian life. Four, the feasts provided the children of Israel an opportunity to gather before the Lord either for thanksgiving or self humiliation for sin. Five, they foster national unity and promoted the spirit of brotherhood among the Israelites. Six, the feasts gave Israelites a sense of

identity and made them peculiar from other nations. It also curbed what could have been an allurements to the idolatrous festivals of the Canaanites and other neighboring nations.

Question 3: Point out the spiritual significance of the feasts of the Lord.

Looking at the historical significance, the feasts commemorated special events in Israel. Passover commemorated the deliverance of Israel's firstborns and their exodus from Egypt. Unleavened bread reminded them of the haste with which they had to leave Egypt before their dough could rise. Pentecost, according to Jewish Rabbi, was a remembrance of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai; Day of Atonement reminded them of the awfulness of their sin and the need for atonement. Tabernacles commemorated the wilderness wanderings of Israel, during which they dwelt in booths.

As at the time the feasts were ordained for Israel, they had present or agricultural significance. Passover first-fruits and unleavened bread coincided with the beginning of barley harvest. Pentecost marked the completion of barley harvest and the peak of wheat harvest. The feast of Tabernacles was the time of final and general harvest. During the feasts, the Israelites had opportunity to thank God for the harvest and share generously with one another.

The spiritual or prophetic significance of the feasts are so many for believers today. (1) Passover symbolized the death of Jesus Christ and our redemption from sin through Him (I Corinthians 5:7) (2) First-fruits, the third day after Passover, obviously represented the resurrection of Christ and is a token of believers future resurrection. **“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept”** (I Corinthians 15:20) (3) Unleavened bread symbolizes believers' feeding on Christ the Bread of life to receive strength and vigour for the journey of life. It also portrays the holiness that should characterize our lives. Leaven is symbolic of sin or

evil and its absence in figurative terms represents purity (John 6:50-58; I Corinthians 5:7,8) (4) The feast of Pentecost pointed to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on believers and the great harvest of souls that we read in Acts Chapter two (Acts 2:1-6,41). (5) The feast of trumpets reminds us of the trump of God during the rapture. **“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first... In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed”** (I Thessalonians 4:16; I Corinthians 15:52). Besides, as the feast of trumpets announced the arrival of the month of atonement which ended the Jewish religious year, so must the believer trumpet/preach the gospel and tell the lost sinners the good news of salvation. **“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins”** (Isaiah 58:1). (6) The day of atonement symbolizes Christ, our perfect High Priest, entering into heaven to make permanent expiation for our sins. It reminds us (who have repented of our sins) that our sins are already remitted or sent away just as the scapegoat bore away the sins of the Israelites (Leviticus 16:21,22; Isaiah 53:4-6,11). (7) The feast of Tabernacles reminds us of the final harvest and great in-gathering in heaven. It points to the end when God will separate between the wheat and the chaff.

SPIRITUAL APPLICATION OF THE FEASTS FOR BELIEVERS (Isaiah 25:6,8; Matthew 26:17-19; Luke 11:13, 22:7-20 Acts 2:1-3; I Corinthians 5:6-8)

The feasts of the Lord were also observed in the New Testament until Jesus Christ gave us their real meaning and fulfilled what they typified. For present day believers, these feasts have deeper meaning and application beyond the mere historical or agricultural significance which they held for the Jews.

Instead of the feast of Passover, commemorating the deliverance of the Jews, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and He commanded us to observe it in commemoration of His death. The death of Christ which Passover anticipated is what the Lord's Supper now points back to in memorial. For this feast to be meaningful in a person's life, he/she must understand that the purpose why Christ died is to deliver us from sin and escape the wrath of God. Therefore a sinner must repent and turn away from all his sins and accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. After this experience of salvation, just as the feast of Passover was closely linked with unleavened bread, even so believers must live a pure life free from the leaven of malice, hypocrisy and wickedness (Luke 22:1,7-20; I Corinthians 5:6-8). From the feast of first-fruits, we also learn to be thankful to God and dedicate all we have to Him as we look forward to our future resurrection. First-fruits give us an assurance that as saints, we shall resurrect to reign with Christ eternally. In the New Testament, believers are also called first-fruits of Christ's redemptive work (James 1:18; Revelation 14:4).

Question 4: How can believers experience personal Pentecost today?

For believers, Pentecost has become synonymous with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The feast of Pentecost was fulfilled when the Holy Ghost came upon the disciples in the upper room at Jerusalem. Literally, we see the connection between the feasts: Jesus was crucified during Passover, the third day He rose again as firstfruit and fifty days after, at Pentecost, the Holy Ghost descended upon believers.

After the initial experience on the day of Pentecost, other people have experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Cornelius and his household, the Ephesian believers and others have experienced personal Pentecost (Acts 10:44-46; 19:1-6). The feast of Pentecost becomes relevant in our lives only when we have genuine baptism of the Holy Spirit so that

we can be empowered for service and fruitfulness. To receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit a person must be born again, sanctified and possess a passion to be used of God in a more effective way. Then, one must pray earnestly in faith and persist until the answer comes. Jesus promised that the Father will give the Holy Ghost to those who ask Him (Luke 11:13).

The feast of tabernacles reminds us of the transient nature of our existence on earth and the need to live in humility and sobriety. During the feast of booths, the Israelites left the comfort of their homes to dwell in booths for a whole week. The object lesson in this is that here we do not have a continuing city. We are pilgrims and strangers on earth, heaven is our real home. Therefore, we should make deliberate effort not to lay our treasures here on earth but in heaven. We should not be in the company of those whom the Bible says, **“their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish”** (Psalm 49:11,12).

Tabernacles concluded the cycle of annual feasts and it was also called feast of ingathering. Certainly, at the consummation of everything on earth, there shall be a final harvest, gathering together unto the Lord. Isaiah had a prophetic insight to such a glorious day and he gave a vivid description of the sumptuous feast believers will enjoy with the Lord. **“And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. He will swallow up death in victory: and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it”** (Isaiah 25:6,8). Certainly, a wise believer should prepare for such a time and live in holiness and watchfulness; sinners and backsliders should also make haste and return to the

Lord. **“O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!”**
 (Deuteronomy 32:29).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING		
MON	Luke	3	2 Samuel	15
TUE	„	4	„	16-17
WED	„	5	„	18
THUR	„	6	„	19
FRI	„	7	„	20-21
SAT	„	8	„	22
SUN	„	9	„	23-24

328 Lesson

THE OIL AND THE SHEWBREAD

MEMORY VERSE: “Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually” (Leviticus 24:2).

TEXT: Leviticus 24:1-9

Our study focuses on God’s command concerning oil for the lamp and the shewbread in the tabernacle. While constructing the tabernacle and its furnishings, Moses had been instructed to make provisions for the oil and the shewbread but now God directs him to actually carry out the preparation and administration of both. He was directed to command the children of Israel that they bring pure olive oil for the light; and he was to make the shewbread and set it on the golden table in the sanctuary. The oil was to be used in giving light perpetually in the tabernacle. The perpetual light was a symbol of God’s continual presence among His people. It also represents the revelation, spiritual illumination and guidance that God’s people stand to enjoy as they remain in fellowship with Him.

From our text, we see that the people had a part to play in order to keep the light burning in the sanctuary. They were to supply the oil and the priests had to light the lamps and trim them regularly. This implies that the presence of God can only abide in our lives when we obey His commands and cooperate with His Holy Spirit as He seeks to lead and guide us day by day.

Moses was also commanded concerning the ordinance of the shewbread. This consisted of twelve loaves of unleavened bread which were set on the golden table before the Lord in the sanctuary. The loaves were symbols of spiritual food and also represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Being set before the Lord

signifies the fact that God's people are continually in His presence and, as such, they are never forgotten.

Question 1: What is the connection between the oil and the shewbread?

The oil and the shewbread were actually two sides of the same coin. The oil gave light and symbolizes God's presence among His people, whereas the bread represents the people in the presence of their God. What a complete picture and illustration of the divine presence in the Church!

USES OF OIL IN THE SCRIPTURES (Leviticus 24:1-4; Exodus 27:20; 29:2,7; 30:25; Ruth 3:3; Psalm 23:5; 45:7; Isaiah 1:6; 61:3; Amos 6:6; Matthew 25:3; Mark 6:13; Luke 10:34; James 5:14).

God told Moses to command the children of Israel to bring pure olive oil to be used in lighting the lamps of the golden candlestick which was situated in the holy place (Exodus 27:20,21). The oil spoken of here is not the same as anointing oil which Moses was commanded to use to anoint the tabernacle but a kind of fuel which kept the lamps aglow and gave light in the tabernacle even when the entire surrounding was dark. Without oil the lamp would burn out and cease to give light. The pure olive oil that God requested for the lamps was the best kind. It was produced by bruising the olive fruit, rather than crushing it so that it would be free from impurities.

Question 2: Mention the uses of oil in the scriptures.

The Scripture describes several ways in which oil was used in ancient times. (1) As food (Exodus 29:2; 1 Kings 17:12). (2) As fuel for lamps (Exodus 27:20; Leviticus 24:2; Matthew 25:3). (3) For spiritual anointing to an office (Exodus 29:7; 30:25; 37:29; 1 Samuel 10:1). (4) For physical anointing or as a lubricant on the body (Ruth 3:3; Psalm 92:10; Amos 6:6). (5) Medicinal – used as a remedy on bruises and wounds (Isaiah 1:6; Mark 6:13; Luke 10:34; James 5:14). (6) Symbolic or figurative use (Psalm 23:5; 45:7; 141:5; Isaiah 61:3).

Oil is illustrative of the unction of the Holy Spirit, joy or consolation of the gospel, and righteous reproof.

In our text the pure olive oil that the people were commanded to bring was for the purpose of fuelling the lamps in the tabernacle but it also has a symbolic application. As a symbol, the oil represents the grace of the Holy Spirit in the believer. It also symbolizes those spiritual qualities we need in order to be ready for the coming of the Lord. Such virtues, like faith, righteousness, perseverance and other branches of the fruit of the Spirit, when abundantly present in a believer's life, make such a person shine as light in this crooked and perverted world and to be ready for the rapture.

The parable of the ten virgins further illustrates this symbolic application of oil (Matthew 25:1-3). The five foolish virgins missed the bridegroom because they failed to take extra oil in their cruse which was an evidence of inadequate preparation for the coming of the bridegroom. Due to lack of oil, their lamps went out and while they went out to procure some, the bridegroom came and only those that were ready went with him.

UNLEAVENED SHEWBREAD IN THE SANCTUARY (Leviticus 24:5-9; Exodus 25:30; 40:23; Numbers 4:7; 1 Samuel 21:4,5; 1 Chronicles 9:32; John 6:35, 48-51).

God commanded Moses to bake twelve cakes with very fine flour. The cakes or bread were then arranged in two rows of six each on the golden table in the holy place. Pure incense was put, usually in a container, upon the cakes as a memorial before God. The cakes were known as "shewbread" or bread of the presence or hallowed bread and they remained on the table before the Lord for a whole week. They were replaced with fresh ones every Sabbath and the old ones were taken away as food for the priests on duty. The frankincense on the stale bread was burnt and fresh incense was placed along with fresh bread every Sabbath.

Question 4: Point out the significance of the shewbread and its position in the holy place.

The shewbread had some striking significance for the children of Israel and by application, for believers as well. One, the loaves being twelve in number refers to the entire twelve tribes of Israel just like the twelve stones of Elijah's altar (1 Kings 18:31) and the twelve special stones in which the names of Israel's twelve tribes were set in the breastplate of the high priest's dress (Exodus 28:21,29). The obvious meaning of this is that the children of Israel are always in the view of God. He watches over them. The consciousness of this should lead the Israelites to live holily and be fully devoted to God. Two, the twelve loaves being stacked together represented the unbroken unity that should prevail in the entire nation. This unity can only be achieved as they both remained on the platform of holiness, signified by the table of gold, and also continue to abide in God's presence. Three, the composition of the bread speaks of absolute purity and freedom from corruption. The bread was made of very fine flour, no coarseness or roughness; it was also unleavened with yeast – the symbol of sin and corruption. Four, the position of the bread in the tabernacle was a deliberate design by God to portray to the Israelites the important place they occupy in the sight of God. The loaves were placed on the pure table of gold and directly against the ark of God which was in the holy of holies. This position suggests that so long as holiness is the foundation of God's people they will ever remain in the presence of God. God will never forget them but ever be looking after their welfare. Five, frankincense was placed upon the loaves to symbolize the power of intercession. In fact prayer is compared to incense in the Bible (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8; 8:3). It is Christ's intercession that stays back the execution of God's judgment and wrath upon sinners.

Six, the old loaves that were taken from the table were eaten by the priests. This points to Jesus, the Bread of Life (Matthew 26:26,29; 1 Corinthians

10:16 John 6:35,48-51). Therefore, the shewbread was an illustration of God's regular provision of daily bread for His own people. He provides both spiritual nourishment and physical supplies for His own people. Seven, the shewbread was also a kind of peace offering, an acknowledgement of dependence on God for daily food as well as a memorial of God's goodness. Considered this way, the shewbread looked like the manna which was placed in the ark for a memorial before God.

UNFORGETTABLE AND TIMELESS LESSONS FROM SCRIPTURAL SYMBOLS (Leviticus 24:1-9; Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; 9:9, 23-24; 10:1; John 6:35,48-51; 1 Corinthians 10:17).

In the Old Testament, God used several symbols and types to teach deep spiritual truths to the children of Israel just as Jesus often used parables in the New Testament. A symbol is something figurative or illustrative of another, whereas a type is a shadow or figure of something real. A type can only find its true meaning or interpretation in the antitype (that is, the real thing it prefigures). Therefore, a type has a narrower application than a symbol and it always points to the future. For instance, the oil and the shewbread in our study were symbols which could be applied or interpreted in several ways but the Passover lamb is a type which can only refer to the Lord Jesus Christ the real Pascal Lamb of God.

The oil in our text is a symbol of the Holy Spirit and not a type. It symbolizes the grace of God's Spirit working through a converted soul. Believers are called to shine in the world and in this sense John the Baptist was referred to by Christ as a bright and shining light (Matthew 5:14-16; John 5:35). But the grace and power to shine comes from the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God who makes us to live to God's glory as He produces Christ-like virtues in us.

Question 5: What lesson can believers learn from the symbol of oil and the shewbread?

As believers we should crave fresh supply of spiritual grace from God the Holy Spirit day by day. Just as the lamps in the sanctuary were to be repaired every morning and evening with fresh oil supplied, we also are to open ourselves up to God so that He can pour more of His divine nature and power into our lives. We also learn that as the Israelites were required to bring the best oil for the use in the tabernacle we should also give to God the best of our service, possessions and talents. The children of Israel had to give oil for the lamps continually and so must we also give to God in order to support the work of His kingdom on earth. We must not get discouraged or tired of giving sacrificially to God.

From the shewbread, we learn that we are ever in the presence of God and He watches over our lives. This thought should make us cast away every fear or anxiety about our spiritual or physical safety. But it should also make us avoid every sinful thought or act since we know that God is watching us. Two, as the twelve loaves were stacked together on the holy table, we should remain in unity and fellowship in the Church. We must stand together on the platform of purity and holiness with no one sounding a discordant tune of corruption, either in doctrine or practice. Three, we must regularly feed on Christ, the Bread of Life (John 6:35, 48-51). This means we must regularly study the scriptures, maintain regular period of prayer and also practice the things that God reveals to us in His word.

Four, we should always be thankful to God and still be dependent on Him for provisions of our daily food. For the children of Israel, so long as the shewbread remained in the presence of God in the sanctuary, it was an evidence that they would never lack daily food. We too should trust God that He will supply all our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Finally, we observe that the symbols of oil and shewbread in our text had a common feature. Both

the oil and bread must be fresh and renewed from time to time in order to serve the purpose for which they were intended. The oil must be renewed daily and the bread every Sabbath. As believers, we need regular renewal of our spiritual experiences so that we can remain fresh in the spirit. We must not live on the glories of the past while at present our spiritual lives have become stale and offensive. We need to go to God daily and on special occasions like retreats, special programs, etc. for spiritual renewal and reinforcement. As we do this not only shall we shine continually for the Lord, we shall also be able to nourish others with the word of life.

