



SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VOLUME 48

"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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OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

612 Lesson

GOD PROVES ISRAEL

MEMORY VERSE: “And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses” (Judges 3:4).

TEXT: Judges 3:1-31

The second chapter of the book of Judges ended with the account of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God after the death of Joshua and the elders that outlived him. They had failed to drive out all the inhabitants of Canaan as the Lord commanded, and they also went into idolatry. For these reasons, God was angry with them and said: “...**Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died**” (Judges 2:20, 21).

In our present lesson, Israel continued with the stream of backslidings which began in the previous chapter. Here, we see the beginning of their servitude in the land of promise and the onset of a vicious circle whereby they would sin, then their enemies would oppress them; they would cry unto God and He would send a judge to deliver them. Then, there would be a period of peace and temporal obedience to God until the reigning judge dies, after which they would fall into sin again, and the cycle is repeated. It was such that backsliding became a recurring decimal in the nation.

Question 1: From the introduction to this study, what do you learn about Israel, men in general, and God?

Israel’s experience is typical of men generally. The natural man is wont to be sinful, stubborn and rebellious.

He is accustomed to committing sin, not minding the consequence. But God's mercy is available to those who call on Him out of a sincere heart.

CONFIRMATION OF ISRAEL'S KEENNESS TO OBEY GOD (Judges 3:1-4; Deuteronomy 8:1-3; Psalm 17:2,3; 66:10; Deuteronomy 8:5)

“Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan” (Judges 3:1). The children of Israel failed to drive out all the Canaanites from the land of promise as God had commanded them. From the human standpoint, Israel's failure was because their enemies possessed chariots of iron which they thought they could not match (Joshua 17:16; Judges 1:19; 4:3). However, from God's viewpoint, Israel failed because they lacked faith in His ability to help them defeat their enemies. Their lack of faith in God resulted in their decision to coexist with the Canaanites in the Promised Land; and God allowed it, not because it was His perfect will but because the people were already determined not to carry out God's commandment to the letter.

We are furnished with a list of those nations which the Lord left to prove Israel. **“Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath”** (Judges 3:3). These became God's instrument to prove and to know what was in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments or not (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Question 2: Explain the meaning of the expression “to prove Israel”.

God left the Canaanites in the land because the Israelites decided to leave them. The consequence of Israel's failure to drive out the Canaanites as commanded was that God also withdrew His supernatural aid which could have given them miraculous victory over the enemies. Whenever an individual or a group settles for anything other than the perfect will of God, He may, in His sovereign wisdom, permit them to have their way; but often, with great consequences. The Canaanites were left to prove Israel, and that simply means: One, to discipline them for their

unbelief and punish them whenever they go astray from God. Two, to be a kind of schoolmaster to teach them the art of war so that they can learn self-defense. This should not have been necessary if Israel had driven out the inhabitants completely as God commanded them. There would not have been any threat or fear of attack within the land of promise. Three, to pose a test to Israel to show whether they would obey God or disobey Him. The Canaanites would be a source of temptation and constitute a stumbling block to the Israelites, and their response would confirm the inclination of their hearts: whether it is towards God or their own self-will.

From the failure of Israel to drive out the Canaanites and God's response to them, believers learn that absolute obedience to God is the only way we can enjoy His best. Second, we cannot obey God except we fully trust Him. Obedience and trust go hand in hand. If Israel had trusted God, they would have depended on Him to drive out the Canaanites despite their seemingly invincible weapons.

Subsequent events showed Israel's inclination towards disobeying the word of God. They failed to keep themselves from the idols of the land and their neighbors' idolatrous lifestyle. They soon found themselves in unbridled compromise with the inhabitants of the land. Obviously, they had failed the divine test.

COMPROMISE AND COMMUNION WITH THE HEATHEN
(Judges 3:5-7; Psalm 106:34-39; Exodus 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-6; Ezra 9:10-12; Romans 6:2; Colossians 3:3)

“And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites: And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods” (Judges 3:5, 6). Not long after the death of the elders that succeeded Joshua, the children of Israel went into syncretism and compromise with the Canaanites among whom they dwelt. They mingled with them in marriage and worship of idols. These evil results which God had earlier predicted began to happen and the Israelites lost their distinctiveness.

Israel's disobedience was in direct contrast with God's earlier command to steer clear of the heathen and their lifestyles. He had warned them: **"Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee"** (Exodus 34:12). Again, He said: **"And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son"** (Deuteronomy 7:2, 3).

It is important for believers to identify the progression of Israel backsliding and their eventual apostasy so that they can avoid a similar fate. It all started with their incomplete obedience by leaving the Canaanites in the land. Then, they compromised by entering into marriage relationships with them. In this way, they established strong links and powerful soul ties with the enemies of God. Another wrong step was that they served the idols of the Canaanites, thereby breaking God's commandment which prohibited the worship of other gods (Exodus 20:3-5). The final step in their downward trend was that they forgot the Lord their God and went into apostasy. The idols of Canaan eventually replaced the Lord in their hearts and they abandoned the true worship of God.

Question 3: Point out the steps that led to Israel's apostasy and state how believers can avoid them.

The example of Israel's apostasy here is written for our learning so we will avoid their mistakes. As believers, we are the Church of Jesus Christ, the 'called-out ones'. Our safeguard in the world from which we have been called out is to maintain our distinctiveness and remain separated from its sinful practices. Believers should avoid compromise in all its ramifications. Though we are not called to destroy our unbelieving neighbors like Israel was instructed to destroy the Canaanites, God's Program for the Church is not less drastic and ruthless in dealing with compromise and sin in our personal lives, family and the congregation. In the Old Testament, it was the potential agents of

temptation and compromise, like the Canaanites that were to be put to death, but in the New Testament it is the believer that is called to die to the world and its evil influences (Romans 6:2; Colossians 3:3).

Practically, believers should not enter into any association with unbelievers in business, friendship, worship or marriage; neither should they adopt their lifestyles and tendencies. As the Canaanites posed a snare to Israel when they were spared, so would the world do to us if we fail to clearly separate from it and its lusts. Also, believers must not worship anything the world around us holds in veneration. Apart from the physical idols that must be rejected, we should also avoid the cult-like crave for wealth, sensuality, entertainment, position and power which characterize our present age. We must not allow anything to compete with or displace God in our lives. In the New Testament sense, idolatry is unbridled crave for anything apart from God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:5).

CONSEQUENCE OF ISRAEL'S COMPROMISE AND GOD'S MERCY (Judges 3:8-32; 2:20-23; Psalm 106:34-45; 107:13-19; 1 Samuel 12:9-11; Hosea 6:4)

The immediate result of Israel's backsliding was that God gave them into the hands of their enemies. The first instance of such servitude in the land of promise is recorded in our text. **"Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushanrishathaim eight years"** (Judges 3:8). God allowed the enemy to prevail over his own people so that they could learn, from bitter experience, the consequence of turning away from Him. Disobedience to God has grave consequences. It brings avoidable sufferings and inflicts us with incalculable loss.

There are six successive periods of servitude recorded in the book of Judges. During this period, twelve Judges were used of God to deliver Israel when they cried unto Him in their time of trouble. The first deliverer or Judge was Othniel, Caleb's nephew and in-law. He had earlier demonstrated great courage and won outstanding victory when the tribe of Judah fought to conquer their own

portion of the Promised Land (Joshua 15:16-19). **“And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushanrishathaim”** (Judges 3:10). Here, we note that Othniel was a close relation of Caleb and, most likely, Caleb’s life of faith had positively influenced him and other members of his extended family. This is a challenge to believers on the need to allow their lives impact positively on their relations.

Question 4: What can believers learn from Othniel as a judge in Israel?

Also, Othniel carried out the divine assignment to deliver Israel by the Spirit of God. He judged Israel. That means he led them to deal with their sin and backsliding before going after the enemy. This is ever the divine order of recovery from the hands of the enemy, and it is the way to achieve lasting revival. The enemy within should be dealt with first before mobilizing against the enemies outside. But this is quite unlike man’s way. Men would rather struggle to have the yoke of their external enemies broken instead of dealing with their inward depravity and sinfulness which gave the enemy an inroad to their lives in the first place. A person who is enslaved by anger and lustful passions may be upbeat about getting breakthrough in finance and career, not realizing that those inward sins would decimate any breakthrough he may receive by the sheer interposition of God’s mercy. The wise thing to do is to seek inward cleansing first so that one can enjoy permanent, all-round victory. Like Othniel judged Israel before going after the enemy, believers are called to judge themselves (1 Corinthians 11:31).

The influence of Othniel’s intervention in Israel was very profound. The land had rest for forty years. But after the death of Othniel, Israel went back into sin and were once again brought into servitude. They learnt nothing from their bitter experience. This time, it was the Moabites under Eglon that oppressed them and the deliverer sent by God was Ehud (Judges 3:12-30). The strategy he used to secure Israelites deliverance was quite unique and different from that of Othniel. But the point is, God used both of them to deliver His people. Ehud employed a

combination of skill and strategy to kill Eglon the king of Moab. He took advantage of his left handedness and used pretense to beat the Moabite security and catch Eglon unawares. He was courageous and witty. Ehud rallied the children of Israel to defeat the Moabites and he secured eighty years of peace for the land.

Again, the people went back into idol worship; then servitude followed again under the Philistines. Yet, God in His mercy sent another deliverer, named Shamgar to deliver them.

As we look at the Judges whom God raised for Israel's deliverance, we are able to understand why God would employ such men or methods in fulfilling His divine will. It is left for us as believers today to emulate the faith and courage of these Judges. Above all, rather than focus on the Judges who were mere instruments, or on their inadequacies which are common to men, we should celebrate the mercy of God and stand in awe of His longsuffering towards His people.