DAILY BIBLE READING

		MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Matthew	24-25	Genesis	13-14	
TUE	„	26	„	15-16	
WED	„	27-28	„	17-18	
THUR	Mark	1-2	„	19	
FRI	„	3-4	„	20-21	
SAT	„	5-6	„	22-23	
SUN	„	7-8	„	24	

329 Lesson

DEATH FOR BLASPHEMY

MEMORY VERSE: “And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin” (Leviticus 24:15).

TEXT: Leviticus 24:10-23

Our previous studies in the book of Leviticus have shown how the subjects of holiness and fellowship with God are of paramount importance to all true believers. Before man is restored to fellowship with God, there must be forgiveness “**of sins that are past**” (Romans 3:25); and for that fellowship to continue here on earth and in the hereafter, God demands holiness in every area of life. Also, there must be total and deliberate presentation of members of our bodies as “**living sacrifice[s], holy, acceptable unto God**” and being “**not conformed to this world**” (Romans 12:1,2) in our actions and speeches. The Bible specifically warns against yielding our bodies as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin (Romans 6:13). Rather, they, including our tongues, must be preserved in holiness before God if we hope to be with Him throughout all eternity.

Our text focuses on the consequence of a reckless use of the tongue – blasphemy. Apart from the unholy use of the tongue, this study also shows the grave consequences of departing from God’s precepts and plan in any area of our lives, however insignificant the deviation might be. Whenever we disobey God’s word or violate any of the clear principles which He has laid down in Scripture, we incur God’s displeasure.

CAUTION AGAINST BLASPHEMY (Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 18:21; 19:12; 24:15; Matthew 5:33-37; Colossians 3:8; James 3:10; 5:12).

God had earlier warned the children of Israel against blasphemy and profanity in the third commandment. **“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain”** (Exodus 20:7).

Question 1: Why did God forewarn against the sin of blasphemy?

God puts blasphemy in the category of crimes that deserves capital punishment. To blaspheme His **“glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD”** (Deuteronomy 28:58) was to incur the death penalty. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, blasphemed God (2 Chronicles 32:14-17) and was punished for it. And in the New Testament, when Hymenaeus blasphemed, the Apostle handed him over to God for appropriate punishment (1 Timothy 1:20).

Question 2: What is the meaning of blasphemy?

Blasphemy means speaking irreverently or injuriously about God or His attributes, talking contemptuously about God or His works, His providence, perfection, government, miracles, etc. To blaspheme is to hurt or blast God’s reputation, attribute evil to Him and speak impiously of His nature and attributes. When a man calumniously ascribes to God qualities that are not His, he is guilty of blasphemy before God.

Question 3: Mention different ways in which a person can blaspheme God’s name in our present time.

The name of the Lord must be hallowed and honoured as sacred. It must not be used in a thoughtless or insincere manner. His great and glorious name must not be associated with idolatry, magic, swearing or any evil. Of course, it is wrong to use the name of Jesus Christ flippantly during conversations or, as some do, to curse enemies or prepare magical potions.

Other forms of blasphemy that must be avoided include charging God foolishly, accusing Him of wrong doing,

questioning His sovereignty and doubting His loving kindness – especially because of disappointment, bereavement, etc. We must never think hard thought nor speak harsh words against the Almighty lest we become guilty before Him. We should also watch against foolish questions and careless talk which may cast aspersions on God’s personality or attributes.

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCE OF BLASPHEMY
(Leviticus 24:10,11; Job 2:9; Matthew 12:24; James 2:6,7; Revelation 16:10,11)

The children of Israel knew what it meant to honour the name of God. In fact, they had a deep reverence for the name of the Lord. They would not dare to pronounce God’s name, rather, they would refer to it as “that holy name”. The scribes, we are told, when copying the scriptures would clean the tip of their pen each time they wanted to write God’s name. How different the Egyptians were from the Israelites! History tells us that it was a common practice among the Egyptians to curse their idols when they were disappointed or angry. For instance, when they failed to obtain their request or get the object of their petitions they often resorted to grievous curses and blasphemies. They were also reputed for invoking the names of their gods for magical incantations and enchantment. From the account in our text, we observe that the mongrel son of Shelomith strove with an Israelite and, being provoked, he blasphemed.

Question 4: Point out the dangers of strife and unequal yoke in marriage as seen in our text.

Obviously, it was a grave mistake for Shelomith of the stock of Abraham to marry an Egyptian who did not have a heritage of honouring God or fearing His name. Little wonder then that her son had no regard for the God of Israel and at the least provocation blasphemed and cursed. Particularly in this account, we see the dangers of the mixed multitude, unequal yoke in marriage and provocation. Though on the surface, it might not seem a big offence for Shelomith to marry an Egyptian, the consequence of such

unequal yoke is that the half-bred children would certainly retain, and subsequently manifest some Egyptian traits. When a child of God goes into unholy alliance in marriage with the ungodly, what could be the fruit of such a marriage? This of course, brings confusion, crises and reproach to God's holy name.

Therefore, we should not go into unequal yoke in marriage for any reason. Light and darkness cannot cohabit; neither can a believer enter into fellowship with an infidel. The result of unequal yoke is always bitter and it attracts divine displeasure. So also we must avoid strife because it leads to provocation and other evils. **“An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression”** (Proverbs 29:22).

Question 5: Mention reasons why people blaspheme and point out the consequence.

Some people blaspheme out of pressure, frustration or because they are passing through hard times. At such times, a person can get so discouraged or fall into despair that he begins to doubt God's providential care. If such a fellow is not watchful, he can begin to speak against God or question His sovereignty. At other times, neighbors or close relatives can taunt us or put pressure on us till we reach a breaking point. For instance, the wife of Job was so exasperated by the sudden loss of their property and the ill-health of her husband that she counseled Job to curse God and die (Job 2:9). But Job resisted the temptation; he did not yield to the evil counsel of his wife. Others do it for monetary gains. They use unprintable and blasphemous words against God for filthy lucre's sake.

But there is yet another reason why people sometimes blaspheme. This we see in the Pharisees and the Scribes during the time of Christ. In their antagonism against Christ and His doctrine, they deliberately spoke against His work, and attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to demons. **“But when**

the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils” (Matthew 12:24). This was a case of wilful and malicious blasphemy because of a deep hatred for truth. Those who allow their religious bigotry or a tradition of unbelief to prompt them into speaking against Christ are in the same class as the blasphemous Pharisees. The atheist who says there is no God as well as the idol worshipper who depicts God in form of a beast and molded lifeless image is a great blasphemer in the sight of God.

The consequence of blasphemy is very grave. Blasphemy is so grievous a sin that it brings God’s displeasure and judgment. In the case of the son of Shelomith, the first to be so punished, Moses commanded that he should be remanded until he sought God’s mind on the matter. It was unprecedented; hence, Moses could not immediately pronounce a judgment until he heard from God. This action of Moses is very instructive to all believers and especially, Christian leaders. We must learn to wait on God and allow Him to direct our actions, especially when we are confronted with new situations. Like Moses, we should pray and hear from God before we make decisions on issues in which we have little or no experience.

God answered Moses and He commanded that the blasphemer be put to death. The witnesses were to put their hands upon his head and the whole congregation, being united with the judgment, stoned him to death. Consequently, the culprit was taken outside the camp and he was executed as God directed. This punishment seems extreme by modern standard. But it shows the seriousness with which God views our relationship with Him and expects us to take that relationship. Taking the culprit outside the camp was a symbol of separation from the congregation of God’s people. Also, the witnesses laying their hands on his head was not for the purpose of identification with him in his sin or for impartation of grace but for

condemnation – a testimony that his sin should be upon his own head.

Blasphemy is a very serious sin and the consequence is eternal damnation unless the guilty person repents before death. As a matter of fact, Jesus pointed out that the only sin that cannot be forgiven is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31; Mark 7:21,22). It proceeds from the unregenerate and uncircumcised heart and the only safeguard against it is the new birth and the sanctification experiences. We also need to watch and weigh our words before we utter them. Like David, we should pray “**set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips**” (Psalm 141:3).

God commanded the children of Israel to stone blasphemers to death. And to safeguard it against misuse, God added a proviso – there have to be two or three witnesses. Yet, on many occasions the children of Israel misused this law to persecute innocent, God-fearing men. Jezebel weaved a web of conspiracy against Naboth for his refusal to give out his vineyard to Ahab. He was falsely accused of blasphemy, and consequently stoned to death so Ahab could take possession of his (Naboth's) land (1 Kings 21:10-13). Also, Stephen was falsely accused of blasphemy and stoned to death (Acts 6:11-13). The Lord Jesus Christ was also accused of blasphemy and condemned to death (Matthew 26:65,66).

COMMANDMENT AGAINST MURDER, PERSONAL INJURY AND CRUELTY (Leviticus 24:17-22; 20:6-21; Exodus 21:23-25)

While dealing with the case of blasphemy, God also repeated the laws against murder and cruelty. He commanded that anyone who killed another person should also be put to death. Also, a person who killed the beast of his neighbor should restore beast for beast. That means if he killed a donkey then he should give a donkey back to the owner. Similarly, if a man caused a blemish in his neighbor, for instance, by causing his eye to go blind or knocking out his

tooth, then the judges were to do unto the offender as he has done to his neighbor.

It is important to note that it was the judges, not the hand of private parties, who enforced the law of **“breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth”** in Israel. It cannot be used as a guise for vindictiveness or retaliation against others. We should not think that the injured person was permitted to take the laws into his own hands and proceed with brutal revenge. Bearing in mind the rudimentary stage of the institution of public justice system at that time, it is easy to understand how very important such laws were in curbing aggression, cruelty against others and their property, lawlessness and excesses in the community. Of course, now that public justice has developed itself into a wide and vigilant system, the necessity of each man taking the law into his own hand ceases. It becomes a crime against law now to usurp the functions of the judicial system. It will amount to anarchy to attempt for one’s self what the organized state willingly undertakes for you.

Besides, in the New Testament, Jesus expounded on these laws and showed us their spiritual applications. He emphasized the superior nature of the New Testament and its higher standard of righteousness by saying: **“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you...”** (Matthew 5:21,22).

According to the standard of Christ, murder is more than killing another person physically. It includes rash anger against our neighbor, destroying their reputation and counting them as a nonentity. Jesus classified the person who says to his neighbor “raca” (an empty-headed fool) with murderers. Therefore, the law against murder prohibits the assassination of our neighbor’s character, abortion and outright killing of another person either by us or through hired killers.

Question 6: Explain the laws against murder and retaliation in the light of Christ's standard of righteousness.

Christ also explained that we must not retaliate (Matthew 5:38-41). Rather than retaliate, we must manifest a higher form of righteousness by blessing those who curse us and doing good to repay evil. All our actions must be governed by the law of love and forgiveness. If we love our neighbors, we will not do anything to hurt them. And when they offend us, we should forgive and overlook their offences against us.

DAILY BIBLE READING				
	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Luke	20	1 Kings	9
TUE	„	21	„	10
WED	„	22	„	11
THUR	„	23	„	12
FRI	„	24	„	13
SAT	John	1	„	14
SUN	„	2-3	„	15

330 Lesson

THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

MEMORY VERSE: “In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession” (Leviticus 25:13).

TEXT: Leviticus 25:1-24

This study focuses on the laws of Sabbatical year and the year of Jubilee in Israel. (Jubilee is spelt severally in the Authorized King James Version as ‘jubile’ – Leviticus 25:11-13,15; 27:17,18,24; Numbers 36:4). God in His providence anticipated the time the children of Israel would settle in Canaan land and, as such, He planned ahead for the welfare of His people and the preservation of their land. By enacting appropriate laws, God made provision for the conservation of both the natural resources which He intended to give to His people, as well as their personal and spiritual health. As we study in the Pentateuch we observe a progression in the laws on Sabbath. Initially God commanded a weekly Sabbath on every seventh day but later He instituted periodic Sabbaths during the yearly feasts, and in our text, the sabbatical year at the turn of every seven. The climax of the sabbatical law is the jubilee which came at the end of every seven times seven year.

But apart from the primary purpose and immediate application which these laws served, they also had a typical or prophetic anticipation of what Jesus would accomplish for the benefit of mankind. The various laws on Sabbath and the year of jubilee pointed to the final rest and release from the bondage of sin which those who believe in Jesus Christ would have. By virtue of Christ’s redemptive act, anyone, regardless of race or rank, can enjoy a God-given rest both now and in eternity. Like the Israelites of old enjoyed deliverance and liberty in the year of jubilee, those who repent of sin and put their faith in Christ

do experience deliverance from the chains and yoke of sin, as well as freedom from satanic bondage.

THE PROMULGATION AND PURPOSE OF THE SABBATICAL YEAR (Leviticus 25:1-7; Exodus 23:10-12; Deuteronomy 15:1-18; 31:10-12).

God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai that when the children of Israel enter into the land of promise, they should allow the land to keep a Sabbath unto Him. After every six years of continuous cropping the land should be left fallow in the seventh year. During this seventh year of rest the children of Israel, throughout their land, must not plant any crop, prune or dress their perennial crops. They were prohibited from harvesting the crops that grow on their own in their fields neither were they to gather the grapes from their undressed vines. Rather, the free-growing crops were to be free for all, with no one laying claim of ownership to them. Everyone – rich and poor, old and young, strangers and natives – had free access to the free-growing crops in the sabbatical year. Even the beasts were to eat freely of the produce of the land in this year. In addition to these, creditors were required to write off the debts of Israelites and release them.

Question 1: Mention the purposes why God instituted the sabbatical year.

God's purposes in giving this law are not far-fetched. One, it was to give periodic rest to the land and thereby conserve its fertility. The science of agriculture prescribes bush fallowing as a method of soil conservation and maintenance of fertility. Two, it was to teach the children of Israel a deep lesson on faith. God would have them know that man does not live by bread alone, and that, even for their necessary daily food, they should depend wholly on Him to provide the way He chooses. If God says they should not sow their field, then they should trust Him to supply their needs in the way that pleases Him. Three, it was to remind the children of Israel that the land belongs to God and they were mere tenants on it. God is the ultimate land

owner and He has the right to dictate to His tenants the terms of occupancy. Four, the sabbatical year provides a platform for all Israelites, no matter their rank, to be placed on the same level. Throughout the year both the rich and the poor Israelite were compelled to depend on God's providence for sustenance. Five, the sabbatical year also narrowed the gap between the poor and the rich. This is because the poor Israelite who had gone into debt was forgiven and his debt written off, while the one who had been sold into slavery also got released. Therefore, an Israelite had the chance of starting business all over again and the human tendency towards greed, selfishness and undue exploitation of others were somehow curtailed in the society.

Six, the law of sabbatical year, like the weekly Sabbath, anticipated the future rest which true believers in Christ will enjoy in heaven. It pointed to a future bliss when labour and sorrow would cease and we shall not depend on the sweat of our brow before we eat. The edenic curse shall be literally removed and mankind shall enter into God's perfect rest. What a blessed hope! This eternal future rest is spoken of in the New Testament and we are warned not to miss that rest. **"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief"** (Hebrews 4:9-11). Seven, the sabbatical year afforded the children of Israel a great opportunity to pay attention to their spiritual lives and hear the scriptures read and expounded to them (Deuteronomy 31:10-12).

Question 2: How can believers take advantage of vacations and national holidays to promote their spiritual lives?

The sabbatical year was not a period of idleness or a time to merely loaf around; it was a time for Israelites to deepen their spiritual lives and draw closer to God. Wise believers have a lesson to learn from this.

The public holidays, vacations, week-ends and other special periods in our national lives, when we are free from our daily jobs, are not times for self-indulgence. Rather, such periods should be best used to rest, attend to the things of God and deepen our Christian experiences. Whether the church organizes special programs for such periods or not, wise believers should rest and also take advantage of such free time to fast, pray, study, evangelize and do extra labour for the kingdom of God.

Unfortunately, the children of Israel did not observe the law of sabbatical year when they eventually entered the land of Canaan. As a result of their disobedience, they were carried away to captivity for seventy years so that the land could enjoy its Sabbaths which they had denied it (Leviticus 26:33,34; 2 Chronicles 36:17-21).

THE PROCLAMATION OF LIBERTY IN THE YEAR OF JUBILEE (Leviticus 25:8-13; 27:17-24; Numbers 36:4).

God commanded the children of Israel to celebrate a year of jubilee after every cycle of seven consecutive sabbatical years. This implies that after every forty-nine years, the fiftieth year should be a year of jubilee. The commencement of the year of jubilee was signaled by the blowing of the trumpet on the 10th day of the seventh month, which incidentally was also the Day of Atonement. As the trumpet of jubilee sounded, liberty was also proclaimed throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants.

Question 3: Mention the major features of the year of jubilee and point out their significance.

There are some major features that characterized the year of jubilee. One, blowing of trumpets. Two, proclamation of liberty for all captive Israelite slaves. Three, a holy Sabbath (another sabbatical year in which there should be no sowing or reaping). Four, cancellation of all public or private mortgages and debts. Five, all possessions which had been sold were returned to their original owners or heirs.

The year of jubilee, with its distinctive features held a deep significance for the Israelites and also for believers today. One, it signified a new beginning for all the children of Israel. Because it coincided with the beginning of a new civil year and also since all debts were cancelled, slaves were released and possessions were returned to their original owners. It afforded the children of Israel the opportunity to begin a new year on a note of personal and financial freedom. Two, the year of jubilee also signified an aspect of universal redemption through Christ. This was clearly shown by the fact that the year of jubilee began on the Day of Atonement. In other words, the liberty of jubilee was closely connected with the atonement for sin and it is only after a person has received full forgiveness of sins that he can enjoy the true liberty of the sons of God.

In prophetic terms, Isaiah described the year of jubilee as the **“acceptable year of the Lord”** (Isaiah 61:1,2a). Ezekiel called it the year of liberty (Ezekiel 46:17). When Jesus was about to start His earthly ministry, He announced that **“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, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord”** (Luke 4:18,19). Jesus came to give us God’s jubilee. Three, the year of jubilee pointed to the true spiritual liberty and new beginning which all mankind could enjoy as a result of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. It typified the release of sinners from the bondage of sin and Satan, forgiveness of past sins and restoration of spiritual inheritance. This means that the true fulfilment of jubilee is to be found in Christ who, by His death and resurrection ensures that all that man forfeited because of the fall are fully restored. This is the freedom which Paul the apostle envisaged in Romans 8:19. Four, it was to teach, in clear terms, the principles and operations of divine mercy and grace. In the year of jubilee, lawful captives were set free and just debts were cancelled,

not because the beneficiaries merited the favour but because God commanded it to be so. Their liberty was a product of God's grace (unmerited and underserved favour). Even so, sinners who repent and believe in Christ are pardoned and their debts of sin cancelled not on meritorious grounds but on the basis of God's mercy and grace. Five, it was to show the true nature of liberty and spiritual freedom. It is not only those who were in physical bondage that were released during jubilee. Even the rich men who own slaves and held on to property were released from the bondage of materialism, greed and selfishness. By releasing their lawful slaves and returning real property to those who had sold them, they themselves were freed from the captivity of possessiveness.

Question 4: What is the implication of the year of jubilee for present-day believers?

The implication of the year of jubilee for present day believers is that Christ, by His death and resurrection, has proclaimed release and liberty for all captives. At the beginning of His earthly ministry He said He was sent or anointed to set the captives free (Luke 4:18,19) and at the end of His ministry He said, **"I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do"** (John 17:4). Therefore Jesus has accomplished the mission of securing liberty for all who are in bondage to sin and Satan. In view of this fact, no one who truly believes in Christ should remain in captivity to sin, sickness or satanic bondage anymore. Instead we are to assert our liberty and repossess all our rightful inheritance by faith.

But believers are also under solemn obligation to proclaim the glad tidings of jubilee. Just as the trumpet of jubilee was to be sounded throughout the land, we should take the gospel to all the nooks and crannies of our own land until the very last captive of Satan is released. Sinners must be persuaded to repent of their sin and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ because this is the only condition to enjoy the benefits of Christ's redemptive work. We must also implore and

prevail on backsliders to return to the Lord so that they can enjoy full deliverance and total restoration.

THE PRECEPT AGAINST OPPRESSION AND THE PROMISE OF BLESSING (Leviticus 25:14-24; 19:13; 26:3-12; Deuteronomy 16:20; 28:1-14; 1 Samuel 12:3,4; Proverbs 14:31; 22:16; 28:8; Ecclesiastes 5:8; Philippians 4:5; Genesis 26:12; Isaiah 1:19,20)

“And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbor, or buyest ought of thy neighbor's hand, ye shall not oppress one another” (Leviticus 25:14). God reminded the children of Israel not to oppress one another in all their business transactions. They were required to set a fair price on all redeemable business items in such a way that neither the seller nor buyer would be cheated. For instance, the value of real property was determined on the basis of the number of years before the next jubilee. If the year of jubilee was very near then the value was set low, simply because the buyer would only be able to use it for a short period before returning it to the original owner. On the other hand, if the year of jubilee was many years away, the value was high.

Question 5: What lessons can we learn from the way prices of property were regulated by the jubilee?

From the way the prices of property were determined by the period before jubilee we learn that God wants us to be just and fair with one another in our business transactions. Both the seller and the buyer must avoid undue exploitation of one another. On the one hand, we should avoid extortion and unscrupulous gains, and on the other hand, we must not take undue advantage of the one we are buying from. A fair rule in this matter is: whenever we sell anything or render any service to our customers or employers we should ensure that we give them good value for their money. Though in many cases we don't have a fixed standard for determining the price of goods and services, nonetheless, a believer can rely on the combination of market forces, the judgement of conscience and the application of the golden rule, to reach a just and fair assessment.

But there is yet a deeper spiritual lesson for believers in the way the price of property was determined by the proximity of jubilee. We ought to set a very low value on the things of this world as the coming of the Lord draws near. **“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer”** (1 Peter 4:7). **“Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand”** (Philippians 4:5). In view of the imminence of the rapture, which is a kind of anti-type of jubilee, we should not put a high value on worldly property or position. Like the jubilee, the rapture will be heralded by the sound of trumpet (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17).

Question 6: What provision did God make to supply the need of Israelites in the sabbatical year and how should this encourage our faith and obedience to God?

Looking at the laws of the sabbatical year and the jubilee, an Israelite might inquire **“What shall we eat the seventh year? Behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase”** (Leviticus 25:20). God anticipated such a question from His people and he answered it by promising them a special blessing in the year preceding every sabbatical year, that is the sixth year. He said that the land would bring forth at once the harvest for three years! This would be sufficient for the sixth year, the seventh year of rest and the eighth year when they would begin to sow. What a tremendous blessing attached to the faith and obedience of God’s people! As a matter of fact, this was not the first time the children of Israel would enjoy God’s free bounty. While in the wilderness, they were forbidden to gather manna on the Sabbath day. But in order to make provision for this weekly day of rest, the manna that fell on the sixth day was double that of other days (Exodus 16:22-29).

Question 7: What do we learn from these miracles of God’s provision and blessing?

There are lessons to learn from these miracles of God’s provision and blessing. These include, one, God

is gracious and He lavishes His goodness upon His children in a very generous manner. By appointing for His people absolute rest for a whole year and yet giving them free food, God displayed in a grand manner, the riches of His goodness and grace. Two, we are taught that the sustenance of God’s people, as well as their harvest does not depend merely on their labour, skill or enterprise but on God’s blessing. It is He who makes the earth to yield its increase and so we should depend on Him. Three, the miracle of divine provision in the sixth year was a conclusive proof that the laws of Moses were divine in origin, otherwise, if they were a mere human arrangement, the miraculous multiplication of harvest in the sixth year, or even the doubling of manna on the sixth day, would have been absent. But as it were, God put His seal of approval on these laws by attaching to them His profound miracles in order to convince those who might likely question Moses’ authority in giving these laws.

Finally, we learn that the path of obedience is also path of blessing. God attaches the promise of blessing to the obedience of His people. Unfortunately, the children of Israel, because of disobedience, forfeited the blessing. Now it is our turn to either obey God and receive the promised blessing, or disobey and also lose the blessing. The choice is ours (Isaiah 1:19,20).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING	
MON	John	4	1 Kings 16
TUE	„	5	„ 17-18
WED	„	6	„ 19-20
THUR	„	7	„ 21
FRI	„	8	„ 22
SAT	„	9	2 Kings 1-2
SUN	„	10	„ 3

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

331 Lesson

THE DIVINITY AND INCARNATION OF CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

TEXT: John 1:1-14

Our text gives a glimpse into the exquisite majesty, unspeakable glory, and sublime honour that was Christ’s “**before the foundation of the world**”. It unveils the peculiar personage of our great Redeemer. As we read, we stand in awe at the great gulf of condescension that was spanned by divine love when the Word became flesh and dwelt among fallen sinful men. The mystery of man’s redemption becomes more profound as we appreciate the infinite love of the Saviour in the plan of our salvation.

To know that He who brought us and reconciled us to God was with God from eternity, and acted in concert with the Father in all divine transactions from the beginning is, to say the least, most reassuring. That the Author and Finisher of our faith is also the Creator and Founder of the world gives the believer cause to rest in His almighty power. It shows how complete and perfect our salvation and security are in Him. As we gain more insight into the pre-incarnation glory and power of the ‘**Lamb of God**’, we are constrained to express while on earth, the celestial refrain: “**Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing**” (Revelation 5:12).

THE GLORY AND DIVINITY OF CHRIST (John 1:1-5; Hebrews 3:4; Colossians 1:16; John 10:28-33; 8:58).

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (verse 1). The opening verse of this gospel speaks of the **“Word”** not as a unit of speech but as a Person. And, not just any person but the One who shares all divine attributes with the Father. The Word refers to Jesus Christ our Lord, the Son of the living God. The immediate implication of this statement is two-fold. First, Christ did not become a person for the first time when as a baby He was born in Bethlehem; He had been with the Father from the dateless past. Second, He, as the Word existed before all created things since **“all things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made”** (verse 3).

Question 1: What is the implication of: “All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made”?

“All things” as used here is intended to be absolute. The idea embraces all matter, life and existence, things visible and invisible. This sense is amplified by the phrase **“and without him was not any thing made that was made.”** That this speaks of the divinity of Christ is corroborated by the Scripture, **“he that built all things is God”** (Hebrews 3:4). Also, the apostle Paul, writing to the Colossians concerning Christ said, **“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him”** (Colossians 1:16). Thus, the Word was with God not only in the sense of being co-eternal with the Father, but also of participation in all divine operations from the beginning. This shows us that He who recreated us in redemption by His own blood is the same who created us in the beginning by His power.

“In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (verse 4). He is here described as the origin of life and light. He is the source of our being, the very essence of our life. Without Him man cannot have the full knowledge and life of God. Just as the moon

cannot shine without the sun, so can no man have light without the life of the Son. He is the fountain of rational knowledge and understanding of the true God and is able to give to those who come to Him, life both abundant and eternal (John 10:10,28). Christ, the Word and Creator, is God.

Question 2: Mention two instances in the Bible where Christ affirmed His divinity.

During one of His encounters with the Jews, the Lord told them, **“Verily, verily I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am”** (John 8:58). This statement does not mean that Christ came into existence before Abraham, but that He never came into existence at all. Rather, He existed before Abraham had any being. That was the sense in which the Jews understood Him, hence, they sought to stone Him for what they termed blasphemy. In another instance, He told them: **“I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him...”** for blasphemy and **“because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God”** (John 10:30,31,33). The Jews on each of these occasions understood that Christ was claiming equality with God.

HERALD OF THE LIGHT (John 1:6-8; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35; 3:19-21; 1 John 5:19; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; 1 John 2:8-11)

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light”.

God’s great love for the salvation of humanity makes Him send chosen men to rescue lost sinners from death. The lifestyle of sin is a reflection of the darkness in the heart of man. Pitiably, **“the whole world lieth in wickedness”**. Darkness is universal, eclipsing man’s life and understanding of the required righteousness of God. Man in darkness of sin self-destruct his own life. Light also has an overpowering phenomenal effect the world over. Jesus is the spiritual Light of the world.

It was true that he, John the Baptist, was a burning and a shining light. But his light was limited in that it shone only in Israel. And so brightly did his Christian life and ministry shine with great impact that he was taught to be the expected Messiah. This is the point where many a growing minister would begin, albeit subtly, to appropriate the glory due to God alone. Many have already fallen into great delusion and deluded others also by declaring that they were the expected Christ. Incidentally, Christ forewarned that many false Christ would arise to deceive people. If you are under such ministers or ministries, repent, return and receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour of your life. Again, you must part with unfruitful work of darkness and come into the fellowship of the people of God.

Neither John the Baptist nor any of the Old Testament prophets were that Light. They were sent only as messengers and witnesses to prepare the people for the true Light for **“to him gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins”** (Acts 10:43). John’s ministry was to announce the arrival of **“the true Light that was to lighten the gentiles and (be) the glory of his people Israel.”**

Question 3: What is the danger when people try to usurp the glory that belongs to Christ alone?

He was not the light but like other prophets before him, he was sent to **“bear witness of the light.”** Here, we have a warning never to confer the glory that belongs to Christ unto any man. John’s conduct reveals how to be an effective witness for Christ. (i) We can only bear witness of the light we know and have experienced. (ii) We must be sent by God to witness according to the proportion of grace given to us. No sinner or backslider is sent to bear witness of the Light – they must first repent and be saved from sin. (iii) We must continually lay all honours at His feet. (iv) This requires humility of heart (v) We must be conscientious and diligent as heralds of the

Light, as John was. (vi) Our purpose should be **“to bear witness of the Light, that all men through [us] might believe”**.

THE ILLUMINATION AND REDEMPTION OF MEN BY THE WORD (John 1:9-13; Romans 1:19-20; Acts 10:43).

“That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (verse 9). It is one thing to exist, but quite another to know how to live, to know the true purpose of life and to know the way to heaven. The entrance of sin into the human race brought alienation from God and consequently spiritual darkness.

Man’s life is basically different from the life of beasts and other lower creations. The capacities of reason and conscience with which he was created distinguished him from, and dignified him above animals. That peculiar and differentiating capacity is of divine origin and comes from Christ, for **“in him was life and the life was the light of men.”** In other words, Christ was the Author, not only of all life, but also of reason, conscience and that innate sense of God, by which man stands higher than beasts. Christ is also responsible for the light of order, beauty and rhythm of nature, which constantly reminds man of the existence, power and wisdom of the Creator (Romans 1:19; Psalm 1:3). From Christ is the ray of brilliance of the human mind for **“in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”** (Colossians 2:3).

The entrance of sin however corrupted all of nature including the human mind (Romans 8:21). It imposed a veil of death and darkness upon the life and light of Christ in man. Christ was made flesh to do away with this veil of darkness and restore life’s immortality through the gospel. Christ Himself puts it thus: **“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness”** (John 12:46).

It is ironical however, that when Christ came to the world He created, it did not know Him. Even the Jews who had been told before hand of the coming of the Messiah neither recognized nor received His doctrine. **“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name”** (John1:11,12). This was because He did not manifest Himself in the way they expected. They thought that His kingdom would come by observations and by martial campaign. Instead, the Saviour came and was born in a manger. Similarly, many who profess to be Christians today do not receive Him for various reasons; they do not want to part with their sins and forsake the world and its system and submit to His lordship truly from their hearts.

Question 4: How does a sinful man become a child of God?

But those who receive Him by faith and turn away from their sins, He gives power to become sons and daughters of God. He does so by recreating their nature, giving them the disposition of true children of God and adopting them into God’s family. They are born again. Adoption into God’s family is preceded by regeneration by His Spirit. No one is born into this world as a child of God but we become children of God when, from the depth of our hearts, we receive Christ as our Lord and Redeemer. Christ’s power transforms our lives, our attitude and our value system to fit us for true relationship with God. Such are the people who believe in His name.

Question 5: What does it mean to believe in the name of Jesus Christ?

The name of Jesus is very descriptive of His person, mission and ministry. Those who truly believe in His name believe that He **“shall save his people from their sins”** (Matthew 1:21). They believe that He is the Word that was in the beginning with God and which became flesh, was crucified on the cross and

raised by God from the dead for their justification. They believe that He is the King of kings and Lord of lords who will reign for ever and of His kingdom there shall be no end. They believe that He is the **“Lord our Righteousness”**, that He was made to be the sin offering for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Those who thus believe on His name shall also be glorified with Him when He returns to reign. **“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”** (Romans 8:18).

THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST (John 1:14; 1 John 4:3; 2 John 7,10,11; 1 John 2:6).

“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (verse 14). The very Word that was in the beginning with God became “flesh” and dwelt among us. Christ shed His eternal glory and essence and assumed the nature of man, not in the sense of sharing in our sinful nature but of being encompassed with our infirmities. By this, He identified with our suffering and shared in our frailties, our weaknesses and our temptations. What cheering revelation this is!