Question 5: In view of the manifestation of God's mercy and grace, what should be the response of (a) sinners (b) saints?

God is ever faithful and merciful. Even after His people had failed, He made provision that could turn their mistakes into miracles. The presence of the Canaanites among the Israelites, though a human device, would become a tool in God's hands to perfect Israel and make them learn wisdom. This should serve as an encouragement to those who, perhaps, have missed God's perfect will in one area or the other in the past. They should not despair but turn to God in genuine repentance, hand over the broken pieces of their lives, and trust Him to make miracles out of their mistakes.

As many times as Israel repented and turned to God, He sent deliverers to get them out of their servitude. Such manifestation of mercy and unmerited favor is one of God's unchanging attribute, and it should propel every sinner or backslider to genuine repentance, and motivate true believers to have a closer walk with God.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	2 Timothy	1-2	Nehemiah	10
TUE	“	3-4	“	11
WED	Titus	1-3	“	12
THUR	Philemon	1	“	13
FRI	Hebrews	1-3	“	1-2
SAT	“	4-5	“	3-4
SUN	“	6-7	“	5-6

613 Lesson

EXPLOITS OF DEBORAH AND BARAK

MEMORY VERSE: “And Deborah said unto Barak, up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him” (Judges 4:14).

TEXT: Judges 4:1-24

The sinful compromise and inconsistent walk of the children of Israel with God received mention in the previous lesson. The oppression they suffered was as frequent as their backsliding. Since Israel repeatedly “**did evil**” in God’s sight (Judges 2:11,19; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 9:57; 10:6; 13:1; Leviticus 26:23-25; Nehemiah 9:23-30; Psalm 106:43-45; Jeremiah 5:3), the natural consequence was for God to leave them to be afflicted by enemies. It is clear that no one continues to live a peaceful life who grieves God at heart.

Question 1: What lessons can believers learn from Ehud in our text today?

Three prophets, Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar were raised by God in the previous chapter to rescue Israel from their oppressors when they repented and called upon Him for intervention. But of these three Judges, the role of Ehud (who is the second of the three) is highlighted. He did not only deliver Israel from oppression like all other Judges but also ensured the people lived a righteous life that guaranteed eighty years of peace in the land. Thus, he became a standard-bearer and his death became a point of reference of Israel’s departure from God and godly principles. “**And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead**” (Judges 4:1). God had always raised people to rescue the perishing. The role of spiritual leaders in providing guidance for God’s people cannot be over-emphasized. Christian leaders must win souls, disciple and encourage them to continue to live a righteous lifestyle to enjoy divine peace. Also, believers need to be watchful not to forget God when He grants them

deliverance, peace, prosperity and other blessings they seek so as not to suffer a similar fate with Israel whose eighty years of peace lulled them into sin. Thus, the danger of sinful compromise and inconsistency, repentance and prayer for divine intervention and deliverance, necessity of courage in obeying the command to rescue the perishing from the wicked, assurance of victory over enemies are highlighted for our consideration in this lesson.

CAUSES OF DEFEAT AND OPPRESSION AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE (Judges 4:1-3; 2:14; 1:19; 5:8; 1 Samuel 12:9; Psalm 106:42; Proverbs 26:2)

Before the newest bondage, the land of Israel had had rest for eighty years. They had been delivered from their oppressors through the previous judge. But failing to learn from their sinful past, the people forsook God's love and mercy, and went astray again into sin. Consequently, the "**LORD sold them into the hand of**" their enemies to oppress them and put them in bondage. As they strayed away from God's love into sin, enemies had another ample opportunity to oppress them. And the enemy that oppressed the children of Israel in our text today is king Jabin of Canaan and his general, Sisera.

We should note, however, that Joshua had earlier conquered and killed one king Jabin of Hazor with all its inhabitants and possessed their land (Joshua 11:1,10). So, the "**Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera**" in our text lived more than a century after. Jabin then is either a standing name or a title of successive kings, much like the name, Pharaoh.

<p>Question 2: What is the primary cause of defeat and oppression among God's people?</p>
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God's people, by their vantage position, are supposed to enjoy uninterrupted victory. In His love, foreknowledge and power, God has adequately provided for their daily victory. And the provision is inexhaustible. More often than not, this provision is never enjoyed by majority of Christians because of inconsistency in their walk with God. Truth is, whenever God's people live righteously, no wicked power can overcome them. But when they open

the door for Satan through sin, God gives them up for defeat and desolation.

When God's people go into sin, Satan, like Jabin and his general, Sisera, uses the opportunity to mightily oppress them. Satan the archenemy of the believer is watching closely and working assiduously to see the protection or cover removed. God's people seem to forget too frequently and easily that Satan and his cohorts are watching for opportunities to repossess their hearts and minds, and to turn them back into evil works.

Question 3: Enumerate some practical causes of defeats and oppressions among God's people and how they can be overcome.

It is necessary to consider causes of believers' defeat today and how to avoid them. Believers are mostly defeated in battle today because of compromise or secret sin. If they go into secret sin hoping that they will not be discovered by members or leaders in the church, they are unwittingly creating opportunities for their own defeat. Compromise or secret sin arise from lack of watchfulness. If the believer does not watch over his actions and reactions, he opens the door for Satan and, consequently, to defeat. When there is inconsistency in the believer's walk with God, he becomes susceptible to defeat.

A prayerless believer can also suffer defeat. Whereas prayer ought to be the believer's 'breath', many Christians see it as unnecessary burden which they must endure. In fact, to some believers, prayer is a means of solving problems and not of fellowship with God. Like the children of Israel in our text, they only pray when they are under attack, and when their attackers are warded off, they relapse into prayerlessness. It is not surprising that **"the children of Israel cried unto the LORD"** only when being oppressed by their enemies. Until they were oppressed by Pharaoh and the Egyptians, there was no record of them praying. This trend continued in the book of Judges: they prayed only when under bondage. Closely related to prayerlessness is the absence of courage and ignorance of the word of God.

COURAGEOUS AGENTS OF DELIVERANCE (Judges 4:4-9, 14; Hebrews 11:32-34; Psalm 83:1-5, 9, 10)

The passage introduces Deborah, wife of Lapidoth, the first woman recorded in scriptures to be a Judge in Israel. Or, put differently, this was the first woman to lead a government of a nation in recorded history. From the passage, it is clear that she was a seasoned administrator both in civil and religious affairs. Her courage is a challenge, not only to women in Christian ministry but also to the men. Deborah made herself available for deliverance of God's people when many men in the land ran for covers. Even when valiant men like Barak had their confidence terribly shaken by events in the land, she became an epitome of courage and an animating spirit of the government and discharged all the special duties of a judge.

By God's direction, she ordered Barak to raise an army that would engage Jabin's army. Her courage rubbed off on Barak who became so motivated that he mobilized other men of war for the task. Even at the battlefield, Deborah was available. She personally went with the army to the war against Jabin and his general, Sisera. It is doubtful today how many men, not to talk of women, will be willing to do what Deborah did.

Deborah was both a wife and a prophetess. Her ability to balance her domestic duties with religious obligations is something that cannot be ignored. Her performance at the home front did not disrupt or hinder her spiritual usefulness. On how she fared in ministry, a Bible scholar writes: 'She judged Israel as God's mouth to them; correcting abuses, and redressing grievances.' What a testimony!

Barak insisted that the lady judge must accompany his soldiers to war. While this talks about her usefulness to God's people, it also underscores the much talked about symbiotic relationship between work and prayer. This relationship is also seen in Moses' prayer while Joshua went to war. Deborah was not going to participate in the real fighting but as a spiritual morale booster for the soldiers.

Question 4: What examples do exploits of Deborah and Barak signify for leaders and followers?

Barak's insistence on having Deborah accompany him to war, and Deborah's promise to go with him teaches us that Deborah would not send Barak where she would not go herself. By extension, those who call others to duty should be ready to participate in such duties.

It should also be noted that Barak's insistence on having the woman-judge accompany them to war was not a sign of cowardice or a result of weakness. Rather, it was a recognition of the power of God in her. Barak knew that Deborah accompanying them to war was a physical sign that Jehovah was with them in battle to defeat the enemy nation.

In any case, Barak's offer to go and fight against these oppressors of Israel was an indication of his bravery and faith in the God of Abraham. This brought about his name in the catalogues of the heroes of faith (Hebrews 11:32).

One fact that must be borne in mind at all times is that God honors both men and women. He does not discriminate between man and woman. As He uses men so He uses women. All we need to do as Christians is to follow His leading (Deuteronomy 29:29).

FUTILITY OF ALLIANCE AGAINST GOD'S PEOPLE
(Judges 4:10-13,17,18; 1:16; Numbers 10:29; 24:21; Exodus 2:15,16,18; 3:1; 4:20,24; 18:5; Matthew 13:3-8,18-23; Hebrews 4:2)

Heber the Kenite was one of the children of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses. It would be recalled that Moses had invited this particular family to share in God's promised blessings. "**Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father in law, We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel**" (Numbers 10:29). Unfortunately, the great offer was turned down. "**And he said unto him, I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred.**" Hobab, and by extension Heber, had a rare opportunity of partaking in the benefits exclusively reserved for the children of Abraham but he turned it down.

The Kenites lived in the southern part of the country, but

at this point in history, Heber, who was one of them, had relocated to the north. While there, he forged an alliance with the enemies of God's people. From the town of Zaamain, they fed Sisera with intelligence about Barak's movement (verse 11, 12). And after Sisera was routed, he could think of no other place that would be safe than **"the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite."** But when God fights with a man, there is no security for him in the house of his best friend as is in this case.

Question 5: Who was Heber and who are those who resemble him in the church today?