The incarnation (or taking up the human flesh) of Christ was for a specific purpose. The Scripture explains that, **“as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same”** (Hebrews 2:14). This expresses that Christ in His incarnate form was not only man, but was also subject to all the pains and miseries of the human nature, for He came **“in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin...”** yet He was devoid of the sinful nature of man. **“For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens”** (Hebrews 7:26). As believers, we must stop and ponder the exemplary and exceeding humility of our blessed Saviour, who though He made all things, yet took that form from which He was at most incomparable. Divine love compelled Him who

received the worship of holy angels to come and dwell among fallen men, short of the glory of God.

Christ's incarnation was inevitable for the redemption of sinful man. It was needful that One who is without sin, who is from God and satisfies all divine demands should take the place of sinful man since no one is qualified to atone for the sins of man (Hebrews 10:4). In His day, Job desired to reach unto God through an acceptable mediator but found none. He lamented that there was no umpire to plead his case before God (Job 9:33). However today, Christ has come in the likeness of sinful flesh to redeem us from sin. Every one that comes to God through Him will find pardon and forgiveness.

By this revelation therefore, the Scripture exposes the ignorance and delusion of those who claim that Jesus did not come in the flesh. They say the entire redemption story was a spiritual transaction without any physical manifestation. But the Scripture says, **“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world”** (1 John 4:2,3).

Question 6: What challenge does the sinless and glorious life of Christ on earth pose to anyone who professes Him today?

Though Christ took the form of sinful flesh yet, **“we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”** The glorious light of divine love, righteousness, holiness and wisdom shone brilliantly through the veil of sinful flesh. It was the glimpses of such divine attributes that inspired the faith, devotion and love of the disciples such as John the beloved, who were closest to the Lord. Generally, closeness and familiarity with men disclose their weakness and foibles. In contrast, those who were closest and most intimate with Christ

only discovered most, His moral perfection, His love and truthfulness. This discovery should challenge the believers in Christ today to live so true to our profession and so transparently righteous, that our lives can bear the scrutiny of any moral searchlight at whatever range. **“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked”** (1 John 2:6).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	John	11	2 Kings	4
TUE	„	12	„	5-6
WED	„	13-14	„	7-8
THUR	„	15-16	„	9
FRI	„	17-18	„	10
SAT	„	19	„	11-12
SUN	„	20-21	„	13-14

332 Lesson

JOHN'S WITNESS OF CHRIST

MOMERY VERSE: "John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me" (John 1:15).

TEXT: John 1:15-51

Our previous study revealed the Lord Jesus Christ to us as the eternal Word made flesh, Who though God, chose to dwell among us, taste of the human feeling and eventually voluntarily died for the sin of mankind. **"Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people"** (Hebrews 2:17). This atonement is still valid for everyone who comes by faith in the finished work. Today, we return to the testimony of John the Baptist on how the Lord Jesus is truly the Christ. Without mincing words, he told His audience and inquirers that he was not the Messiah but rather, His forerunner and witness. John's authority as a witness of Christ, the content of his witness and its impact on his audience form the kernel of this study.

Question 1: Mention other witnesses of Christ beside John.

Apart from John the Baptist (John 1:6,7,32-34; 5:33-35) there are other witnesses to the Messiah or Christ mentioned in the Bible. These include: God the Father (John 8:17-27,14), the Son (John 5:17-27; 8:14; 18:37), the Holy Spirit (John 15:26;16:13-15), the written Word (John 1:45; 5:38,46), His divine works (John 5:17,36; 10:25;14:11;15:24), and the disciples of Christ (John 15:27; 19:35; 21:24). All these witnesses are in agreement that Jesus is the Messiah. He is therefore worthy of universal acceptance as our Saviour.

THE CALL OF JOHN TO BE A WITNESS OF CHRIST
(Isaiah 40:3; John 1:23; Luke 1:13-17,76,77; 3:4;
Malachi 3:1; Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Matthew 28:18-
20; Mark 16:15,16).

A witness is one who testifies to any fact from his own personal knowledge. A witness is needed when there is controversy or doubt about something in dispute. The testimony of witnesses can help to clear the doubts or disprove false claims and allegations. Under the Mosaic law, two witnesses under oath were necessary to convict a person charged with a capital crime (Numbers 35:30) and if the criminal was stoned, the witnesses were bound to cast the first stones (Deuteronomy 17:6,7).

The need to have a witness who would testify of the Messiah arose from the fact that from the first mention of the coming of a Saviour in Genesis 3:15, many generations had passed. Isaiah later prophesied of Him about 700 B.C. Even the last of the prophets, Malachi, prophesied about the Messiah (Malachi 3:1) in about 430 B.C. The long passage of time made it necessary that there should be a forerunner or herald to prepare people's heart for the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist was the God-sent messenger to prepare the way and bear witness (Malachi 3:1; Luke 1:76, 77).

That John the Baptist was appointed or sent by God to witness to the Messiah is a clearly stated fact. **“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all men through him might believe”** (John 1:6, 7). John the Baptist did not appoint himself to bear witness of Christ. He was appointed by God even before he was born. Like John the Baptist, we, as believers, are called to be witnesses of Christ. Therefore, we must not be ashamed of Him (Romans 1:14-16). We must witness about how He saved us from our sins. The sinner's heart needs one form of preparation or the other in order to come to the Saviour. If we wait for sinners to come to the

Saviour, we may have to wait for too long. We are under obligation to reach them where they are.

God's call ordered his life and ministry. The call made his ministry so clear that there was no doubt that he was sent by God for this purpose. No wonder, he lived a purpose-driven life. A child of God must be sure he is led of God before embarking on any important venture. Believers should always ensure that their ministries are defined, else, they could end up floundering and not fulfilling their God-given ministries. This is why it is better for those who feel led to particular areas of ministry to wait and pray through to be sure of the when, where and how of such areas before jumping in than to go in, run into confusion before seeking counsel.

John the Baptist was sincere in character, conduct and ministry; his ministerial success did not sway him from his own line of call as a "**Messenger of the Highest**" to assume a greater role. He chose to remain a mere "**voice of him that crieth in the wilderness**" (Isaiah 40:3).

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN AS A WITNESS OF CHRIST (John 1:15,19-28; Matthew 3:1-17; Luke 1:15-17; 3:1-18; Colossians 4:16).

Knowing his call, John the Baptist carried on his ministry as a faithful and true witness. He stuck to his ministry of "**preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins**" (Luke 3:3) and remained faithful unto it till the task was completed. What a challenge to believers! We need to stick to our individual ministries till the great task is accomplished. Though his ministry was centred on repentance, it was necessary because it served to prepare the hearts of the people for eventual belief in and acceptance of the Messiah. The ministry was such a successful one that it stirred up religious reawakening among the Jews who had for more than 400 years lacked a prophet who could warn them of the danger of their sins. His ministry brought multitudes of publicans,

Pharisees, Sadducees, soldiers, etc. who came to listen to his messages to their moral and spiritual consciousness. As a result of the successful ministry of John the Baptist, many people began to take him for the Messiah.

John the Baptist was an unusual man who preached an unusual message to unusual multitudes in an unusual place. He was a unique man. His dressing and diet were unique; his message and abode were unique. His kind of message was one that was not popular in Israel. Note however, that he did not aim at creating a brand called John; he wanted to prepare the people's heart for the Messiah. A preacher like John the Baptist today cannot, naturally, fit in into the murky water of politics because of his conviction. Besides, he did not court the favour of anyone – high or low - in the society. Rather, as an austere, yet a gracious minister, he could declare the truth to all, including king Herod.

Question 1: What are some of the marks with which true ministers can be identified?

John the Baptist, truly, was down-to-earth and self-effacing. As believers, we have lessons to learn from this in the sense that one of the marks of true ministers of Christ is the desire to always have preference for Christ's glory. True ministers are not noisy or frivolous; neither do they distract people's attention from Christ. They do not seek popularity. Rather, they deliberately endeavour to keep themselves out of public view so that Christ can be manifestly seen. Actually, the great task entails lifting up the Saviour. No matter how much a minister is endowed, honoured or blessed, he should lay all at the feet of Jesus, and direct all men to Him as the undivided object of affection and honour. The business of every Christian and Christian minister in every age, race, clime is to be a witness for Christ, and to endeavour to convince the world that He is worthy of our confidence and love.

When Jewish leaders sent emissaries to inquire from John if he was the Messiah, he told them plainly that he was not, neither was he Elias nor any other prophet. **“He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias”** (John 1:23).

Question 2: Enumerate what John the Baptist testified concerning Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist’s ministry of witnessing for Christ was a public one. As a bridge between the old and new, he needed to minister to the people in the Old Testament style of crying out (Isaiah 58:1). He cried out to show the people their sins and the Messiah. Today, the believer’s emphasis must be on fulfilling his ministry. Like John the Baptist and Archippus, believers must **“Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it”** (Colossians 4:17).

THE CONTENT OF JOHN’S WITNESS OF CHRIST
(John 1:14,16,17, 29-34;

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

The body and truth of all the sacrifices of the law, to make atonement for the sin of the world, is Christ. All the lambs used in the Old Testament were foreshadows of the sacrifice that Christ was coming to make for the sin of the world. Note that the word "the" used before the Lamb adds a greater force to it, not only to set forth the worthiness of Christ, and so separate Him from the "lamb" which was a symbol of Him, and from all other sacrifices of the law, but also to remind us of the prophecies of Isaiah and others. Also, that the expression is in the present tense indicates that the act is continuous because the Lamb rightfully has this power both now and forever to take away the sins of the world.

It is instructive that the content of John's witness is centred on the ultimate purpose of Christ's coming into the world, namely, to take away **"the sin of the world."** Whatever ministry one is involved in, if it does not emphasize the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross, is not worth the while. Jesus Christ is here described symbolically as the **"Lamb of God"** who takes away sin. Jesus Christ is the Passover or Paschal Lamb that delivers from sin and eternal destruction (1Corinthians 5:7). The lamb was equally used in the old covenant for sacrifice morning and evening everyday. But in the New Covenant, Jesus is our everlasting propitiation (Hebrews 9:26). Jesus did not only come to take away our sin, but also the guilt, power and consequence of sin. He is the Saviour, Justifier and Sanctifier. As a result of His sacrifice, sin no more has dominion over the believer because he is no more under the law but under grace (Romans 6:14).

Christ is the fountain of all goodness; He gives us most bountifully out of His storehouse at all times especially when we put our faith in Him. For those who have not known Christ as Lord and personal Saviour, there is abundant grace for salvation and freedom from sin. For every need that we may have, there is, as one would say, graces piled one upon another. We only need to **"come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"** (Hebrews 4:16).

THE IMPACT OF JOHN'S WITNESS ON HIS AUDIENCE (John 1:35-51; 10:41,42; Matthew 21:24-26; Luke 1:76-80).

The witness of John concerning Christ had credibility and it stood the test of time. Many believed in Jesus Christ because of the testimony. Two disciples of John, one of whom was Andrew, heard him declare that Jesus is the Lamb of God and they followed Him (John 1:35-40).

Those who listened to John testify of Christ had the opportunity of verifying firsthand from Christ what he told them and the verdict of many of them was, “**John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true**”. As a result, many believed in Him. As Christians, we should examine ourselves if our lives and ministries are impacting positively on people around us. Do we preach with conviction about Christ as John did? Do we preach Christ crucified or our emphasis is on self and materialism? Our lives should turn multitudes to Christ as did John.

Question 3: List some virtues in John that made his witness effective.

John’s witness was effective on his hearers for many reasons. First, he was in tune with God. In other words, he was in good relationship with Him. He received his ministry and message from God. Likewise, for anyone to powerfully testify of Christ today, he must, first, possess the new birth experience. This will prevent such a person from contradicting his message. Once the preacher’s life contradicts his message, he cannot make any meaningful impact as people will be distracted by those inadequacies.

Also, like John, we must be separate from sinners, be disciplined and careful of the company we keep. We are also enjoined, “**Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?**” (2 Corinthians 6:14). And like Christ, we must be “**holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners**” (Hebrews 7:26). This does not, however, mean that we should be isolated from the society but that we prayerfully choose who we make our friends.

Again, we must strive to know the truth. This means that we must “**Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth**” (2 Timothy 2:15). Nothing dispels falsehood more quickly than truth.

The earlier believers are equipped with truth, the quicker falsehood will be unable to have foothold in our communities. Therefore, we must equip ourselves with the knowledge of the Scriptures, and also hear from God. Believers should cultivate the habit of reading and studying the Scriptures regularly and meditating on what had been read and studied.

Moreover, we must stick to the doctrines of Christ in spite of people’s attitude to us. Messages on holiness, upright lifestyle and godliness are certainly unusual in a permissive and perverse world. They are most likely not going to be popular in such a world. But when people see our consistency and steadfastness, exemplary lifestyles, they will have a change of heart.

Of course, mere knowledge without courage to stand for the truth will not help. John was not only truthful; he was also bold in declaring it. He testified about the coming of the Messiah, though he knew that such a message could offend those in authority, such as the Roman Governor. We should lay our all on the altar and be willing to suffer for Christ, even if need be, to pay the supreme sacrifice.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING		
MON	Acts	1-2	2 Kings	15-16
TUE	„	3-4	„	17
WED	„	5-6	„	18
THUR	„	7	„	19
FRI	„	8	„	20-21
SAT	„	9	„	22-23
SUN	„	10	„	24-25

333 Lesson

THE MARRIAGE IN CANA OF GALILEE

MEMORY VERSE: “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him” (John 2:11).

TEXT: John 2: 1-11

Two days after His encounter with Nathanael, Jesus received and honoured an invitation to be a Guest at the marriage in Cana of Galilee. His manifest presence and power at the occasion recorded only in the gospel according John, was an attestation to the divine institution of marriage.

Marriage, the union between a man and a woman, was God’s creation right from Genesis. Aloneness of man was the only thing God saw after creation that was not good. **“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him”** (Genesis 2:18). Consequently, He removed a rib from man, and with it made the woman to be his “help meet”. This divine institution is aimed at achieving partnership, purity, procreation, provision, protection and preservation of posterity. Those who seek to marry according to God’s plan, pattern and purpose are inevitably enlisting His support in their relationship. **“Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord”** (Proverbs 18:22).

Question 1: What is marriage, according to the scripture?

It need be stressed that marriage is between a man and a woman. Marriage union between a man and another man or a marriage union between a woman and another woman, called gay marriage, is abomination in the sight of God. Persons who have chosen to be gay would not have been born into this world through the divine institution of marriage if their own parents had toed their path of rebellion against God. They are

in a pitiable condition of depravity, directly fighting against God. And by their lifestyle are courting the judgement of God (Romans 1:24,26,27,32). Their rebellion cannot change God's design to give holistic fulfillment which is predicated on a godly marital relationship and regulated by His word and will. It is no wonder then that Jesus performed His first miracle at the marriage in Cana of Galilee.

MARRIAGE INVITATION TO CHRIST (John 2:1,2; Isaiah 1:18; Matthew 11: 28,29; 1 John 1:3)

“And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage” (John 2: 2). The effort of the couple to invite Jesus to their marriage ceremony was a step in the right direction and a lesson, not only for the celebrants who tasted the miracle of **“good wine”** but also for believers who intend to marry today.

<p>Question 2: What should be the goal of believers while preparing for marriage ceremony?</p>

It could be inferred that Christ was either a friend or relation to the couple as Mary herself was present before the arrival of Christ and His disciples. And right from His arrival, it is the identity of the person of Christ, not the couple or the ruler of the feast that is magnified and given prominence in this account of marriage ceremony. This is one secret intending couples must learn if they expect the manifestation of the glory of the Son of God before, during and after their marriage ceremony. Marriage relationship will only be beautiful, enjoyable, glorious and fulfilling if Christ is made Guest and exalted as Lord in it. The same is true of the life in whom Christ is both Guest and Lord.

Would Christ honour an invitation to marriage ceremony that is founded on immoral practice, promiscuity and inordinate affection? Such a corrupt practice would scare Him who is **“of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity”** (Habakkuk 1:13). What a caution to intending couples to keep themselves chaste, virtuous and pure

during the period of courtship until they stand before God and His people for the solemnization of their marriage union. The scripture warns that, “**Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge**” (Hebrews 13:4). Both the married and the single are clearly cautioned to desist from all forms of immoral practices contrary to God’s word. Besides, Christ’s acceptance of the invitation and presence at the marriage in Cana condemns the fanaticism of some believers who are too spiritual to attend marriage ceremonies of other children of God. However, to be so pre-occupied with the issues of marriage to the extent of losing consciousness of the imminent return of the Lord is one of the dangers that signposts the end of time.

Christ manifested the power of His Lordship wherever He was invited or received (Matthew 8:14,15; Luke 10:38; 19:7; 24:29). So, inviting Jesus into your crisis-ridden marriage relationship is the only and best solution that will bring peace and fulfillment into it.

Question 3: State the basic step the sinner must take to be able to enjoy marriage relationship.

Enjoying God’s best in a marriage relationship requires response to His call to repentance, cleansing and restitution. This experience brings one into a relationship – in scriptural parlance, a marriage relationship with Christ, the Bridegroom (Matthew 22:2-11; 25:1-13; Mark 2:19,20; John 3:29; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-32; Revelation 19:7). Therefore, every believer married to Christ is a member of His body, flesh and bones (Romans 7:4; Ephesians 5:30 1 Corinthians 6:15). This relationship is sustained through intimate fellowship with Him in prayer, reading and studying of His word, obedience to Him in all things, fellowship with His people and talking about Him to other people so they can receive Him as their Lord and Saviour. Righteousness, as a lifestyle, becomes the robe everyone who hopes to

be at the marriage supper of the Lamb must wear throughout our pilgrimage on earth. It requires that the believer be watchful that his garment is not stained with sin or stolen by the adversary. Those who refused the invitation to enter into relationship with Christ together with those who responded to the invitation by attending Christian services but without the righteousness of God through Christ will be banished from heaven.

Christ's call into a relationship with Him is universal and has not expired. **"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"** (Matthew 11:28; Revelation 22:17). Whosoever comes to Him for forgiveness and cleansing from sin, He promises not to reject. Christ receives sinful men.

REQUEST FOR DIVINE PROVISION (John 2:3-5; Matthew 6:11; James 1:5-7; Zechariah 10:1; John 14:13,14; 16:24).

<p>Question 4: How can believers contribute to the success of marriage ceremony of fellow brethren?</p>
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Marriage ceremony is usually a time to feast, a time to rejoice with those who rejoice. But in this marriage, we are faced with an embarrassing situation of dire need for wine as guests were apparently far more than the provision made. The wine finished. The situation would have become irreparable for the couple, as marriage ceremonies usually lasted for days among the Jews, were it not for the presence of Christ. Challenges require faith to tackle and Mary rose to the rescue. She recognized the divinity of Christ at that instant and made supplication to Him on behalf of the couple. She was selfless – quite unlike women who attend marriage ceremonies with food and drink harvesting bags for their families at home. She sought to contribute her quota to the success of the ceremony, as it is always better to give than to receive. Her supplication was in line with the word of God (Luke 11:6; John 19:26; Jeremiah 29:13).

Others would rather criticize, murmur and bear tales against the couple for shoddy preparation for the ceremony, but the right thing to always do is pray to the Lord in times of need. It is instructive that men should seek and possess the presence of Christ at all times. The vicissitudes of life reveal the inadequacy of man's resources to meet his needs. But the prayerful will always find that God is more than **“able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us”** (Ephesians 3:20). Besides prayer, we can also be available to plan with intending couples, run errands, serve during the ceremony like the servants in our text and provide moral or financial support for the success of other believers' marriage ceremony.

DIVINE PROVISION THROUGH OBEDIENCE OF FAITH (John 2:6-11; Isaiah 44:3; Psalm 36:8; Isaiah 55:1; Matthew 5:6; John 7:37; Revelation 7:16; 22:7).

Question 5: What are the conditions for receiving miracles of provision?

Although Jesus performed no miracles up to this time, His mother looked up to Him at this time of need. As it came to the matter of miracles relating to His divinity, He replied **“Woman, what have I to do with thee?”** Expectedly, He was not subject to Mary in the manifestation of His divine power. Christ's answer, **“mine hour is not yet come”** reveals that He followed a divine time-table before and after beginning a public ministry. Mary was however undeterred because she knew how He was born and the supernatural events that surrounded His life. She then turned to the servants and said, **“Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.”** How great it is for us to seek and honour the Lord and treasure His Word. That Mary instructed the servants to obey Christ reveals the depth of her spiritual perception: that miracles take place when the Lordship of Christ is proclaimed, accepted and surrendered to by people. It is those who acknowledge His Lordship that obey Him. Such obedience of faith in Christ on the part of servants was preparatory

to the miracle of provision. Though preparation precedes blessings, it is obedience of faith in Jesus that brings about actual blessings. Those who reject the Lordship of Christ and His counsel will not be heard when they pray to the Lord for any blessing other than the salvation of their souls (Proverbs 1:24-32).

Mary esteemed and extolled Christ's words as powerful, productive, final and unfailing. She said unto the servants, "**whatsoever he saith unto you, do it**" (John 2:5). Her instruction revealed to the servants the sovereignty and Lordship of Christ in whom alone men should put their faith for desired miracles. That faith in Christ's words to accomplish the supernatural will produce result is further clarified in the case of the centurion whose servant was healed. He told Christ, "**...speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed**" (Matthew 8:8). He received miracle for his servant through faith in Christ's words. The servants at the marriage also obeyed Christ. Oftentimes, God requires that we do our part before He gives us a blessing. Jesus chose to use the common and familiar things of their own law to solve their immediate problem. According to their ceremonial law, vessels were filled with water for guests to perform ablutions – washing of feet, hands and head – before they could enter the house of the couple.

Jesus instructed the servants to fill the six water pots of stone there with water. They obeyed, signifying their submission to the control of Christ. Having filled the water pots, the attendants turned to Jesus for further instruction. The men did not really know that there would be any meaning in the next task – commonplace though it seemed. The greatest obstacle to Christian discipleship for most people is lack of simple will to do what God wants them to do. God demands that we allow Him to take the lead and control of our lives. We must learn to say as Paul did on the way to Damascus, "**Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?**" (Act 9:6). Thus, shall we be on

the way to blessing as the servants did. To obey the Lord once may not result in miracles that you need. You must be ready to continually obey the Lord in all areas of your life. The obedient child of God will always experience and witness miracles of God as the servants did.

“And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it” (John 2:8). They did what Jesus told them to do, and imagine their surprise when they drew out wine, good wine, better than what had been served in the beginning. This was a living, undeniable miracle. Even the governor of the feast testified to the groom whom he thought had kept the good wine on purpose till that time: **“Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now”** (John 2:10). Thus, Jesus manifested His creative power by turning water into wine - good wine. His power over nature is irresistible and excellent (Matthew 8:26; 14:20,25; 17:27; 21:19; Mark 4:39; Psalm 65:7; 89:9; 107:29; Jonah 1:15). If Christ has power to turn water into wine, He can turn poison in your body into water, curse into blessing, and a stony heart into a heart of flesh. Satan recognized this power of the Lord when he suggested that Christ should turn stone to bread to meet His need for food. But the Lord defeated Him. The power the Lord possesses is for the good of His children who accept His Lordship and obey Him in all things.

Question 6: Why does the Scripture forbid drinking of intoxicating wine?

God does not perform miracles that will lead people into captivity. His power and holiness are the same. Jesus did not turn water into intoxicating wine for men to drink and continue in sin. Some people erroneously misinterpret “wine” in our text to be alcohol. It needs be clarified that there are two types of wine produced from grapefruit or pomegranate

in the Middle East namely, unfermented wine and fermented wine.

The unfermented wine is non-alcoholic fruit juice. This is very nutritious food for the body. It was used as beverage at festivals (Esther 1:7; 5:6; Daniel 5:1-4; John 2:3); for drink-offerings in the temple service (Exodus 20:26; Numbers 15:4-10); as part of the "first-fruits" (Deuteronomy 18:4); used to celebrate the Passover, and by extension, the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:27-29). This kind of "**good wine**" cannot make one 'bad' or 'abnormal'. Would Christ turn water into alcoholic wine for guests to drink, get intoxicated and disrupt activities at the marriage? God forbid!

Intake of fermented, alcoholic wine that intoxicates is unarguably sinful as it results in degrading behaviors (Genesis 9:20; 19:31-36; 1 Samuel 25:36-37; 2 Samuel 13:28; 1 Kings 20:12-21; Esther 1:10-11; Daniel 5:23; Revelation 17:2). Misery, woes, errors, folly and wickedness describe those who take alcoholic wine (Proverbs 23:29-35; Isaiah 5:22; 28:1-7; 5:11,12; 56:12; Hosea 4:11; Joel 3:3; Amos 6:6). And these are not the descriptive qualities of the redeemed children of God. God forbids His children from taking it (Leviticus 10:9; Numbers 6:3; 1 Samuel 1:14; Proverbs 23:31; 31:4-5; 1 Timothy 3:3; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 21: 8, 27). To take or not to take alcoholic wine but give others attracts a curse (Habakkuk 2:15).

Question 7: What are the reasons why Christ performs miracles?

Further, Paul's advice to Timothy to "**use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities**" adds another dimension to this issue. Understandably, alcohol is drug. It is a basic constituent of most drugs we use from day to day. Timothy was asked to use a measure of it to cure his stomach trouble. Those who misconstrue this statement as licence to drink alcoholic wine obey their flesh and attract God's displeasure on them. Medically, use of drugs without the doctor's recommendation is drug abuse, and punishable in the law court.

Thus, Christ’s first miracle of turning water into wine was performed to show forth the glory of God. Besides, miracles, signs and wonders attest to the potency of the power of God. Genuine miracles from Christ also draw sinners unto God so they can receive the greatest of all miracles – the salvation of their souls. Divine manifestation also makes the believer to exercise absolute trust in the sovereignty of God. As a result of the miracle, “**his disciples believed on him**” (John 2:11).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Acts	11-12	1 Chronicles	1
TUE	„	13	„	2
WED	„	14-15	„	3-4
THUR	„	16	„	5
FRI	„	17-18	„	6
SAT	„	19	„	7
SUN	„	20	„	8

334 Lesson

JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE

Memory Verse: “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19)

TEXT: John 2:12-25

After the marriage ceremony during which He turned water into wine in Cana, Jesus left for Capernaum with “**his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples**” The few days Jesus spent in this city were undoubtedly momentous as other scripture references reveal. Capernaum, believed to be Peter’s city-home, was where the healing of the centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:5-13), the nobleman’s son (John 4:46-56), Peter’s mother in law (Matthew 8:14-17), the demoniac (Mark 1:21-28), the paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8) and various diseases (Matthew 8:16,17) all took place. Capernaum, a city in Galilee located on the Northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee was the place Jesus’ sermon on the Bread of life (John 6:24-71) and other important messages (Mark 9:33-50) were preached. The people’s resistance to Christ’s message of repentance did not go without condemnation (Matthew 11:23,24). We learn from the foregoing that the joy of marriage ceremony should not rob us of the sense of responsibility with which to rescue sinners. Besides, obstinacy to the call of God to repentance attracts divine condemnation.

PURGING GOD’S TEMPLE (John 2:12-17; 2 Chronicles 29:3-15; Nehemiah 13:9; Matthew 21:12; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Isaiah 1:16; 2 Timothy 2:21)

Question 1: Why did Jesus attend the Passover of the Jews?

Jesus was in Jerusalem with His mother, brethren and disciples to attend the first Passover after His baptism preparatory to His public ministry. The Passover of the Jews instituted in Exodus 12:1-51 was celebrated annually. Our passage reveals that the Lord kept the Passover apparently not because He was subject to the law but to fulfill all righteousness and to redeem His people from the curse of the law (Galatians 4:5; John 1:17). He also took advantage of the occasion to make Himself and his doctrine known. But He **“... found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when He had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, ...”** (John 2:14,15).

The temple of God had suffered pollution, defilement and profanity physically and spiritually from the Old Testament to this time. Religion, at this time had become a façade for business practices. Sheep, oxen and doves were brought into the temple to enable those who came from afar and could not bring their sacrificial animals with them to buy. The money-changers were there to change people's money as every one was expected to offer (Exodus 30:13). Christ, without fear or favour, drove out the sellers and buyers from the temple and over-turned the tables of the money changers. He was displeased with those who made worldly gain out of the church. None could challenge His action, not even his enemies. In preaching the gospel, believers should learn from the boldness of Christ, who was zealous in a good cause. Apparently, the priests were indulgent; and all the scribes and Pharisees who claim to be the guardian of the law could not apply the truth Christ quoted as the basis for His cleansing of the temple. Multiple commercial activities in any acclaimed 'house of God' today are ominous signs of deadness or absence of revival.

God's will, revealed in Christ's action against desecration of the temple, is for His worshippers to set apart all places of worship as sacred, preserved in

holiness and righteousness. In cleansing the temple, the Lord condemned the covetousness of the priest, who for filthy lucre made the temple a market place, whereas provision should have been made for such purposes elsewhere. A Christian writer aptly captured this situation, when he said, “Great corruptions in the church owe their rise to the love of money”. The hordes of prosperity preachers and the profane practice of bazaars in contemporary time owe their origin to the love for money.

Today’s church can only escape the present pervading spirit of disobedience and hypocritical worship if all who profess to be Christ’s followers are genuinely saved by “...**the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost**” because Christ “...**gave himself for us, that he may redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works**” (Titus 3:5; 2:14).

<p>Question 2: How does the purging of the temple apply to believers today?</p>
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Believers are referred to as the “house” or “temple” of God (Hebrews 3:6; 1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20). And as such, we must keep our bodies, the temples of God, pure from defilements. “**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service**” (Romans 12:1). If defilement in the physical temple grieves Christ and necessitated cleansing, then those who have defiled their bodies through unclean practices have grieved God and need cleansing in the blood of the Lamb. The consequence of remaining unclean is grievous. “**If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are**” (1 Corinthians 3:17). There is continual cleansing in the precious and efficacious blood of Christ for believers who walk in the light (1 John 1:7).

CHRIST GIVES A SIGN TO THE JEWS (John 2:18-22; 6:30; Matthew 12:38-40)

The Jews asked the Lord to prove His authority by showing them a sign. They expected that he should confirm His claim of being on a divine mission through some miraculous operation as Moses did (Exodus 4:30). Jesus did not give the Jews an instant sign but gave them a prophecy of His death and resurrection which they misunderstood. They thought it strange for Christ to build in three days the temple which took their forefathers forty-six years to build. Christ, however, was referring to His body. Truly, **“the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Christ is the Temple in which the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Colossians 2:9). As the temple in the wilderness, so also was the temple in Jerusalem a type of Christ (Acts 7:44). Therefore, He, speaking concerning His body said, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”**. Christ’s desire was to draw the attention of the Jews from glorifying the physical temple building to the spiritual temple which Himself is (Hebrews 9:11, 23, 24).

Question 3: What changed the disciples understanding of Christ’s mission to the world?

Christ’s disciples themselves admired but did not understand what the Lord said. There were many things that they did not distinctly understand until after the resurrection when they saw those things accomplished. **“Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures”** (Luke 24:45). They clearly and more firmly believed the scriptures and were able to make a clearer interpretation and application after the resurrection. Their eyes were more opened when the Holy Ghost came upon them at Pentecost (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15; Acts 2:1-4). The clarity of insight and harmony of the Old Testament Scripture with Christ’s words under the New Testament confirmed and strengthened the disciples’ faith in God’s word. The

consistent Christian who reads, studies and listens to the word and meditates on it will always discover doubt-clearing proofs of inerrancy of scripture truths. **“Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord”** (Hosea 6:3). Christian ministers must not give up just because the truth they preach in simple and clear words are not understood. They are co-labourers with God. It is God’s part to open the understanding of those that listen to His word to comprehend and to obey. Notwithstanding, gospel ministers must be adequately prepare through constant study of the word and prayer, and seek the power of the Holy Ghost for effective, result-oriented preaching as the incidence in our text happened before the cross and Pentecost.

CHRIST’S REACTION TO MIRACLE SEEKERS (John 2:23-25; Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:31; Proverbs 21:21; 1 Kings 3:13)

“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did” (John 2:23). Christ performs miracles with the purpose of bringing men to God. Unfortunately, people are more likely to believe God when they see miracles but go away when it comes to establishing them on the infallible word of God. It is certain that not all who claim to believe that will continue if their faith is not anchored on the Person and Word of Christ. Christian workers must note that many of those who turned back from Christ when He preached the truth in John chapter 6:53-66, had earlier claimed to believe on the Lord. Christ’s principle of non-committal in our passage to those whose Christian experience of salvation is but spurious should be our guide in life and service. If Jesus did not commit Himself unto such, then we should neither commit ourselves nor His work into their hands. Rather we should subject them to the sound teaching of the word of God as Christ did. We should also rebuke them, like Peter did to Simon the Sorcerer, so they will know the condemnation of God is upon them if they fail to repent and abide in Christ.