The case of the Kenites here is a warning to everyone. They had a golden opportunity of entering into an earthly rest like the children of Israel; they had a gracious promise and advantage of sharing in God's provision for His people. But they rejected the offer. This also accounts for some people's inability to derive all the benefits in God's word; they simply exclude themselves. There are many people in the church today who have the golden opportunity of hearing the undiluted truth, getting saved and experiencing miracles as of old. Rather than settle their salvation once and for all, they keep postponing it. Such people are susceptible to forming alliances with enemies of God and His people. They give helping hands to people who fight against the truth and righteousness. To escape the judgment of God, sinners must break away from sin and relationships or associations that keep them in sin.

COMPLETE DEFEAT OF GOD'S ENEMIES (Judges 4:15-24; Joshua 10:10; Psalm 83:9-10; Exodus 14:28; Judges 5:24-27)

"And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet" (Judges 4:15).

Bible scholars say the Hebrew equivalent of that verse is rendered as: 'Jehovah threw the army of Sisera into confusion.' This implies that the men of war, their horses and chariots were intermingled in wild confusion. Feeling

unsafe, Sisera lighted down his chariot and fled on foot towards the tent of Jael, Heber's wife. It is faith-building to see a general who had been oppressing Israel with **"nine hundred chariots of iron"** abandon them and the multitudes with him on the battlefield and take to his heels before the ten thousand men Barak raised out of Naphtali and Zebulun. Truly, woe unto him who strives with his Maker!

The requests of the fleeing Sisera engage our thought. **"And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty"** (verse 19). He got and drank milk which led to his death, in line with Deborah's prediction. His second request was for Jael to serve as his guard after leaving his chariots and soldiers on the battlefield. There is no refuge for anyone who fights with God, His people and His cause in this world. Security is only guaranteed for those who reconcile with Him.

The interesting part of this victory is that it was the wife of Heber with whom he had a pact that **"took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died"** (verse 21). Surely, God makes the enemies of those who please Him to be at peace with them; He also makes even the friends, associates and neighbors of those who displease Him to be at war with them. God can turn anything and anyone to an instrument of judgment to prove His word. The victory of every oppressor of God's children is temporary.

It must be underlined that Israel's victory over Jabin and Sisera was not because of Barak's intelligence and bravery but by the power of God. Deborah and Barak were only instruments God used in defeating them. Israel's triumph has become a reference point in history.

God has made ample provision for the believer's victory through Christ's death and resurrection. He has therefore promised victory to everyone who will depend on Him. All the believer needs to do to have a repeat of this kind of victory is to be a friend of God at all times, giving Him a prominent place in his life, being watchful, prayerful and consistent in his walk.

Question 6: What assurance does the victory over Jabin and Sisera give to believers?

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Hebrews	8-9	Esther	7-8
TUE	“	10	“	9-10
WED	“	11	Job	1-2
THUR	“	12-13	“	3-4
FRI	James	1-2	“	5-6
SAT	“	3-5	“	7-8
SUN	1 Peter	1-2	“	9-10

614 Lesson

DEBORAH AND BARAK'S SONG OF VICTORY

MEMORY VERSE: "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts" (Psalm 145:4).

TEXT: Judges: 5:1-31

Although men ought "**in everything** [to] **give thanks**" unto the Lord, we are more inclined to render praise to Him in moments of joy. The joy of victory after a hard battle for the Lord excited saints of old to compose and render worshipful songs. Such songs serve to preserve the memory of God's wondrous acts among His people. An example is the song of Moses and Miriam following the unforgettable and miraculous deliverance of Israel and the destruction of the army of Egypt at the Red Sea (Exodus 15). Another example is the song of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 32, in which he rehearsed the great things God did for Israel in contrast to their recurring infidelity. Moses' song in Deuteronomy was meant to be a deterrent, by constantly reminding Israel of the dangers of apostasy, as well as an exhortation to faith. Thus, sacred songs serve as expressions of worship and thanksgiving to God and a means of preserving the remembrance of divine acts from generation to generation.

Question 1: From Scriptural examples, what purposes do sacred songs serve among God's people?

The song of Deborah and Barak in our text captures the above essential attributes. It also provides a study of the misery which people plunge themselves into when they abandon their Rock and choose "**new gods**". It brings to the fore the deceitfulness of idolatry and compels us to examine ourselves in the light of the different attitudes and dispositions of the tribes of Israel when they were faced with a situation that called for sacrifice and courage, in furtherance of God's glory and the re-establishment of true worship, righteousness and order. Finally, we witness

the inevitable end of any divinely promoted cause or battle. It reminds us that if we altogether hold our peace at a time of challenge, **“then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise... from another place”** (Esther 4:14).

TROUBLED TIMES OF IDOLATRY (Judges 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Acts 3:19; Colossians 1:13, 14)

The early part of Deborah and Barak’s song dwelt on the unpleasant conditions that prevailed when Israel labored under Jabin. It mirrored the deep distress which Israel suffered before Deborah appeared on the scene. The national misery and anarchy was attributable to Israel’s descent into idolatry when **“they chose new gods”**.

The contrast in the situation of Israel during the time they wallowed in idolatry and after their return to God was so sharp that one could hardly believe it was the same nation that was being described. The change and transformation were dramatic, striking and all-encompassing. This is similar to the change that takes place when a hopeless and miserable sinner turns to Christ. **“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). Repentance, whether on a national or individual level, always ushers in a time of refreshing (Acts 3:19).

<p>Question 2: Describe the condition of Israel during her period of descent into idolatry and how it mirrors the life of the sinner.</p>
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The intense suffering and deprivation of Israel under Jabin typifies the tyranny of sin and Satan in the unbeliever’s life. Jabin’s despotic suppression gave rise to insecurity and anarchy which affected the very life of the nation. The sufferings and miseries in the land of Israel mirrors the life of the sinner. The cessation of commerce and trafficking reflects the futility and unprofitability of a life without the outworking of God’s grace. The effrontery of robbers who operated without check on the highways thereby forcing frightened citizens into byways typifies the abundance of iniquity in these last days with its danger of weakening the love of God in the hearts of men. The neglect of agriculture because of the fear of plunderers reflects the neglect of eternal life by those who are ruled by the fear of men and

the pressure of present worldly system. The lack of arms for defense and offence is typical of the vulnerability of those who do not know the promises of God and who do not have and cannot be clad with the whole armor of God.

Question 3: What remedy has God provided for the miseries, fears and hopelessness in the world today?

God, in His mercy, responded to the cry and suffering of Israel under Jabin by throwing off his yoke through Deborah and Barak. Today, anyone can be delivered and **“saved from [his] enemies and from the hand of all that hate [him]”** by faith in Jesus Christ, **“who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins”** (Colossians 1:13, 14).

TAKING OUR PLACE IN GOD’S ARMY (Judges 5:9-19; Ecclesiastes 9:11; 1 Corinthians 15:57; 1 Peter 2:14; Luke 12:48b; Matthew 12:30)

In their song, Deborah and Barak reserved places for the enemy who fought against Israel, for the various tribes and people who fought for Israel, and for those who stood neutral while the Lord’s battle raged. The enemy was identified in the song to be Jabin and Sisera, their Amalekite allies together with the kings of Canaan. The enemies were large, ferocious and bitter. They were determined: **“they took no money.”** Their resolve against God’s people was stronger than could be found among mere mercenaries.

For Israel to rout such formidable enemy forces without a king bears testimony to the truth of God’s word that, **“the battle [is not] to the strong”** (Ecclesiastes 9:11); **“there is no king saved by the multitude of a host”**. **“A mighty man is not delivered by much strength. A horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength”** (Psalm 33:16, 17). On the other hand, God, by His holy arm, always gives victory to His people who trust Him. Apostle Paul’s experiences in all his life’s battles made him exclaim, **“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (1 Corinthians 15:57).

The courage and selflessness of those whom God raised to redress the oppression of Jabin and Sisera were commendable. It is noteworthy that such willing instruments in God's hands were found across all social classes. They included: **“governors of Israel that offered themselves willingly among the people”** (verse 9), the nobles **“that ride on white asses”** and the magistrates who sit in judgment but set aside their privileges and honor to serve God at such an auspicious time. While ascribing the glory of the victory to God who stirred up the various classes of people, Deborah recognized the exemplary roles of those who lent themselves as instruments in God's hand. Indeed, giving due praise to those who do well encourages them to persist in well-doing while setting them up as good examples for others to emulate. Similarly, leaders at all levels will do well not only to rebuke offenders, but to praise those who do well. According to Scripture, leaders are sent **“for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of them that do well”** (1 Peter 2:14). However, when we are praised, we must watch against the temptation to become proud and self-conceited.

Question 4: What caution must we apply with respect to receiving rebuke or praise?

Deborah, in her song, reserved a place of honor for those tribes in Israel who rose to the challenge of Jabin's oppression. Among such tribes were Benjamin, Ephraim, Machir (half tribe of Manasseh), Zebulun, Issachar and Naphtali (verses 14, 15, 18).

Deborah also noted those tribes, who stood neutral on such a critical engagement; who did not actively identify with the glorious cause. Such were the tribes of Reuben, Dan, Asher, and Meroz. No mention was made of the tribes of Simeon and Judah because their geographical location was too far from the scene of the battle.

When the different attitudes of the various tribes of Israel are considered against the backdrop of Israel's resounding victory and the prophetic expressions in Deborah's song, some facts emerge. Firstly, God demonstrated clearly that He could do without any unwilling hearts such as Reuben, Dan, Asher and Meroz. No man is indispensable

for the inevitable victory of the Lord's army. Secondly, the Lord regards those who do not identify with Him in battle as being against Him though they may not actively fight on the enemy's side. Such was the neutrality of Asher, Reuben, Dan and Meroz. This truth is reflected in the words of Christ: **"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad"** (Matthew 12:30). Thirdly, the Lord will not hold it against us when our inaction is the result of situations truly beyond our control or out of our reach as was the case of the tribes of Judah and Simeon. Fourthly, every willing participant in the battle against the forces of darkness will be remembered in the victory song in heaven. Though our present contributions to the war efforts may be diverse, what is important and expected is that **"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God"** (1 Peter 4:10).