Expectedly, Christ neither took these ‘believers’ serious nor called them after Him nor maintained a familiar fellowship with them because: (i) they were false believers, (ii) they were ignorant and weak, (iii) their faith was not founded in discerning the truth of the gospel which Christ preached, (iv) their acceptance of the gospel was sudden and based on the miracles they saw and they considered Christ as a famous person and a great personality from whom they might expect some earthly good, (v) they had no true justifying faith. It is possible to hear the word and witness miracles without receiving Christ as Saviour. True justifying faith requires understanding and agreeing with the truth of the revealed word, which these Jews lacked (vi) those who believe and willingly receive and accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour are moved by their affections to love, desire, hope and rejoice in him and bond themselves into obedience to his law. A simple evidence of genuine repentance is spiritual hunger to learn more of the word of God coupled with prompt obedience to it. This was evident in the converts of the early church as they continued in fellowship, prayer, doctrine and sharing with other people of God.

Question 4: Why did Christ not commit himself to those who believed in him?

The divine nature of Christ accorded Him the perfect knowledge of all men, not only from their external acts and behaviors but what is also in them, as He searches the heart and tries the reins (1 Kings 8:39). He knows His true followers, He knows their sincerity, genuineness and their determination to identify with Him in all circumstances (John 10:27; Luke 9:23). Spiritual leaders must pray for spiritual insight and understanding of the state of their flock.

To believe in Christ presupposes that the individual accepts His message implicitly as the only truth, puts confidence and trust in His efficacious work of salvation, believes without reservation, predicates his or her faith in Him as the only Saviour and surrenders

completely and unreservedly to His will and Lordship. This results in genuine salvation. Those who firmly and wholly accept Christ as the only and all-sufficient Saviour commit the care of their souls unto Him.

Question 5 How can you identify a false believer and a genuine one?

To claim to believe in Christ and still remain a weak in sin is a misnomer and a demonic distortion of the gospel message. Jesus said, **“if the son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”**(John 8:36). **“He that committed sin is of the devil...”** (1 John 3:8). The Almighty God **“according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness...”** (2 Peter 1:3) and is able to keep us from falling and to present us without fault before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24). A believer then is a saint, one who trusts and fears God absolutely, is zealous for God’s glory and militant for the truth. His or her conversion from Satan to Christ and from sin to righteousness is genuine and clear to all around him or her. He or she is a true and reliable disciple and a loyal and faithful servant of Christ. Those who lack this testimony like the Jews of Jesus’ time are false believers caught in Satan’s web of deception and delusion. All they need to do is heed God’s call to repentance, exercise faith in Christ’s work of atonement at Calvary and receive Jesus into their hearts as Saviour and Lord.

DAILY BIBLE READING				
MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Acts	21	1 Chronicles	9
TUE	„	22-23	„	10-11
WED	„	24-25	„	12
THUR	„	26	„	13-14
FRI	„	27-28	„	15-16
SAT	Romans	1-2	„	17-18
SUN	„	3-4	„	19-20

335 Lesson

NICODEMUS CAME TO JESUS

MEMORY VERSE: “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

TEXT: John 3:1-21

Having focused on the cleansing of the temple, which was part of Christ public ministry, today’s study focuses on the second aspect of His ministry – His ministry to individuals. It is amazing that large as Christ’s congregation was, He still had time to attend to the needs of individual members. Those who felt that their questions were not sufficiently dealt with publicly sought audience with Him privately. This group is represented by Nicodemus in our study.

Though some scholars suggest that he could have chosen such time out of fear, cowardice and shame of being seen with Christ, it is, nonetheless, heart-warming that Christ heartily welcomed him, answered his questions and led him to the way of life. No doubt, Nicodemus left Jesus that night a changed man as can be seen later in his life. He got much more than he expected from Christ. From this, we learn that God is a specialist in finding and changing people mankind considers out of reach because of their social, financial or religious status in the society.

Question 1: What example does Christ’s attitude towards Nicodemus portray before gospel ministers today?

Gospel ministers are here encouraged not to despise seemingly weak beginnings of a hungry soul. They should promptly attend to apparent sincere seekers who may not have followed the laid down rules and regulations in their quest for truth and salvation. In fact, for the sake of bringing all men to Christ, they should be all things to all men.

THE MAN NICODEMUS: A PICTURE OF A SINCERE SEEKER (John 3:1,2; Isaiah 55:6,7; Jeremiah 29:11-14)

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and leader among the Jews, here came to Jesus by night. He did not think it enough to hear His public discourses; he resolved to see Christ privately, perhaps to avoid unnecessary distractions and opposition from fellow Pharisees or the general public. It proved to be true that in the night, his discourse with Christ was without distractions. Seeing the miracles of Jesus, Nicodemus came to Jesus personally, although he could have sent one of his assistants. He came to have a first hand experience with Jesus and to separate fact from what he had heard about him. A learned teacher himself, he came to Jesus to learn more. What a lesson for believers! However intelligent and well educated we may be, we must, each time, create time to come to the feet of Jesus. As we come, it must be with an open heart and an attitude to learn and obey so He can teach us the truth about God. What is interesting about Nicodemus was that he was already a high-ranking member of the society. He was a Pharisee.

Question 2: Who were the Pharisees?

The Pharisees were a numerous and dominant sect of the Jews who agreed on some main points of doctrine and practice, but divided into different parties or schools on minor points. For example, there were followers of Hillel and Shammai, who were celebrated rabbis or teachers. Historians say, they first appeared as a sect after the return of the Jews from captivity. In tenets, they revered the Old Testament as the sources of the Jewish religion, yet they also attributed great and, if not greater authority to traditional precepts relating principally to external religious rites such as ablutions, regular fasting, long prayers, alms-giving, avoidance of all relationship with Gentiles and publicans (Matthew 6:5; 9:11; 23:5; Mark 7:4; Luke 18:11,12). They were held as eminent citizens with superior wisdom and sanctity.

Their professed sanctity and close adherence to all external forms of piety gave them great favour and influence with the common people, especially among the female part of the community.

Like the Stoics, they believed all things and events were controlled by fate yet not so absolutely as entirely to destroy the liberty of the human will. But unlike the Sadducees, they considered the soul as immortal, and held the doctrine of a future resurrection of the body (Acts 23:8).

Though Nicodemus came secretly by night, after the inner transformation experience, he was one of those who stood for Christ publicly thereafter (John 7:50,51; 19:39). No one can tell what such sincere seekers could become tomorrow in the kingdom of God. What can be learned here is that faith, which at first may appear like a mustard seed grain, can grow to be a great tree yielding pleasant fruit of righteousness.

THE MEANING AND FRUITS OF HEART REGENERATION (John 3:3-8; 1:12; Ephesians 2:1-9; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8:8-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:22-25; Romans 6:6-22).

The natural man is estranged from God. He lives in rebellion and self-will. He is dead in sins and trespasses. In that state, he cannot please God. He needs a fundamental change of direction. Unless he repents, he cannot have any worthwhile relationship with God. Sincere repentance and godly sorrow for sin are important prerequisites for heart regeneration.

Question 3: What do you understand by heart regeneration and how can it be received?

Regeneration is a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. It is the work of the Holy Spirit by which a soul, previously dead in sins and trespasses, is recreated in Christ unto righteousness. There are several facts about this experience in Scripture; in other words, it is expressed variously. One, it is being

born again and born from above (John 3:3-7). Two, it is becoming a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17). Three, it is being quickened to a new life of holiness (Ephesians 2:1). Four, it entails having Christ formed in the heart (Galatians 4:19). Five, it is being made a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). This extraordinary change is the handiwork of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of gospel truth (John 1:12,13; 3:4; Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 Corinthians 4:15; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). The result of this work is the restoration of God's image to the saved soul and impartation of the divine love for our neighbors in our hearts. It needed to be stressed, however, that a kind of regeneration that does not produce a change of heart, faith, righteousness, godliness is doubtful. This new birth is a glorious experience. It happens when the convicted sinner comes to God with godly sorrow after realising his sins, turns to God in total repentance; manifests faith in the finished work at Calvary and forsakes all his evil ways. He is then forgiven and becomes born-again. The sinful desires are gone, and God gives him power to sin no more (John 8:11). ***“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”*** (2 Corinthians 5:17).

<p>Question 4: What was the effect of Christ's message on Nicodemus? What change should the new birth experience make on the recipients today?</p>

The discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus had a remarkable impact on him as he later publicly stood for Christ in the presence of the chief priests and other Pharisees (John 7:45-53). His role at Christ's burial is another pointer of what Christ's Word had achieved in him (John 19:39,40). His encounter with Christ changed his position. Whereas he was in the camp of the foes of Christ, he afterward became a friend of Christ, though still a member of the community of Pharisees. It was a remarkable turn around in the life of Nicodemus. What a transformation! This transformation, which affects every aspect of life

after salvation, is universal. Those who are truly born again are totally freed from sin and its bondage (John 8:32, 36; Romans 6:14-23). With the impartation of God's grace, they are enabled to live a life pleasing to God, which is a total departure from the old life (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24,25). Some of marks of the new birth experience include, non-conformity to the world (Romans 12:2), love for God and submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:13,14), manifestation of love towards fellowmen (1 John 4:7; 3:10,11), victorious living (1 John 3:9; 5:18; Romans 6:6,7,14,22), separation from worldliness (1 John 2:15-17), etc.

The new birth cannot be equated with physical birth for God's relationship with the believer is a matter of Spirit rather than flesh (John 3:6). Such relationship only remains cordial on the condition that we manifest continued faith in Christ throughout our existence here on earth (John 8:31, 32; 2 Timothy 2:12; Romans 8:12-14).

THE DANGER OF RELIGION WITHOUT HEART REGENERATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS (John 3:4,9-13; Mark 10:17-27; John 8:31-45; Romans 2:13,16-24; Matthew 7:21-23; Galatians 5:3-6; 1 Samuel 16:7).

In spite of the Pharisees' much profession of religion, they were neck-deep in sins. They were highly superstitious and self-righteous. Though they rigidly interpreted the letter of the Mosaic Law, they often violated its spirit by their traditional and philosophical interpretations (Matthew 12:2-8; 23:23). On numerous occasions, Christ denounced them for their pride, covetousness, ostentations in prayers, almsgiving and tithing (Matthew 6:2,5; Luke 18:9). They were also denounced for employing the garb of religion to cover their profligate dispositions and conduct (Matthew 23:1-39; Luke 16:14; John 7:48,49; 8:9). As a result, He incurred their hatred (Matthew 12:14) and they eagerly sought to destroy him. These essential features of the Pharisees are

still common in many Christian assemblies today, but they are no less detestable to Christ than they were in His days on earth.

Question 5: What is the danger of religion without righteousness?

Religious practices are no panacea for the inborn tendency to sin in the natural man; neither can they atone for sins. Jesus told the rich young ruler who tried to justify himself, **“one thing thou lackest...”** (Mark 10:21). Some people think that giving helping hands to the less privileged will qualify them for God’s kingdom. Every religious man at his best yet lacks the necessary righteousness, which can only be gotten through heart regeneration made possible by the new birth. **“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away”** (Isaiah 64:6). Unless we exercise absolute faith in the atoning blood of Christ, which He shed for us on the cross of Calvary to redeem mankind, we will have no part in God’s kingdom. Religious knowledge deals with the head while experience deals with the heart.

Question 6: Why is heart regeneration very essential?

Without heart regeneration, one may sing, talk and write about the kingdom of God but he cannot enter the Kingdom. One may be so close to the kingdom as a result of sound knowledge of the truth or associated to a religious group that teaches sound doctrine of God’s word but until he is born again, he cannot receive eternal life. Mere works of righteousness cannot qualify us for God’s kingdom for then would all the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus’ days have gotten an express visa into God’s eternal kingdom. We all inherited a polluted heart from Adam and only the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross can atone for and cleanse the heart from such wickedness (Jeremiah 17:9). The clear injunction from Christ remains **“ye must be born again”** (John 3:7). External display of religion without the imputed

righteousness is futile in the sight of God who looks at the heart.

THE PLACE OF FAITH IN THE NEW BIRTH EXPERIENCE (John 3:14-21; Ephesians 2:8-10; Galatians 3:6-9; Romans 1:14-17).

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

This is the gospel in a nutshell. The giving of the begotten Son was purely an act of true love. God sets the pattern of true love, the basis of all relationships. Because He loves us dearly, no sacrifice was too great for Him to make for our redemption. He gave up His only begotten Son, the highest price that could be paid, to redeem us from our sin. And Jesus, gladly accepted to abdicate His throne and heavenly glory to pay the debt He did not owe, as we could not pay and could not have paid. He then offered us the new life that He bought for us. His sacrifice was meant to make man escape the wrath of God and be saved. **“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved”** (verse 17). This is the universal gospel, the good news for all men irrespective of nation, race, status, age, gender or time. It was a perfect sacrifice for **“whosoever believeth...”** Salvation is full and free for all, and this offer of eternal life from the ever-loving God is still open to all today.

But its rich benefits are appropriated by faith. We must therefore put our trust and confidence in Christ, which is the only thing that can save us from the power, influence and consequence of sin. Some people see it as too simplistic when told to have faith in Christ’s sacrifice. To **“believe in Him”** means more than intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It means putting Christ in charge of our present plans and destiny. It means trusting His word to mean what it says and saying what it means. It is

relying on Him for power to begin the new life after prayer of repentance. So, if you have not trusted Christ for salvation, do so and let Him give you the “**everlasting life.**” In the same breadth, every believer is commissioned by Christ to preach this gospel to sinners.

Question 7: What is the believer’s duty to sinners? Suggest some ways by which this can be done.

One of the ways by which we can show gratitude to God for pardon and eternal life received is by preaching the gospel to the sinners. There are various ways through which we can reach sinners around us with the gospel message. They can be reached through carriage evangelism, personal evangelism, friendship/charity evangelism, literature evangelism, telephone evangelism, hospital or prison outreach. An invitation to a church programs backed with prayers for the individual’s soul could also be an effective way of reaching the lost. A special arrangement could also be planned whereby targeted and defined outreach is made to the bereaved, the families with new born babies and new neighbors just moving into a particular community. Also, in this digital era, we can effectively preach the gospel to our relatives, friends and acquaintances with the help of mobile phones. The more we depend upon the Spirit of God, the more strategies He lays upon our hearts. If for any reason we shy away from this responsibility, God will require their (sinners) blood from our hands (Ezekiel 3:18).

That people don’t want the light of the gospel to expose their dark closets because of being revealed should not deter us from proclaiming it. There are times when such people feel threatened by our godly lifestyle and obedience to declare the gospel, which they fear will rightly expose the darkness in their lives. But that should not discourage us; it should not turn us away from the right. It is better to live in the light than hide in darkness. And our lives must teach them so.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING

EVENING

MON	Romans	5-6	1 Chronicles	21-22
TUE	„	7-8	„	23-24
WED	„	9-10	„	25-26
THUR	„	11-12	„	27-28
FRI	„	13-14	„	29
SAT	Romans	15-16	2 Chronicles	1-2
SUN	1 Cor.	20-21	„	3-4

END OF THE NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF SPECIAL STUDIES

336 Lesson

THE SURRENDERED CONSECRATED LIFE

MEMORY VERSE: “All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD” (Numbers 6:8).

TEXT: Romans 12:1,2; Colossians 3:5-10; Numbers 6:1-8.

The subject of consecration is central to the Christian life and walk. It determines to what extent a believer will go in his relationship and fellowship with God. Whether or not he would attain the status of a “Friend of God” like Abraham or “a man after my own heart” like David is predicated on the level of his consecration and surrender to the Lord. Abraham did not earn this title only because God loves him but equally because he demonstrated uncommon surrender and obedience through consecration. Moses had the privilege of leading Israel out of a bondage of 400 years, not because he was the most educated, but perhaps because he chose **“rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt”** (Hebrews 11:25,26). Paul got revelations and visions, reached the third heavens because of his relationship and devotion to God (Genesis 22:1-18; Philippians 3:7-15).

Many believers manage to tread the periphery of the ocean of God’s grace, power and revelation because they are unwilling to go the extra mile with Him. Yet, the purpose of our call is that we **“may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God”** (Ephesians 3:18,19). Many believers scarcely know **“what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in**

the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power” (Ephesians 1:18,19).

Question 1: Why are some believers not effective in their ministries?

Consecration lifts the believer from the realm of the ordinary to the sublime. It releases us from the spoils of pleasure and sets us apart for God’s use and service. A believer who is set apart for God attains to greater heights and deeper depths.

Consecration begins as an act of separating from a common to a sacred use, or of devoting and dedicating a person or thing to the service and worship of God. Consecration does not necessarily make a person or a thing holy, but declares it to be set apart, that is, devoted to God or to divine service like the consecration of the priests among the Israelites and the consecration of the vessels used in the temple (Exodus 29:9; Leviticus 8:12; Numbers 3:3; Joshua 6:19; Acts 6:6; 13:3).

CALL TO CONSECRATION AND TOTAL SURRENDER
(Romans 12:1; Colossians 3:1-5; Exodus 32:29; Numbers 32:12; 2 Kings 23:3; 2 Chronicles 15:15).

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

Paul here calls the children of God to supreme act of surrender, consecration and devotion to the Lord. This he does with the tenderness of a father and consciousness of a fellow heir. He admonishes, implores and pleads, rather than command believers, to yield wholly to the Lord. Paul’s plea here is against the background of the foundational stones of teachings he had laid in the preceding chapters on the grace of God, propitiation for sin, justification by faith, possibility of reconciliation, the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the covenant of God with the children of Israel.

The thought of the Apostle here zeros in on two things: one, the fact that we are called brethren implies that before dedication and consecration can be meaningful, the new birth must have occurred. Two, since we have received the mercies of God, the only logical consequence of our gratitude is that we will now give our bodies unto the Lord as a living sacrifice.

Question 2: Who are those called to offer themselves as living sacrifices?

The Apostle opines that there are those who are cleansed, and had become children of God. It is this bracket of people who have come into a dynamic living relationship with Jesus that are called to offer themselves unto God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto Him. And this is God's demand on everyone who professes the new birth. Those that are dead to sins and trespasses and the rudiments of this world are called to set their affections on heavenly things (Colossians 3:1-5).

When God called Abraham, He summoned him to a higher, more perfect walk (Genesis 17:1). To Solomon, He said, **"if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days"** (1 Kings 3:14). Again, He challenged Israel as a nation to separate from sin and idolatry. **"For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to day to the Lord... that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day"** (Exodus 32:29). God does not accept a half-hearted service nor does He demand any relationship that falls short of entire consecration. Those who must know and receive of His best must be willing to lay themselves on the altar of sacrifice.

Further examples abound of individuals and groups of people who entirely served the Lord and reaped the reward of obedience. Caleb and Joshua were singled out for special blessing because they went beyond the run-of-the mill devotion to carve a niche in God's

heart. While thousands of their colleagues died in the wilderness “**Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun:** (were spared) **for they have wholly followed the LORD**” (Numbers 32:12). They determined to go the extra mile with God when others settled for the easy walk. In like manner, Judah (at different times) under Josiah and Asa, covenanted to serve the Lord with their whole heart all their life (2 Kings 23:3; 2 Chronicles 15:15).

The highest example of consecration and absolute surrender is found in our Lord Jesus Christ who gave His all for the redemption of the world. Love drove Him from the bliss of heaven, the praises of angels and the fellowship of His Father, to tread the dusty roads of Jerusalem in search of the lost.

REASONS FOR THE BELIEVER’S CONSECRATION (Romans 12:1; Nehemiah 9:19-21; Psalm 103:1-5; Micah 7:18; Ephesians 2:4,5; Titus 3:5; Psalm 116:12; Philemon 8-10).

God’s call to consecration is not without basis. He has been gracious to mankind. His love to us is without measure knowing that none of His creatures enjoys as much benevolence as man that is created in His own image. He causes His sun to rise on the just and unjust and sends His rain upon the grass to give us our meal. More importantly, the believer owes God a greater debt of gratitude, first, for His saving grace that delivered us from sin and power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13). Now we are called “**brethren**” — people washed in the blood of Jesus, justified and adopted into His Kingdom. We were brought from the depth of sin to sit with Christ in heavenly places and have been made heirs of the grace of God.

Second, we must be grateful to God for His manifold mercies. No one qualifies for the mercy of God based on his own merit; it is His free gift to us. His bowels yearns for the care and welfare of His creatures. The prophet captures it this way: “**It is of the LORD's**

mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not" (Lamentations 3:22). A personal voluntary presentation of the believer to the Lord as a sacrifice follows the manifold grace and blessing he has received from God. This is the response that articulates our gratitude for the showers of blessing God has poured upon us.

Israel on the other hand, did a lot to provoke the Lord to anger both in the wilderness and in Canaan. **"Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go"** (Nehemiah. 9:19).

The manifold mercies of God guarantees the presence of God in our lives. Reconciliation, the breaking down of the wall of partition between us and God is by the mercies of God. The leading of the Spirit of God in the life and ministry of a believer is also a manifestation of the mercies of God (Romans 8:14). The psalmist also shows how God manifested His mercy towards Him (Psalm 103:1-5). In response, he asked: **"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me"** (Psalm 116:12). With the psalmist then and all the redeemed of the Lord today, it is **"the multitude of thy tender mercies"** that blot out our sins and gives us life more abundantly.

Question 3: What can the believer render unto the Lord for all His benefits?

Having enjoyed such mercies, Apostle Paul says affirmatively that the only reasonable service we can offer to the Lord is to present ourselves unto Him, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. This is the only acceptable sacrifice that could express our gratitude for the mercies the Lord made manifest in our life through salvation, sanctification, Holy Ghost baptism, healing, deliverance, provision, grace and the promise of heaven.

Another reason for presenting “**our bodies a living sacrifice**” to God is hinged on the sacrifice of Jesus. Nothing equals the price He paid for us at Calvary. He suffered like no other to bear our grief and carry our sorrows. And the only logical gratitude from those He died to save is to sing with the hymn-writer: “When I survey the wondrous Cross On which the Prince of glory died...

Finally, the benefit of total consecration compels us to throw our lives unreservedly to the Lord. When we do, we shall become vessels of honour reserved for the Master’s use (2 Timothy 2:21). Second, God’s secrets shall remain with us (Genesis 18:17).

THE REASONABLE SERVICE OF SURRENDERED BELIEVERS (Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 8:3-5; Proverbs 23:26; Romans 6:12,13,19; 1 Corinthians 6:13,19,20; 1 Peter 3:10; Psalm 24:3, 4).

“...that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

To “present” is to yield and surrender, or give as offering. And what we are to present, surrender or give to God as offering here is our body. The heart is the most important of all the parts of our body. It is the first thing we give to God. God makes a special demand of it. **“My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways”** (Proverbs 23:26). When our hearts are given to the Lord, we are cleansed and purged. Without this, consecration will be worthless and unprofitable.

Also all members of the believer’s body must be daily and continually presented to the Lord in a definite act of consecration. Members of our body include the eyes, ears, tongue, hands, feet, etc. We should not employ our eyes to gaze upon objects of temptation. Rather, we are to concentrate on things that sponsor and promote holiness in our thoughts and actions. **“I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?”** (Job 31:1). Here,

Job consecrates his eyes for the glory of God and the promotion of holiness in his life. Also, we should not use our mouths or lips to crack indecent jokes or give our ears to hearing something that can inflame our thoughts. If we consecrate members of our body to the Lord, we will do things that please Him.

OUR HOLY AND EXALTED PRIESTHOOD (Numbers 6:1-8; 1 Peter 2:5,9; Philippians 2:17; Luke 9:23).

In the Old Testament, priests were commissioned to offer daily, continual sacrifices unto the Lord. Nobody was a priest who did not offer sacrifice to the Lord. These people were commanded to sanctify themselves by virtue of their hallowed service. They were to distinguish themselves from others and separate from every form of defilements because they were persons that draw nigh to God in the performance of religious duties. And as long as they officiated in this capacity, they were required to be consecrated.

The Nazarites (Jews who professed extraordinary purity of life and devotion) of the Old dispensation were expected to abstain from everything that defiles as long as the vow of separation was upon them (Numbers 6:1-8). Such were obliged to strict and close devotion to the Lord than others. They'll rather be held in derision by others than break their vows to be separate to the Lord.

In the same vein, all true members of the body of Christ today as priests are to individually on a daily, continual basis **“offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”** (1 Peter 2:5). We are not to bring animal sacrifice to the Lord any more but to present our bodies a living sacrifice. A sacrifice is something you dedicate to the Lord. A Christian therefore, hands his life to God unconditionally, unreservedly and wholeheartedly. He presents himself to God to do His will only. **“Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God”** (Hebrews 10:7).

Question 4: How can the members of a believer's body be engaged as sacrifice unto the Lord?

Strictly, the sacrifice we offer to the Lord must include our time, talents, resources and endowments. For instance, Dorcas spent her time and resources making dresses and giving to the poor. It might even be our voice employed in singing and ministering. The feet might be presented to the Lord in going from one place to another witnessing for Christ.

Paul the Apostle spoke of the sacrificial giving of the churches in Macedonia for the cause of the gospel. They dug into the very sustenance of life and almost gave their very blood. But before they did that, they first gave themselves unto the Lord. Our souls must first experience God's love and receive His mercy before we can present ourselves to the Lord.

Question 5: How can a Christian bear his cross daily?

Again as a sacrifice, the believer must daily bear his cross and deny self. The sacrifice of Christ led Him to bear the cross. When we patiently bear reproach, ridicule and persecution for Christ's sake today it is part of the sacrificial life. **“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”** (Luke 9:23).

THE CHRISTIAN'S NON-CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD (Romans 12:2; Galatians 6:14; James 1:27; 4:4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 1 John 2:15).

Question 6: What is the Christian's position in relation to the world?

Our service to God cannot be acceptable if we are still unequally yoked together with the world. The true believer is wholly given to God so that he will not be conformed to the spirit of this age. The spirit of the age manifests itself in pride, ego, sinful entertainment

or sensual pleasure. The world pervades the society through worldly music, movies, fashion, inordinate ambition and ungodly pursuits. The believer is delivered from the present evil world never to be friendly with or conformed to it. **“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world”** (Galatians 6:14). We must of necessity keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Cor.	3-4	2 Chronicles	5-6
TUE	„	5-6	„	7-8
WED	„	7	„	9-10
THUR	„	8-9	„	11-12
FRI	„	10-11	„	13-14
SAT	„	12-13	„	15-16
SUN	„	14	„	17-18

337 Lesson

THE SERVICE OF CONSECRATED SAINTS

MEMORY VERSE: “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23,24).

TEXT: Romans 12:3-8.

The believer is saved to serve. And the scripture is replete with this truth as the basis of God’s exercise of mercy and redemptive work in the believer. For instance, while Israel was in bondage in Egypt, God sent Moses to release them so they can serve Him. It is for this same reason that Christ died and rose again, **“That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life”** (Luke 1:74,75).

Question 1: Why should believers render consecrated service to God?

The parable of the talents in particular, the slothful servant who gave excuses for not being profitable for His merciful master who gave him a talent was condemned and judged. It is not out of place then for Apostle Paul to harp on the noble responsibility of the believer in advancing the kingdom of God. That service can be profitable and rewarding or unprofitable and unrewarding is revealed in the life and attitude of Christian servants. Apostle Paul here gives practical directions and discourse on how the consecrated believer should use his gifts fruitfully in the church of the living God.

GRACE AND HUMILITY IN SERVICE (Romans 12:3,16; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 3:10; Luke 14:11; Proverbs 16:18,19; 25:27).

Question 2: Explain the priority of grace and humility in the service of God.

“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3). The practical instructions Paul passes to the believer is by the grace of God that he experienced on the way to Damascus when he met Christ. He could boast of nothing his human ingenuity had done or could do. He said he owed everything to **“the grace given unto me”**. How indicting this is to Christian ministers who indeed received the grace of God but have blown it or now boast of their own achievements. Christian servants who minister with pride are bereft of the grace of God. The proud do not have the grace of God because self has taken the center stage in their service. But Paul affirms that the believer’s focus should be on God. If in wisdom **“God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith,** what then is the basis for pride?

Humility precedes service and usefulness. Humility is a priceless Christian virtue. It is a state of modesty, meekness and sobriety. Humility enables the believer have a modest sense or imagination of his significance. The apostle enjoins the saint to think soberly of himself, according to the limitation of the measure of faith God has imparted to Him.

Question 3: Why are believers warned not to be proud?

As the apostle underscored the necessity of service for every consecrated believer, he cautions us against the destructive nature of pride. Pride is anathema to Christian life and service. It destroys whatever a man does for God. Pride truncates a growing, progressive ministry. It is only when a believer is humble that God can use him for His glory. Pride is a besetting temptation of the human nature. Man is prone to exaggerate his own abilities and merits. The apostle

would not take the subject lightly but repeated his warning in verse sixteen: **“Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.”** Paul left no room for the rich, educated or highly placed brethren in the church to display their opulent status but to condescend voluntarily and assume equality with others who may be less privileged. Our Lord did not spare the proud in heart: rich or poor. **“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”** (Luke 14:11).

The believer must realize that his salvation, gifts or talents are by grace. This knowledge will shut out pride from him. If we must be useful to Christ and make our service acceptable, pride, vainglory, boasting must be crucified and conquered. Pride makes the believer and all his talents, like those of Lucifer, to be useless and worthless. Those intoxicated with pride are running on a slippery precipice. **“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud”** (Proverbs 16:18, 19). Absalom fell because of his pomposity and haughtiness. Lucifer, having tasted of the glory of heaven, where believers are still seeking earnestly to go, was cast out of it because of his thoughts and actions of pride. Incidentally, God has incisive and penetrating eyes that decode this hideous monster, pride. There is a spiritual gravity that pulls the proud down and lifts the humble up.

The apostle himself attributed whatever he is and would be to the grace of God. In exhorting the believer here, he did not appeal to his office as an apostle or to the authority he had. On the basis of his humility he exhorts all men to be humble. His exhortation is for everyone.

Note the triple mention of the word **“think.”** Why was the apostle so much concerned with thought? This is because the thought produces the action. Our action

and reactions originate from our thought. When a man takes care of his thought pattern he will be able to control himself.

The apostle enjoins the believer not to **“think of himself.”** There are people who are preoccupied with themselves. They would not think of the good of their neighbors nor of the welfare of others. Second, the believer should not think of himself **“more highly than he ought to think.”** He should not have an exaggerated view of himself. Third, he should think soberly, soundly and safely. Fourth, he should think scripturally. **“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things”** (Philippians 4:8).

The apostle did not think of himself as a superman who is greater, higher and more talented than others. His ministerial greatness was not as a result of his ingenuity. He exalted the grace of God as the main factor in his ministry. Even though he talks of his labour, his exploits and his breakthrough in ministry (which far exceeded those of his contemporaries) he attributed everything to God’s grace (1 Corinthians. 3:10). He wasted no time in making all men realize that his missionary outreach, the writing of the epistles and all the enduring works he had done, were according to the grace of God (1 Timothy 2:12-14). The believer should never at any time lose sight of this truth. Obedience to this body of teaching on relationship would forestall conflicts – personal, interpersonal, church, family – among the brethren and the society. The root of strife is when one feels that he has been slighted or that his personality or status is not recognized.

DIVERSITY OF GIFTS (Romans 12: 4-6; 1 Corinthians 12: 4-31; Ephesians 4: 16).

Question 4: What is the danger of inferiority complex among believers? And how can we overcome the problem?

Every believer in Christ is potentially endowed to serve God according to the proportion of God's grace in his life. Just as there are no useless members in the body, no believer in Christ is useless except by choice. Just as God condemns superiority complex among members of the body, He equally does not tolerate inferiority complex in any believer. Inferiority complex – the feeling that one is worthless or not needed - in the service of God paralyzes and makes people to hide their God-given talents. For instance, if the anus in the human body refuses to work because of its hidden place or use in the body, how catastrophic will it be for the mouth who boasts of its abilities to also perform the function of the anus. All the members of the body, seen or hidden, with different but determined places of operation and functions are mutually independent in the same body. They fulfil their purpose by working with other members of the body. **“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith”** (Romans 12:4-6).