Question 5: What lesson can we learn from the victory of Israel even without the help of some tribes?

Apart from Simeon and Judah who lacked opportunity to participate, none of the tribes who shirked their duty in the war could be excused. The division that existed among the tribe of Reuben was a bitter root that should not have been allowed to spring up. As the Scripture warns: **"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"** (1 Corinthians 1:10). As a consequence of their divisions, Reuben chose the safety of the sheep-fold, preferring the sonorous bleating of their sheep to the martial trumpet that summoned them to the battle of the Lord. Today, some Christians are similarly kept away from their duties by the love of ease and excessive concern for their worldly businesses. Dan **"remain in ships"** (verse 17) under the pretext that leaving their ship for the battle would result in an incalculable loss or that they were used to the sea and unfitted for land battle. Dan, in that case, would be condemned by Zebulun, a fellow sea-faring tribe who abandoned their ship to identify with the Lord's battle. Whatever cloak we seek to hide our loss of affection for the

Lord would be exposed by some other people in similar situations whose courage and resolution for the Lord will condemn us. As for the tribe of Asher, their continuing on the sea shore during the battle ostensibly to repair the breeches the sea had made on her land, speaks of love waxed cold. The truth is that those who do not love God with all their heart will always find other “duties” more compelling and urgent than the call to make sacrifice for God. Considering the fact that Meroz lay very close to the scene of the battle and had every opportunity to demonstrate obedience and concern for Israel but declined attracted a curse. **“Curse ye Meroz... because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty”** (verse 23). Those who are in the habit of comparing their efforts with those of others will do well to recognize the disparity in opportunities and endowments.

The truth is that we must sincerely and prayerfully ensure that no extremity in our circumstances or in our domestic affairs is allowed to override the Lord’s command.

On the last day, at the judgment seat of Christ, we cannot plead lack of opportunity for our not participating in the on-raging battle of snatching souls from Satan through the gospel message. Every situation or station in life affords us the opportunity for pious service unto the Lord.

THE TRIUMPH OF GOD’S ARMY (Judges 5:24-31; Job 9:4; Judges 4:17; Joshua 2:9-11; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 1:20)

When men make themselves enemies of God through disobedience, they incur the hostility of God’s entire creation. Thus, in the ensuing battle against God’s people, even the stars fought against Sisera by causing storms against him. River Kishon, usually a small river, swelled into a torrent that swept away Sisera’s soldiers who tried to escape through the river.

While acknowledging the commendable roles of the six tribes of Israel who participated in the battle, Deborah reserved a special praise for Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite: **“Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent”** (verse 24). Jael’s exploit in killing Sisera, captain of Jabin’s host, by driving a nail through his head

becomes more illustrious when one considers the fact that she was a woman.

Just as Rahab, the Canaanite woman, preferred loyalty to the God of Israel to blind heathen patriotism, Jael placed peace with the God of Israel above peace with Jabin. Both Gentile women's exploits and the high honor their faith brought them are recorded in the Holy Writ to teach us that, **"of a truth... God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him"** (Acts 10:34, 35). As both women's faith in God was the result of what they saw and heard of God's power, there is no excuse for anyone to disbelieve God. For even **"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork"** (Psalm 19:1). By her faith, Jael, a woman in her home was able to achieve an honor as high as that which Barak achieved in the battle field. Those whose lot is to serve and labor in obscure and lonely spheres of ministry can attain a place of honor before God. And they shall not lose their reward if they serve God faithfully till the end.

Question 6: What lessons can we learn from the faith manifested by Jael and the honor ascribed to her in Deborah's song?

The ignominious end of Sisera who had proudly designed the destruction of God's people typifies the ruinous end of sinners whose seeming prosperity flatters them into thinking they have no need for God in their lives.

While the carcass of Sisera lay with a deadly wound in Jael's tent, his mother was full of expectation of his glorious return. **"Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?"** (Verse 28). She and her maidens never thought of or considered the possibility of defeat and death. All they had in expectation was worldly honor, pleasure and wealth. They presented a pitiful picture of hope where there was no hope. Sinners who think that God will justify them without faith in Christ and that they will escape God's wrath are like these people. When the Captain of our salvation returns in triumph and great glory, we shall sing our victory song. Our hope to share in His glory cannot be disappointed if we love Him in truth and are ready to enlist in the battle for truth (2 Timothy 12:12).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Peter	3-5	Job	11-13
TUE	2 Peter	1-2	"	14-15
WED	"	3	"	16-17
THUR	1 John	1-2	"	18-19
FRI	"	3-4	"	20-21
SAT	"	5	"	22-23
SUN	2 John & 3 John		"	24-26

615 Lesson

GOD COMMISSIONS GIDEON

MEMORY VERSE: “And the LORD looked upon him, and said, go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” (Judges 6:14).

TEXT: Judges 6:1-32

Israel’s penchant for doing evil was yet to abate. The slide-back into evil which began after “**there arose another generation... which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel**” had continued for more than a hundred and sixty years (1425-1256 B.C.) after Joshua. Generation after generation and judges after judges, the people had refused to break loose from idolatry and disobedience to divine commands in spite of the attendant misery and defeat. They had refused to tackle their propensity to go back into evil as soon as their God-appointed deliverer was dead. They had continued to provoke the Lord to anger, yet God had continued to show His manifold mercies towards them each time they repented and cried unto Him.

In the text under consideration, the same scenario of going back to idol worship had played out again and the children of Israel had come under cruel hardship, plunder and destruction by the Midianites as a result. But as was their antecedent, they cried unto God when things became unbearable and God found a suitable, qualified vessel for the deliverance of the nation. He raised another deliverer for them in the person of Gideon. Despite his background and the challenges involved with the task, Gideon obeyed the call of God and was mightily used to do exploits against Israel’s enemies. He believed that the One who commissioned him would supply needed enablement to carry out the great task.

At different times, God often commissions His people to deliver those who are oppressed of the enemy and bring His children back to the path of righteousness. In our dispensation, the call to bring sinners to the Savior is an assignment all believers must carry out.

Question 1: What is the greatest commission that the Lord has given to His people today?

Every sinner is in bondage and under the cruel oppression of Satan. Just as God called Gideon, believers are called to preach the saving gospel of Christ to the sinning world and bring deliverance to Satan's captives. Underscoring this, our Lord Jesus says, "**Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature**" (Mark 16:15). Believers must not relent in the task to rescue sinners and backsliders before it is too late.

GREAT OPPRESSION, DEFEAT AND MISERY OF ISRAEL (Judges 6:1-6; 3:12-14; 4:1, 2; Joshua 7:11, 12; Judges 16:17; 2 Kings 17:14-20; Ezra 9:7)

The children of Israel at this time had gone back into sin. They had forgotten that previous defeats at the hands of their enemies were due to their disobedience, sin, evil lifestyle and rebellion. Backsliding had brought on them great misery and impoverishment. They lost the favor of God and were punished. Here again, "**the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel...**" (Judges 6:1, 2). Sin, wickedness, rebellion, if unrepented of, brings defeat, downfall and utter destruction. It makes the enemy to prevail against the people of God. It opens a floodgate for the adversary to oppress and wreck havoc on God's heritage. Believers who were superior to the enemy would suddenly become weak, humiliated and unable to stand before their enemies. Such was the experience of Israel here. In the days of their godly leaders, the Midianites could not withstand them in battle; they were utterly defeated (Numbers 31:7-12). But sin decimated their strength and caused their enemies to prevail against them.

Question 2: Mention instances when sin was the cause of the defeat of God's people.

Joshua had a similar experience when Achan took of the accursed stuff and brought defeat on the whole nation (Joshua 7:1-5). They could not progress to Canaan until

they had dealt with the cause of defeat. Samson lost his power, life and ministry as a result of his fraternity with strange women (Judges 16:17). The nation of Israel could not challenge the Philistines because Saul was out of favor with God due to disobedience. They also lost their sovereignty and were carried into a foreign land, not once, not twice. **“Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only. And the LORD rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight”** (2 Kings 17:18, 20).

Question 3: What are the consequences of a life of sin and evil?

Israel’s untold misery and suffering under the Midianites continued until they acknowledged their backsliding and called upon the Lord. **“And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD”** (Judges 6:6). Sinners and backsliders should not take the grace of God for granted. Judgment will come upon all the unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 6:23). The mercy of God is reserved only for those who acknowledge their evil and are willing to forsake their sins (Proverbs 28:13). The way out of sin is to run to the Savior. God is not interested in the death of sinners and backsliders but that they should repent and return to the Lord with deep contrition and willingness to remain steadfast in the grace of God.

GOD’S CONCERN AND CONTROVERSY WITH ISRAEL
(Judges 6:7-10; Hosea 4:1; 12:2; Micah 6:2; Jeremiah 25:31)

“And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage” (Judges 6:7,8).

Behold the mercy and kindness of the Lord! As soon as Israel cried to the Lord, He responded immediately. Though it would seem that their cry was a result of the weight of

the oppression, yet the Lord sent a prophet and a deliverer to them. But not without first outlining the bases of His rejection and controversy with them. First, He reminded them that He brought them out of bondage in Egypt where they served their taskmasters. Second, He delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians when they would have destroyed the whole nation. Third, He delivered them from the various oppressors and persecutors after they left Egypt. Fourth, He defeated all the adversaries that rose against them in battle; not one of them was able to stand before them as long as they obeyed His voice. Fifth, He drove away the inhabitants of Canaan and chased the beasts out of the land in readiness for their occupation. Sixth, He gave them a land flowing with milk and honey and caused them to inherit it. Seventh, He avouched Himself to be their God and adopted them as His own (Deuteronomy 26:18). Eighth, He assured them of His abiding presence: He said, **“fear not...”** (Judges 6:10). In spite of these, the Lord’s verdict on the children of Israel was: **“but ye have not obeyed my voice”** (Judges 6:10). Thus, Israel was guilty of ingratitude, disobedience and lack of faith. How many believers have been caught in the same sins!

Question 4: Why did the Lord specify His acts towards the children of Israel?

The reason the Lord outlined some of His manifold kindness to the children of Israel was to remind them of His benevolence, bring them to a sense of their sin and prepare them for deliverance. He wanted them to acknowledge their folly peradventure they would cease to fall back into it. The reason the Spirit of God points our sins and mistakes to us is to enable us repent and renounce them. The wise would hear and fear.

As soon as the Lord ended the bases of His controversies with Israel, He set out to deliver them. He charged Gideon to take the mantle of leadership in order to deliver His people from the oppression of the Midianites.

GIDEON’S COMMISSION, COURAGE AND OBEDIENCE
(Judges 6:11-32; 2 Corinthians 6:15-19; Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:5; Matthew 10:37; 6:24; Acts 4:19; Galatians 1:16; John 16:2; Isaiah 1:11-20)

“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour” (Judges 6:12).

A man of valour, Gideon became God’s ready instrument to deliver the children of Israel from the cruelty of the Midianites. The angel of God affirmed that the Lord was with them and declared him to be a man of courage, gallantry and victory. But Gideon could not reconcile these accolades with the reality on ground. He could not understand how they could be under such oppression when the Lord was with them. After all, his fathers had told them that when the Lord was with Israel, He brought them out of Egypt and wrought mighty miracles among them. He plagued the Egyptians with divers diseases, turned their water to blood and broke Pharaoh’s hold on Goshen where Israel dwelt. As soon as they left Egypt, He parted the Red Sea and drowned Pharaoh’s chariots in the ocean. When enemy kings fought against them, He discomfited them. He supplied their needs in the wilderness, gave them water from the rock; He rained manna from heaven. The pillar of cloud and of fire led them during the day as well as the night and He did not suffer any to harm them. How come they were now the laughingstock of their enemies? Why should they hide away to thresh their wheat to avoid it being destroyed? Gideon could not believe what he heard, and he asked: **“Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?”** (Judges 6:13). His conclusion was right. He said: **“but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”**

When an individual, a group of people or church assembly that was enjoying divine protection, provision and preservation goes back into sin, they risk being forsaken and left at the mercy of their enemies. Such would no longer enjoy the benefits of dwelling under the shadow of the Almighty where there is security, favor and mercy.

In spite of Gideon’s misgiving and distrust, **“the LORD look upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?”** (Judges 6:14). As Christian believers,

if we abide in the Lord, no matter our “infirmities”, we can do exploits for our God. Moreover, the Lord’s assertion underscores the way God views His children. He does not see them as weaklings, wretches, failures, never-do-wells. He considers them as men and women of valour who **“can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth”** them (Philippians 4:13).

Still conscious of his background, human frailties and inadequacies, Gideon continued with his stream of excuses and why he would not want to be the deliverer. He said, **“Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.”** But the Lord assured him of His presence, protection and certain victory. Such is the response of men whom God had called to assume a specific task for Him. Moses claimed he was a stammerer and could not stand before Pharaoh to speak for the children of Israel. When confronted with his choice as the first king of Israel, Saul asked, **“Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin?”** (1 Samuel 9:21). Solomon told the Lord, **“I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in”** (1 Kings 3:7). Prophet Jeremiah also screamed: **“Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child”** (Jeremiah 1:6).

However, in spite of the seeming consciousness of their frailty and humanity, borne out of a sense of humility, the Lord mightily used those who acknowledged His power and obeyed His voice. God has all power and might to use the ‘weakest’ but prepared vessels for His glory: **“But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty”** (1 Corinthians 1:27).

<p>Question 5: What are the qualities God look for in a man He wants to use for His glory?</p>

If we surrender our little talents, strength and efforts into God’s hands, there is no limit to what He can achieve through us. All we need is total and absolute yieldedness and His grace would accomplish the rest (2 Corinthians 12:9). Humility is a great virtue that all true believers must possess. True ministers of the gospel must never allow

pride or self to tarnish the work of the Lord. **“For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble”** (1 Peter 5:5).

Gideon was weak in faith when he got the commission. He desired to have his faith confirmed with specific signs before he would embark on the great assignment. God honored his sincerity and confirmed his calling. Believers today are under the influence of the Holy Spirit and should not wait for a sign before embarking on the task of *Discipling A Whole Nation* (DAWN). Prayer is a major tool a believer has in carrying out the divine and urgent task of delivering the captives of the mighty in our generation.

Gideon offered the angelic being a kid and unleavened cakes. But the angel turned the meat into an offering made by fire to show that God is not a man that needed meat, money or materials. He is Almighty and all He demands from us is our life. He must be worshipped, honored, adored and served with all our heart and soul in holiness.

Gideon obeyed the Lord’s command to pull down the monuments of idol in the family before embarking on his task. God’s marvelous grace raised him as a deliverer out of the family of a leader in idolatry to demolish idolatry **“and build an altar unto the Lord”** (Judges 6:26). If we must be used of God, we have to destroy all the altars in and around us.

<p>Question 6: What are some of the idolatries practiced today and what should be our attitude to them?</p>
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Gideon obeyed divine demand **“...and did as the Lord has said unto him...”** (Judges 6:27). Obedience ensures that we have the support of the Lord. When we obey Him, He will work in our favor; He will defend us even when the whole world turns against us. For Gideon, the Lord influenced the heart of his father, Joash to defend him against the advocates of Baal who wanted to kill him because he destroyed its altar (Judges 6:28-32). In the same vein, believers are to engage in the great task of preaching the gospel and trust God for safety. He has promised that He will never leave nor forsake us. **“So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me”** (Hebrews 13:6).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Jude	1	Job	27-28
TUE	Revelation	1-2	“	29-30
WED	“	3-4	“	31-32
THUR	“	5-6	“	33-34
FRI	“	7-8	“	35-36
SAT	“	9-10	“	37-38
SUN	“	11-12	“	39-40

616 Lesson

GIDEON MOBILISES ISRAEL FOR WAR

MEMORY VERSE: And he sent messengers' throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered unto Asher and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them (Judges 6:34).

TEXT: Judges 6:33-40

The preceding verses of this chapter show how the children of Israel were oppressed and afflicted for seven years by the Midianites as a result of their disobedience. They were greatly impoverished because of the constant attack from the Midianites and its allied forces. But when they cried to the Lord out of their predicament, He granted their request by sending them a deliverer. This study centers on Gideon whom the Lord found faithful to lead the children of Israel against their foes, namely, the Midianites, the Amalekites and the children of the east. The task of mobilizing and leading the Israelites to war against this confederacy of nations required moral rather than physical courage. Sin must be purged in the life of the burden-bearer before venturing into such campaign.

Gideon had met with God's required standard of self-purification, destruction of Baal's altar and the establishment of true worship before attempting to embark on this national assignment.

Question 1: How did Gideon prepare himself before God chose him to lead Israel in this battle?

Gideon's life had been transformed as he separated himself from the culture and tradition of the people. He had broken the power of idol and was preserved by the Almighty. He had learnt to fear God only instead of idols. To qualify for God's service, the believer is expected to separate from self, sin and Satan. **"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him"** (2 Chronicles 16:9).

ATTACK ON ISRAEL BY THE MIDIANITES AND THEIR ALLIES (Judges 6:33; Exodus 17:8-16; 1 Samuel 15:2-9; Genesis 25:1,2; Numbers 31:1-20)

“Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel” (Judges 6:33). It is instructive to observe that this attack on the Israelites was spearheaded by the Midianites, descendants of Abraham (Genesis 25:1, 2). Years earlier, the same Midianites had battled the Israelites in the wilderness (Numbers 31:1-20). But because of the failure of Israel to completely eliminate them, they repopulated and became stronger; now in alliance with the Amalekites and the children of the east, they gathered together to oppress and afflict Israel with cruelty. They destroyed even the means of Israel’s subsistence. Unknown to these allied forces, however, God had raised Gideon who became an instrument of deliverance for Israel.

Question 2: What can we learn from the sudden attack on Israel by the allied forces?

Believers are to be vigilant and sober always as the adversary is never tired of seeking people to devour. They are to put on the whole armor of God. It is equally advisable that believers are not ignorant of the devices of the devil. He will always plan to attack at an unguarded moment. **“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”**. It was in keeping with His promise that the Lord raised Gideon for the war against these enemies.

GIDEON MOBILISES ISRAEL FOR WAR (Judges 6:34, 35; 3:10, 27; 1 Chronicles 12:18; 2 Chronicles 24:20; Judges 5:17)

“But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abi-ezer was gathered after him”. Gideon was moved by the Spirit which came upon him to blow the trumpet; and the men of Abiezer, his own people, were the first to rally round him. This clearly indicated that the reformation he carried out among them had a positive impact on them. With such encouragement from his people, he sent messengers throughout the neighboring

tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali. These four tribes were closer to the valley of Jezreel; therefore, they were affected mostly by the marauders.

Question 3: What can leaders learn from the life of Gideon in depending on the Holy Spirit?

The call and commission of Gideon was great and divine. It is instructive that he depended on the Holy Spirit to accomplish such a great task. Gideon released himself to the sole use of the Spirit. Leaders must learn from Gideon to yield their lives to the exclusive use of the Spirit. They can achieve this by ensuring consistent walk in the Spirit, practical holy living and deep hunger and thirst after the Spirit. The Lord has given us a promise that He **“will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring”** (Isaiah 44:3).