Apostle Paul illustrates the gifts in the body of Christ with the members of our natural body. Members of the natural body are not disjointed. Rather, they are mutually united in their operation. As the body is one coordinated, organized, cooperating system, so also must the body of Christ be. This is compulsory to ensure the body fulfils its existence.

The body of Christ consists of many members with different ministry gifts. **“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also**

is Christ” (1 Corinthians 12: 4, 12). While believers are members one of another, we are not reduced to a dead level of uniformity. So, also are the gifts believers in the body Christ. Leaders and believers then should identify their gifts and also encourage others to identify theirs so they (gifts) can be put to profitable use in the house of God. Christian leaders should also give opportunities to other members of the church to minister so the body of Christ can be edified and Christ glorified.

Question 5: What qualities of life or characteristics should be found in each member of the body?

The apostle also shows the qualities and characteristics of each member of the body. First, every member possesses life irrespective of its size or shape. Life is basic to each functioning member. Second, every member is limited. No matter how important, strategic, conspicuous a member, it cannot play the entire role or the functions of the entire body. Every member needs other members to be fulfilled. Third, every member is dependent on others: only one member cannot be enough, we need all. Fourth, each member complements one another. Members are not competitive but complimentary. There should be no contradiction among believers in their Lord's service: they should each support another. It will be unfortunate for a member to feel so great and so important that he has to contradict or compete with others.

Fifth, there must be unity in diversity. There is room for diversity in the Church of Christ. In the local Church, there is room for varied gifts and activities. But this diversity must lead only to one thing – unity. Without biblical unity there will be division and confusion. And God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14: 33). Gifts differ one from another. The gifts of the women would be different from the gifts of men. Talents of the old men will be different from the young members of the church.

Sixth, disunity delays progress. It defeats purposes, destroys life, decreases usefulness, and deprives us of our rights. Seven, some members are conspicuous; they are easily seen. Others are less conspicuous, but this does not diminish their importance in the body. That is how the Lord designed the body and expects the Church to learn from this super-structure. **“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:30).

CONDITIONS OF USEFULNESS (Romans 12: 6-8; 1 Peter 4: 10, 11).

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:6-8).

Clinched in these verses are certain conditions which must be fulfilled to guarantee our usefulness in the body of Christ.

<p>Question 6: Mention five conditions the believer must fulfil to guarantee his usefulness in the body of Christ?</p>

First, we need the grace of God. Gifts are given according to the grace that we have. To possess gifts without corresponding sustaining grace brings destruction. James and John demanded of Christ liberty to command fire on unyielding Samaritans so they can have their way. Their lack of grace of gentleness, humility and self control was exposed.

Second, we must wait and develop our ministry. The more our faith grows the more our proclamation of the gospel. You must develop your faith as you wait on your ministry. If you are gifted as a teacher, remain in it. Teaching moulds immortal souls and inspires the old and the young. Take time to study the Bible very well before teaching.

“He that exhorteth” must wait on exhortation. Believers must not be known to be of all trades and master of none. Those with the ministry of giving should wait on it and do it single-mindedly and cheerfulness; not with complaints and murmur. Believers whom the Lord has endowed with the ability to rule should be diligent in ruling. Count your service for the Lord more important than any other thing. Be cheerful as you show mercy.

Third, do not minister above that which you have received. **“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen”** (1 Peter 4:10, 11). The consecrated servant of Christ should minister according to the ability that God has given him. His goal should be to glorify God and not to make a show of his gifts. This is because he who boast of a false gift is like cloud without rain. Fourth, there should be the supreme love of God in our hearts as we minister. Our service must be wrapped in love. Any service without love will not attract any reward (1 Corinthians 13: 1-3).

Fifth, our service must be on the foundation of sound doctrine. **“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee”** (1 Timothy 4:16). The believer’s life and conduct must not contradict the doctrines of the Bible he believes so that the name of the Lord should not blasphemed. Finally, there must be diligence, development and discipline. **“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest”** (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

That our text deals with ministry gifts should not make believers to excuse themselves from responsibility towards our neighbors. Giving, for instance, to meet others' needs is the responsibility of all believers. But the point is that some are excellent in these areas.

Again, there are other areas of Christian service where believers can use their talents or gifts for God like ushering, choir, security, etc. For our service to be fruitful and God-glorifying, it requires entire consecration, self-abandonment and complete yieldedness to God to excel in Christian service and ministry. If we carefully cultivate the highlighted qualities of Christian character and spice our service with them, our service will be life-giving, edifying, refreshing and much sought after. Thus, souls will be saved and believers will be edified thereby crediting our accounts of rich rewards and crowns in heaven. Though there are all-encompassing bountiful blessings we enjoy as we serve God on earth, we must grow in consecration and endeavour to get to heaven to be able to receive our rewards

DAILY BIBLE READING				
	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Cor.	15	2 Chronicles	19-20
TUE	„	16	„	21-22
WED	2 Cor.	1-2	„	23-24
THUR	„	3-4	„	25-26
FRI	„	5-6	„	27-28
SAT	„	7-8	„	29
SUN	„	9-10	„	30-31

338 Lesson

SERVING ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE

MEMORY VERSE: “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Romans 12:10).

TEXT: Romans 12: 9-13; 1 Corinthians 13: 1-8

Paul’s discourse on the essential teaching of Christian living glides from vital Christian service and ministry within the body of Christ to daily practical Christian relationship that underscores Christian brotherhood. These teachings are put forth with an obligatory tone leaving no place for excuses or exemptions. This present body of teaching zeros in on the life of love and its full-blossomed fruits. Unfeigned love produces selfless, unpretentious and excited service one to another in the Church. Love is more important than all the spiritual gifts exercised in the church body. Great faith, acts of dedication or sacrifice, and miracle-working power produce very little without love. Love makes our actions and gifts useful. This is the hub of Christian life and relationship. If we have all things and lack in love, we have nothing. All the activities and ministry we engage in, in the Church are unprofitable if the love of God is not at its foundation. Although people have different gifts, love is available to everyone.

CHRISTIAN LOVE: THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE (Romans 12:9, 10; John 13:34, 35; Philippians 1:9; Romans 13:10; Hebrews 13:1).

The Lord took extra pain to teach and show the disciples the new commandment – love. This is the only virtue that could help them to reach the uttermost parts of the earth. It is the propelling quality that could fire our zeal. The desire to serve one another is

fulfilled when the heart is rich in love. We cannot give any excuse of being too busy or too occupied not to be concerned about the physical and spiritual needs of our brethren. God who looks at our disposition, thoughts and hearts, and who protects and keeps us, knows all things **“and shall render to every man according to his work”**

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34, 35).

Question 1: What is the place of love in Christian service?
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What articulates and loudly declares our relationship with the Lord is not our preaching, ushering or singing in the choir. It is our life of love that tells the world that we are disciples of Christ. The measure of our love should be measure of the love of Jesus for us. The strange thing amongst believers is that Christian activities seem to drown the love of God in our heart. The more activities we get engaged in, unfortunately, the less of love we have for the brethren. True fellowship always dies where love ceases to exist. This is the reason many fellowship centers are witnessing low turn out.

But here, Paul the Apostle, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit strives to reserve the trend. He laces up Christian business and fervency with a life of pure love. The order, therefore, is that our love must not decrease and our Christian engagement must always increase. Besides, our love must be pure and unfeigned. It is disheartening that most of us have learned how to pretend to love others – how to speak kindly, avoid hurting their feelings, and appear to take an interest in them. Some are even skilled in pretending to be moved with compassion when they hear of others needs, or to become indignant when they learn of injustice. But God calls us to real and sincere love that goes far beyond pretence

and politeness. Sincere love requires concentration and effort. It means helping others become better people. It demands our time, money, and personal involvement. Because of the prevalence of feigned love among believers, Peter the apostle had this to say: **“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently”** (1 Peter 1:22).

Question 2: How is love best expressed?
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Our society today confuses love and lust. Unlike lust, God’s kind of love is directed outward toward others, not inward toward ourselves. It is utterly unselfish. This kind of love goes against our natural inclinations. It is possible to practice this love only if God helps us set aside our own desires and instincts, so that we can give love while expecting nothing in return. Thus the more we become like Christ, the more love we will show to others in the body of Christ. Our love must not be smiles covered with bitterness and hatred. Our love must be free of lust. It must not be one that loves the opposite sex and excludes his gender from his deeds of love. Everything of covetousness must be stripped off our life of love. We should not love because of what we stand to gain or enjoy from the relationship.

Again, our love must be impartial – free full love to all without discrimination or ulterior motive. Our love must be one that is fervent, not passive or disinterested. Some say: ‘I love people but I don’t know how to show it’. But they err. Love is expressed in actions of affection, kindness, consideration and empathy.

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). Love overlooks the mistakes of others, forgives others very readily even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. When we do this, we are really following God

(Ephesians 5:1). The Lord wants us to manifest love in our actions and relationships with one another. In fact, this is the very basis and foundation of our activity in the Church and ministry in the body of Christ.

Our love must not approve of sin. We must eschew or run away from any act or conduct that has the stain of sin. Gossips, backbiting, negative criticism must be abhorred. We must not be party to anything that would discourage or put down a brother or a sister. On the contrary, we should cleave to that which is good. Remember the golden rule always and live by it. **“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets”** (Matthew 7:12).

If you want people to love you, you should love them first. If you want people to forgive you, appreciate you and speak well of you, do the same to them. If you want your mistakes and oversights to be overlooked, do the same to others too. If you do not want false stories about you to be peddled, do not do that to others too. This is the foundation of our service.

SPIRITUAL FERVOR AND HARD WORK IN GOD’S SERVICE (Romans 12:11,12; Acts 18:25; Psalm 69:9)

“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer” (Romans 12:11-12).

<p>Question 3: Mention six things that should characterize our Christian service?</p>
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Six things are noted in these two verse as characteristics of our Christian service. First, not slothful in business; second, fervent in Spirit; third, serving the Lord; fourth, rejoicing in hope; five, patient in tribulation; six, continuing instant in prayer. All these must be carefully considered and cultivated if we want our service to be acceptable to the Lord.

The charge to eschew slothfulness in business applies both to our daily private pursuits and our Christian service. **“For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies”** (2 Thessalonians 3:10-11). We should be fervent in the daily execution of our secular work. A true believer must provide for the need of his family members. Those who leave off work with the pretext of a phony call to full-time ministerial duty and stay at home are uninformed in the Word of God. God places a very high premium on dignity of labour.

Besides, women also should not be slothful in domestic business. The home of Christian women should not be left untidy or their personal body unkempt with the excuse of a heavy load of Christian service to bear. Again, believers who are involved in the work areas of the Church are here addressed not to be slothful in business. The preacher in the Church must create time to study and read the Bible through and through before ministering to God’s people. If you will be a member of the choir in your church, you must be prepared to give the hours of long and arduous practice required to minister in songs to the people of God.

Fervency of Spirit involves some personal internal motivation and desire to carry on a given task. This is described as zeal. It strips our service of every form of lukewarmness, passivity, joylessness and drabness. **“For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me”** (Psalm 69:9).

Serving the Lord in whatever capacity – cassette distribution, literature distribution, hospital visitation etc., must be performed with cheerfulness and zeal. **“Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart”**. Our service must be **“as unto the Lord”** **“with**

all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 5:22; 6:6,18).

THE LABOUR OF LOVE AMONG BRETHREN (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:16; 1 John 3:16-18; Galatians 5:13).

“Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality” (Romans 12:13).

Question 4: How and what can we distribute to other saints in the church?

Here we have the commandment of the Lord concerning our service. It is a responsibility for all – ministers, members, young and old members of the Church. Some feel they are so penurious that they have nothing to distribute. But they miss it. In fact the reason why we must give is because we don't have. While we may not have something tangible or material to share, we have a kind word to say and brighten up a sorrow-laden face, a sympathetic touch, an encouragement to the discouraged. **“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father”** (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3). Our love should not be partial and passive. Our love should not be mere theory. It must show mercy to the needy and give to the necessity of saints. **“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him”** (1 John 3:16, 17).

Supreme love for God and love for our fellow men ensures for us plenteous supplies in the midst of famine, blessings in the midst of curses, peace in the midst of chaos and commotion, abundance in the midst of lack, long life in the midst of death, health

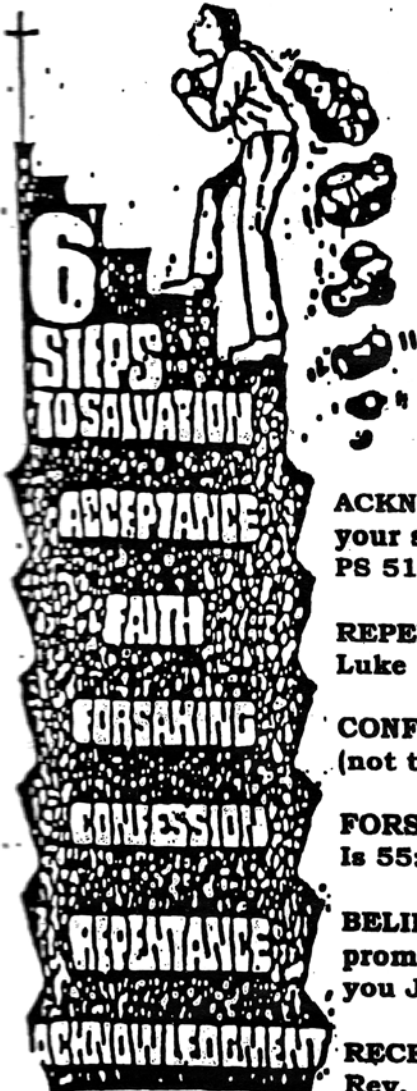
in the midst of sicknesses, prosperity in the midst of economic doldrums, and success in the midst of failures. It secures for us “**the days of heaven upon the earth**” (Deuteronomy 11:21). We must happily lay down our resources and material things before the brethren if we say we love the brotherhood. This is the New Testament commandment. It is the whole gamut of law and the prophets put together. We must serve one another in love.

DAILY BIBLE READING				
MORNING			EVENING	
MON	2 Cor.	11	2 Chronicles	32
TUE	„	12-13	„	33-34
WED	„	1-2	„	35
THUR	„	3-4	„	36
FRI	„	5-6	Ezra	1-2
SAT	Ephesians	1-2	„	3-4
SUN	„	3-4	„	5-6

**THE END OF THE STUDIES, BUT BE ADVISED THE
WORD OF GOD IS TIMELESS (DOES NOT BECOME
OBSOLETE AT ANY TIME). THEREFORE, ENDEAVOR
TO KEEP THIS BOOK HANDY.**

DISTRICT CHURCHES DIRECTORY

1. Bronx: 213 E. 144th Street (718) 292-7883
2. Brooklyn: 140 Saratoga Avenue (718) 919-1166
3. Queens: 103-19 to 23 Merrick Blvd (718) 206-3961
4. New Jersey: 23-39 South 20 Street, Irvington (973) 202-3989
5. Staten Island: 330 Heberton Avenue (718) 815-6613
6. Nanuet, N.Y.: 27 North Middletown Road
Suite #6 (845) 709-6058



ACKNOWLEDGE
your sinfulness
PS 51:3-5

REPENT OF YOUR SIN
LUKE 13:3, ACTS 3:19

CONFESS them to God
(not to Priest) 1 JOHN 1:9

FORSAKE all known sin
Is 55:7

BELIEVE that GOD is true to his
promise to forgive and clean
you Jn: 6:37 1 Jn 1:9

RECEIVE JESUS into your heart
Rev. 3:20 Jn 3:17



DEEPER CHRISTIAN LIFE MINISTRY, USA

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DEEPER LIFE BIBLE CHURCH WEEKLY FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

New Jersey	9:00 AM
Bronx/Brooklyn/Queens/Staten Island	9:00 AM
Rockland County	10:30 AM

TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY

Bronx/Queens/New Jersey/Rockland/Co-op City and Staten Island	7:00 PM
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WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY

Brooklyn	7:00 PM
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FRIDAY (REVIVAL SERVICE) FAITH CLINIC

All the Church Locations	7:00 PM
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ALL NIGHT PRAYER VIGILS

Bronx – First Friday of Every Month	7:00 PM
Brooklyn – Last Friday of Every Month	1:00 PM
Queens – First Friday & Third Friday of Every Month	11:00 PM
New Jersey – Third Friday of Every Month	11:00 PM

Pastor W.F. Kumuyi – General Superintendent
Your Spiritual Welfare is our Concern