Believers who desire this experience must wait upon the Lord in prayers and supplication. They must seek and keep seeking until the answer comes. All these steps are very imperative if we are to be used by the Spirit of God.

All reformation must first begin with self. If we want changes in our communities and our nation, then this change must first begin with us. It is the desire of God for His Church to be pure and holy. Therefore, let us breakdown every altar of Baal and eject every idol from our hearts. Let us allow the holy flame of the Spirit to consume all images that is not of God. The church is in dire need of revival today. Our miracle and revival Programs would be richer and better if we can get the leaders and members closer to God. We must be determined to purge the church of everything that is contrary to God’s word.

Question 4: How did the four tribes summoned by Gideon respond to the call to duty and what can we learn from their response?

“And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them” (Judges 6:35). The people readily obeyed the call of Gideon as they now confidently looked up to him as their savior. God can make the enemies

of a man to be at peace with him and to gladly come under his wings. From the case of Gideon, we learn that no man who is conscious of God's abiding presence should allow himself to be discouraged even if his fellow men do not duly appreciate him.

Today, believers have a call that is greater than that of Gideon. And it is the call to the great commission. We are to be spiritually and physically prepared if we must snatch the souls of men from the devil and his cohorts. Appropriate strategies must be adopted in line with God's word. Prompt obedience is required from every believer in carrying out this great task. Personal goals should also be subordinated to corporate goals at the hour of emergency. Leadership and members should work as a united force to dislodge any opposition. Leaders must be God-fearing and exemplary in lifestyle to attract the level of unity and cooperation shown among these tribes.

The influence and impact of the Holy Spirit upon Gideon was not in doubt. Such should be the case with leaders seeking to mobilize the children of God against the forces of Satan in our time.

GIDEON REQUESTS REASSURANCE OF DIVINE SUPPORT (Judges 6:36-40; 6:14; Genesis 18:32; Exodus 4:3-7)

“And Gideon said unto God, if thou will save Israel by my hand, as thou has said, Behold I will put a fleece of wool in the floor...” (Judges 6:36, 37). Gideon had already witnessed the power of God as a proof of his calling. He had been assured already of the favor and presence of God by an angel of the Lord. Yet, he went ahead to seek further assurance.

We must not, however, be hasty in condemning Gideon in this matter. The assurance which he had received before now had given him strength; he had destroyed the altar of Baal, cut down the grove that was by it at the risk of his life. We should therefore not be surprised that he is seeking a fresh assurance. Many believers would have been spared of shameful defeat if they had sought additional reassurances from the Lord. A lot of mistakes would be avoided if we humble our soul to seek the face of God before embarking on any mission.

The omniscient God knew the condition of Gideon’s heart, hence He granted his request. Though fears and doubts were in the heart of this humble servant of God, he went to God for courage and confirmation. That the Lord granted the request of Bible characters like Abraham, Moses and Gideon shows that **“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy”** (Psalm 103:8).

Question 5: What lesson can believers learn from Gideon’s request for divine reassurance?

“Putting out a fleece” means asking God to guide in a decision by fulfilling some specific conditions. Those who practice this put a limitation on God. We must note that it is not a scriptural approach to determining God’s will. Our Lord Jesus Christ never adopted it as a method; the early apostles never practiced it. Gideon used it due to his declining faith and limited knowledge of God and the Scripture. The fact that God stooped to Gideon’s weakness only proves that the Lord is gracious; and that He understands our shortcomings (Psalm 103:14). Demanding extra signs was an indication of fear and unbelief on the part of Gideon. Visible signs are unnecessary if they only confirm what we already know is true. Today, the greatest means of God’s guidance is His Word. Unlike Gideon, we have the mind of God revealed to us through the Scripture. All we need is to prayerfully study it to know His mind on any issue (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). We should not allow a fleece to become a substitute for God’s Word.

Question 6: Why should believers not use fleece in determining the will of God?

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Revelation	13-14	Job	41-42
TUE	“	15-16	Psalms	1-5
WED	“	17-18	“	6-8
THUR	“	19-20	“	9-11
FRI	“	21-22	“	12-16
SAT	Genesis	1-2	“	17-18
SUN	“	3-4	“	19-21

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

617 Lesson

SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES AMONG BELIEVERS

MEMORY VERSE: “Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” (1 Corinthians 6:7).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

The Corinthian church was bedeviled with many crises such as divisions, carnality, worldliness and incest which Apostle Paul had been addressing in the previous chapters. In this study, the absence of the fruit of the Spirit - peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness and temperance - made them to go before unbelieving judges in the law courts to settle their disputes.

Question 1: Why is it odd for believers in Christ to settle their disputes in the law court?

God is love. He imparts His love to all His children and expects that they should love one another. It is for this reason that He gave His Son to redeem us and empower us to love like Him. While on earth, He prayed that believers would be perfectly united in love because “**love worketh no ill to his neighbor**” (John 17:21-23; Romans 13:10). Though the Scripture affirms that there would be offences among the brethren (Luke 17:1), God expects amicable settlement since love always prevails. The definition and principles of love have borders which a Christian must not venture to cross if he desires to remain in the will of God.

It is against this background that the oddness of litigation among brethren in the Corinthian church and some churches today can be fully understood. The Christian ideal, if fully imbibed and wholeheartedly practiced, ensures a peaceful interrelationship among the brethren.

That is why believers who have God as their Father should not drag themselves before “**the unjust**” judges in the law courts who have the god of this world as controller of their lives.

THE EXALTED POSITION OF BELIEVERS IN CHRIST:

(1 Corinthians 6:1-3; Ephesians 2:6; Revelation 1:5,6; 3:21; Matthew 19:28; Luke 19:17; 22:30; Daniel 7:22; Revelation 20:4)

Question 2: Is the existence of the judicial system in the society unscriptural?

The phrase “**go to law**” or “**goeth to law**” in verses 1, 6, 7 refers to resorting to the magistrates, courts or the judicial systems for arbitration. The Bible does not condemn the judicial system in our society as an instrument for maintaining peace, justice and equity. It also did not condemn a believer seeking redress against unjust treatments from an unbeliever. And should an unbeliever press charges for wrongdoing against a believer, Christ instructs that the believer should be wise and quick at reconciling with the offended (Matthew 5:25; Luke 12:58). The judicial system in a sane society is a means of peaceful settlement, redress and maintaining the peace which is crucial to the spread of the gospel. Note however that the law is made for the lawless; and since believers have the Prince of peace in them, they should not be lawless.

Question 3: Why did believers in Corinth resort to settling their disputes in court?

Litigation among brethren in the Corinthian church stemmed from their ignorance of the truth. They did err for not knowing the truth about their exalted position in Christ. Apostle Paul expounded these truths rhetorically: **“Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?”** (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3).

Redeemed by His blood, believers are made kings and priests unto God. This royalty has conferred on us the privilege of sitting with Christ in the heavenly places now

and with Him on the throne during His millennial reign. Saints will also have the privilege of judging the world and angels at Christ's instance. Then, He will give believers authority to be judges and rulers; and we shall reign with Him. The Scripture declares plainly that after the rapture of the saints, Christ will come back to judge the world with all His saints (Jude 1:14, 15; 1 Thessalonians 3:13). With this exalted position, it is debasing for saints not to be able to settle "**the smallest matters**" on "**things that pertain to this life**" among them but take themselves to court before unbelievers.

That a believer cannot sue another believer in any law court does not connote absence of misunderstanding or offences but the presence and power of the grace of God at work in their lives. Offences come because Christian experiences of believers as well as their knowledge of Scripture are at different levels. Every Christian assembly is composed of matured and immature, sanctified and unsanctified believers. They may also have careless or watchful, prayerless or prayerful believers. Christ, for instance, gave a panoramic view of the spiritual state of every church in every age in the opening chapters of the book of Revelation (Revelations 1-3). Before their sanctification, the twelve disciples manifested misunderstanding, indignation and immaturity. Paul and Barnabas had sharp disagreement and the early church also had a major dispute on the issue of circumcision of Gentile believers. As it were, none of these cases appeared in any secular law courts.

CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS OF DISPUTES AMONG BELIEVERS (1 Corinthians 6:1, 5-8; Proverbs 10:12; 29:22; Psalm 15:4; 1 Timothy 6:1-5; Exodus 22:14; 2 Kings 6:5; Proverbs 22:16; Jeremiah 17:11; Ezekiel 22:13; James 5:4; Luke 16:1-7; 1 Corinthians 7:5)

Question 4: What are the implications of believers settling their disputes in law courts?

The Scripture reveals hatred, pride, and contentious spirit, unfaithfulness to agreement, defamation, and foolish questions as causes of strife. Among the brethren in Corinth are also found contempt for their leader to whom they should have resorted for settlement. Besides, the offended were retaliatory, insisting on having redress and

justice while those who “**do wrong, and defraud**” the brethren were unrepentant. The problem in the church at Corinth concerning litigation was sparked off by fraud. God’s command is, “**Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning**” (Leviticus 19:13).

Deceit, dishonesty and greed are not virtues but vices that still cause strife among the brethren in many churches today. These works of the flesh show that the believers involved are straying far from godliness. Contrary to the will of God, fraudulent practices such as borrowing money and refusing to pay, returning borrowed item that is damaged without repair, misappropriation of funds, making unjust gain, denial of conjugal rights in marriage, delayed payments, refusal to pay or withholding wages of employees still characterize some professing believers today. These and other fraudulent activities have made affected brethren to take unscriptural actions of litigation. They are however not justified for taking matters involving fellow believers to law courts.

Fraudulent practices and litigations have grave implications in any living church. One, it shows that the world is entering the church. And such an assembly like the Corinthian church will become carnal, lacking spirituality. Two, for believers who profess faith in Christ to go before “**the unjust**” and “**unbelievers**” (verses 1, 6) for settlement show the undesirability of their faith to the world. Three, believers involved have given occasion for the church and the name of Christ to be blasphemed. Unresolved disputes and litigation involving brethren bring disgrace and reproach to God. Four, the church where disputes and litigation are allowed to fester will disintegrate (Matthew 12:25). Five, believers are commanded to fight the good fight of faith. But as believers take sides in conflict in the church, they leave the great commission unattended. Six, conflict and litigation leave a bad precedence for future generations. Seven, believers involved in unresolved disputes and those who go to court in defiance of God’s word risk losing heaven except there is repentance.

REBUKE FOR ERRING BELIEVERS IN CORINTH: (1 Corinthians 6:5-8; Proverbs 27:5; Luke 17:3; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:2; 3:16, 17; Titus 1:12, 13; 2:15; Acts 20:28)

In view of the folly of believers resolving their disputes in the court of law, Apostle Paul sternly rebuked the Corinthian Christians. He said, **“I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?”** (Verse 5). It was baffling to him that not even a single believer was wise enough among them to adjudicate in their disputes.

Question 5: What can we learn from the rebuke of errant believers in the Corinthian church?

Apostle Paul’s rebuke was in line with Christ’s command (Luke 17:3). Believers who sin are to be rebuked openly to serve as deterrent to others. In Scripture, preaching, reprove, rebuke and exhortation always go together. Rebuke leads to soundness in the faith of erring believers through repentance, restoration and restitution. For this desirable outcome, rebuke must be done with all authority; it must be Scripture-based and done in love with the singular aim of ridding the body of Christ of sin and error.

Like Apostle Paul, Christian leaders then must **“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine”** (2 Timothy 4:2). They must not be tired of correcting sinful practices in any church like Apostle Paul did in almost all the chapters of this book.

SCRIPTURAL BLUEPRINT FOR SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES (1 Corinthians 6:1, 4, 5, 7; Galatians 5:22, 23; Luke 17:3, 4; Matthew 18:15-17; Acts 15:1-32; Exodus 18:19-27; 1 Kings 3:16-28)

Question 6: Explain practical ways of settling dispute among believers in any local church.

After rebuking them for their unwise decision to seek redress at law courts, Apostle Paul proffered a two-way solution of settling disputes among brethren. Settlement of disputes among believers ought to be **“before the saints”** who are **“wise”**; saints who will **“be able to judge between his**

brethren” (verse 1, 5). Paul’s instruction to the church in Corinth is, **“If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church”** (verse 4).

The second solution was anchored on forbearance, longsuffering and meekness that are supposed to be the hallmarks of Christians. Apostle Paul expresses this thus: **“Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?”** (Verse 7). The practical implications of this is for the believer to forbear and forego his right if that will foster peace and bring glory to God.

Before Paul’s conversion, there was a dispute among the brethren in the early church because of perceived neglect of some widows in the distribution of food. It was amicably resolved (Acts 6:1-7). When dispute about circumcision of Gentile believers came up and could not be resolved, it was brought before the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. In this particular instance, the apostles referred to the Old Testament scriptures to reach amicable settlement.

Conflict resolution among believers should follow Christ’s blueprint as revealed in Scripture (Matthew 18:15-17). But if the offender remains unrepentant, the church leadership should wade into the matter in order to settle it. With Christ, the church is the ‘supreme court’ for arbitration among believers.

There could also be instances where a brother that is offended is hard to win (Proverbs 18:19). When the offender or offended believer refuses to repent or be appeased, his obstinacy is proof that he has backslidden. According to Christ, such a person should be counted henceforth **“as a heathen man and a publican”**.

<p>Question 7: What attributes do Christians involved in dispute and those mediating need for peaceful settlement?</p>

Solomon, for instance, demonstrated wisdom in the case of a conflict between two women over a living child brought before him (1 Kings 3:16-28). There are still other attributes needed for settlement of disputes among the brethren. Moses appointed **“able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness”** to judge matters among the people.

From the foregoing, believers need to cultivate the fruits of the Spirit; pray earnestly for the cleansing of the inbred sin; be Spirit-filled, possess the gift of the Spirit; walk in the Spirit; live in the consciousness of God and rapture; fear God and divine judgment; love and obey God’s word; commit themselves to following peace with all men and mediating for amicable settlement of disputes among the brethren. The believer must also maintain a reasonable distance in a situation where **“any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat”** (1 Corinthians 5:11-13). Such could fan the embers of discord with the hope of benefitting from the proceeds of damages from court cases, where it occurs. While believers should devote themselves to studying God’s word, Christian assemblies should give priority to teaching the whole counsel of God so that ignorance of the right biblical steps in handling peculiar conflict situations can be avoided. Believers should seek counselling from mature and spiritual leaders so as to continue to remain in the path of peaceful inter-relationship.

In all, believers must love and not defraud one another; they must forgive one another and apply scripture guidelines in resolving conflict; they must not fan the embers of conflict but be peacemakers. All believers are required to, at all cost, **“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord”** (Hebrews 12:14).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Genesis	5-6	Psalms	22-24
TUE	“	7-8	“	25-27
WED	“	9-10	“	28-31
THUR	“	11-12	“	32-34
FRI	“	13-14	“	35-36
SAT	“	15-16	“	37
SUN	“	17-18	“	38-40

618 Lesson

SANCTITY OF THE BELIEVER'S BODY

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? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

The importance of this study is underscored by the fact that many Christian believers do not understand the sanctity that God attaches to the human body. They are only concerned about the state of their hearts and minds. By their reckoning, once the heart and mind are in good state, there is no problem. But such believers need to know that man is a tripartite being comprising the soul, spirit and body. As a Bible scholar puts it, "Man is a spirit being, he has a soul and he lives in a body."

Before God, the human body is sacred, and every human being ought to have the same disposition towards the human body. And even if others decide to downplay this fact, it should not be so done by the Christian believer. The Bible states that the human body was created in the image of God, and that the body is the property of the Creator. This implies that man simply has custodial rights to his body, and has no more right to harm or destroy his body than the caretaker has to ransack the building he is hired to maintain. The children of Israel knew that they were not to abuse their bodies or give their bodies over to Satan to use for his glory but only to things that would bring glory to God alone at all times.

Question 1: Explain why the believer's body should be treated with sanctity.

A careful study of how the human body works shows that the human body is delicate and carefully wired in such a way that everything is interwoven. This, of course, advocates that all body parts should be taken care of in a way that its harmonious working is not disrupted. Bearing

this in mind, the believer cannot afford to overlook how he treats his body. Rather, the believer should be cautious to ensure the sanctity of his body just as he cares for the purity of his heart and the soundness of his mind. Our duties as crowns of God's creation and as redeemed of the Lord demands that we respect and guard our bodies against harmful and risky activities and imbibe living a healthy lifestyle.

SALVATION AND FREEDOM FROM SIN (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5-8; John 3:3-8; 1 Corinthians 3:3; Titus 1:9; Hebrews 12:14; 13:4; Revelation 22:15; James 3:14-15)

The problem of sin is such that man has never been able to find solution to in spite of his ingenuity and technological breakthroughs. While an average sinner may have been able to conquer his environment, he is nonetheless in a fallen state, unable to subdue his sinful passions. He is neither under the guidance of the Spirit of God nor in his right reason. Rather, he is under beastly passions: a worse state than the brute, and unable to conquer his sinful habits. Whatever good works such a sinner does in that spiritual state is nothing but acts of self-righteousness which cannot save him. Being a member of a popular church, a moralist, priding oneself in philanthropic, hospitable or generous activities, having a good report of 'good works' in a neighborhood, church or denomination does not atone for past sins.

Though some people have outward form of godliness in dressing, talking or alms-giving, inwardly they are dirty. It should be made clear that as long as an individual still gets involved in sins, he is yet to be saved however religious he claims. None can be saved by his works without faith in the redemptive work of Christ on Calvary. In fact, not depending on the finished works of Christ is akin to biblical labor of the fool. **"The labor of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city"** (Ecclesiastes 10:15).

Question 2: What is the place of deception in all of these?

Paul, the apostle, warns the Corinthian church and by extension the Church today against being deceived: **"Be**

not deceived". He knew the ease of being deceived by the fact that when a man is involved in one religious activity or the other, he could easily be carried away by such activities. By "**be not deceived**", the apostle implies that being deceived is dangerous and that people could easily be deceived by good works. As in the days of Paul, the apostle, the danger of being deceived by false prophets, who are after pecuniary gain is still rife today. Every sin, committed but not repented of, shuts the sinner out of the kingdom of heaven. This is why he warned, "**Be not deceived.**"

Many people are inclined to flatter themselves that their involvements in religious activities would take them to heaven but they may find that to be untrue too late when they die in sin and go to hell. But the wise should not expect to reap where he has not sown: none can sow to the flesh and hope to reap everlasting life. None can atone for his own sins nor appease God by his own religious efforts. Rather, salvation is entirely the work of God, given by grace and received by faith. To be saved, sinners should forget about what they have done or what they can do because salvation is by faith in Christ. He should just come to the Lord just as he is with a penitent heart.

Question 3: What is repentance?
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Repentance indicates sorrow for past offences and a full purpose to turn from transgression and lead a holy life. Anyone who claims to be truly penitent has sorrow for sin, not only because it is ruinous to his soul, but mainly because sin is an offence against God.

Repentance and faith are like two legs on which a man stands. Repentance is turning away from all sins. Without repentance, there is no forgiveness. Although we are saved by grace through faith, that faith must be preceded by repentance. However sinful you think you are, the Lord will forgive you the moment you repent of your past sins, and confess those sins and accept Christ as your Lord and personal Savior.

Like the Corinthian believers were warned against returning to past sins, so are believers being warned against their past sins. This is because salvation as a definite Christian experience gives power to live a morally clean life and sets free from the judgment to come.

SELF-DISCIPLINE AND LIMITS OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM (1 Corinthians 6:12-14; 10:23; Romans 6:12; 1 Corinthians 9:27)

“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

The apostle’s concern here is that the gospel be not turned into a means of gratifying self without consideration for others. When some seemingly legitimate act violates the conscience of another or jeopardizes the peace or edification of others, it would make weak minds stumble. So, the mature and knowledgeable believer should refrain from such acts. That the Christian has been forgiven his past sins does not give him license to continue in sin or do anything that will not bring honor to God. True, as a believer and an apostle **“all things are lawful”** to him, but **“all things edify not”** (1 Corinthians 10:23). All manner of “meats” are lawful to be eaten because they have been sanctified by the word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:3-5), but not one in an idol’s temple. The apostle opines that though it might not be sin to him to eat anything, if it would hurt the conscience of others, he had better refrained from it.

It is not enough to be forgiven one’s past sins, one must continue in righteousness. **“As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed”** (John 8:30, 31). It is in continuing in the word of God that Christ-likeness is made manifest. It is only the past sins that are forgiven, not present and future sins.

SANCTITY OF THE BELIEVER’S BODY (1 Corinthians 6:15-20; Leviticus 19:28; 21:5; Deuteronomy 14:1; Jeremiah 16:6)

As believers, holding our lives sacred before God means that we must protect our bodies from harm and do everything possible to take care of any damage that occurs. This includes taking precautionary measures against illnesses by means of vaccination or immunization of ourselves and our children against preventable diseases. It also means that we are required to live a healthy life and to seek

medical care when necessary. According to a renowned Jewish philosopher and rabbi who also doubled as one of the earliest medical proponents of preventive medicine, “clean air and environment, and the value of a healthy diet and exercise”, must be pursued and maintained.

In the same way, believers should, where necessary, undergo medical checkups and treatments because they have the potential to save their lives. It is obvious that believers must avoid cigarette smoking; they should also avoid exposure to second-hand cigarette smoke as much as possible because it is more dangerous and causes sickness and death to third parties.

The Old Testament dispensation forbids tattooing because it mars the body. Tattooing can be likened to graffiti on a magnificent building (Leviticus 19:28). Therefore, tattooing or imprinting figures of flowers, leaves, stars, and other fanciful devices on various parts of the bodies is forbidden because it degrades the body. Historically, printing of marks on the body is a very ancient tradition where people carry marks on the body in honor of the object of their worship. Till this day, all the castes of a certain religion in an Arab country still bear sectarian marks on their foreheads or elsewhere which distinguish them from others, not only in a civil but also in a religious point of view.

Although some people argue that piercing is permitted because it is not a permanent change and will heal if the posts are not continuously kept in place, it should be stated that any kind of piercing is seeking for aesthetics outside the confine of the will of God. Those who argue and claim that they are beautifying God’s creation need to re-examine their motivation: glorification of themselves or God.

In the same vein, other actions like body piercing of earlobes, tongues, noses, eyebrow, or any part of the body for that matter is not permitted because it is like assaulting the sensibility of the Creator who created human beings and, upon review, concluded that **“it was very good”** (Genesis 1:31).

Suicide and homicide are strictly prohibited in scriptures. This is because they make a man to prematurely destroy

the body he is duty-bound to protect (Genesis 9:5). Even physicians are not permitted to accelerate the death of a patient, not only because of his duty to preserve life, but also because he has no right to destroy the property of God. In the same breadth, the life of the unborn child should be held sacred.

Question 4: Enumerate some ways believers bodies are not treated with sanctity.

Knowing that our bodies are God's sacred creation and gift from God, we should accord them the deserved respect and not defile it in any way. Our dressings and appearances are indicative of how precious we hold our bodies. Our dressing is a reflection of what we are on the inside. The watchword of the believer who holds his body sacred is through modesty. Modesty goes beyond a matter of avoiding revealing attire. It describes the attitude of our hearts reflected in the believer's thought, speech, dressing, and conduct. Moderation and appropriateness should govern all of our physical desires.

Besides dressing, adorning or speech, the Apostle deals extensively with the evil of sexual immorality. Fornication is sexual immorality between two unmarried individuals. He distinguishes it from all other sins because it corrupts both soul and body. Whereas **“every sin that a man doeth is without the body;”** **“he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body”** (1 Corinthians 6:18). Most sins are committed by the abuse of other things but fornication involves a defiling, dishonoring and destruction of the body. This act could result into an infection and a contact with a terminal disease. Therefore, he counsels us to **“flee”** fornication because of the hurt, harm and scandal it brings.

Second, as the temple of the Holy Ghost, our bodies should be preserved from pollution and corruption. As the vessel housing the third Person in the Godhead, nothing should be done to defile it. Third, by virtue of our redemption and the divine ownership on us, we have no right to spoil what does not belong to us.

For everyone who claim to be born-again and Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, **“ye are bought with a price:**

**therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit,
which are God's"** (1 Corinthians 6:20).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Genesis	19	Psalms	41-44
TUE	"	20-21	"	45-48
WED	"	22-23	"	49-51
THUR	"	24	"	52-56
FRI	"	25	"	57-51
SAT	"	26	"	62-66
SUN	"	27	"	67-68

619 Lesson

SCRIPTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON MARRIAGE

MEMORY VERSE: “Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 7:1-40

The first epistle of Paul the apostle to the Corinthians was written to correct some anomalies and answer some questions in their fellowship. In the first six chapters, he had dealt with the reports he received on issues of contentions, divisions, immorality and litigation among the brethren. In our text, he began to address the issue of marriage and to offer proper Christian perspective on it in this corrupt world.

One major problem of the Corinthian church was the negative influence of their environment. The general attitudes and opinions of people were putting pressure on their convictions. They also had many unanswered questions on the relatively new Christian faith which they had just received.

On marriage principles, practice and procedures, the scriptures must be the guide, and everything must be done decently and in order. In our text, Paul the apostle, by the Spirit of God sets forth the scriptural perspective on the issues of marriage, celibacy, separation, divorce and remarriage of widows.

DIVINE PRECEPTS CONCERNING MARRIAGE: (1 Corinthians 7:1-9, 25-39; Genesis 2:20-25; Matthew 19:3-12; 5:31, 32; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7)

The Corinthian believers had obviously written to the apostle on marriage and other issues. In answering their questions, the apostle stated the basic precepts and guidelines on marriage for believers. These scriptural guidelines need to be reiterated especially in our present day when the marriage institution is undergoing intense pressure from the secular society.

Question 1: State some basic scriptural precepts on marriage.

To begin with, Paul pointed out that marriage is good and proper for Christians because God ordained it (Genesis 2:18-25). It is His solution to man's problem of loneliness and lack of a suitable help meet. It is also designed to be a means of procreation, ensuring purity, and deriving pleasure for both husband and wife. In our text, the Apostle emphasizes both the purity and pleasure benefits of the marriage union: "**Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband**" (1 Corinthians 7:2, 3).

While emphasizing the benefits of marriage, the apostle also hints that heterosexual monogamy is the scriptural standard in marriage. That is, marriage should be between a man and a woman, and it should be one-man-one-wife. Every man should have his own wife, and every woman should have her own husband. This prohibits the sharing of a marriage partner, as it happens in polygamy; and also the abominable practice of homosexual marriage.

Another basic precept here is that marriage should be by volition, not by compulsion. The decision to marry or not should be left to individuals. But it should be stated that people should not settle for celibacy until they have prayed and be fully persuaded by the Lord. Moreover, the decision to be unmarried should only be taken after much prayer and proper counselling from mature ministers of God.

In Paul's day, the issue of whether a Christian should marry or not generated a serious controversy. There were two major reasons for this. One, the persecutions against Christians was intense and to have a family in such circumstances was really a big problem. Two, the popular teaching in some religious circles, as well as the general leaning of society at the time aggravated the controversy. While some eminent Greek philosophers asserted that marriage was a burden and an encumbrance or at best a necessary evil, the Jews with some Greek hardliners considered marriage a compulsory duty which must not be

deferred or denied. As a matter of fact, there were places where unmarried people were denied some basic rights such as watching the popular games, receiving any public honor, speaking to a congregation of married people, and the like. Some Jewish Rabbis even taught that for a man to exceed age twenty without getting married was wrong, and not to marry at all was evil. They based their argument on God's statement in Genesis. **"It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him a help meet for him"** (Genesis 2:18). These conflicting opinions, coupled with the fact that Paul himself was unmarried, made the Corinthians ask directly whether it was right to marry or not.

It is required that husband and wife fulfill conjugal rights to one another. In saying this, the apostle used a general word "benevolence" which connotes mutual good will, friendliness, helpfulness, loving kindness, mercy, understanding, gentleness, tolerance, forgiveness and generosity.

Question 2: Explain the meaning and scope of the command to render mutual benevolence in marriage.

Rendering mutual benevolence is not limited to the matter of conjugal union which is the main reference in this context, but it covers every aspect of the marriage relationship. Conjugal union cannot be fulfilling when the basic ingredients of love, friendliness and mutual understanding are missing. God demands that husband/wife should play their roles in a marriage union. Conjugal union is an integral part of the marriage relationship and each couple should work out how to make their marriages fulfil the divine purpose. The union should not be misused or abused by either partner. Denying each other is not advisable. Even on occasions when both partners agree to refrain from conjugal union for a specific purpose, they should come together again to avoid being taken advantage of by the enemy. Christian couples who live far apart as a result of job transfer, business trips, mission work, among others expose themselves and their spouses to serious temptations. The notion that total or prolonged abstinence confers more spiritual power is unscriptural.

THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE (1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 39, 40; Genesis 2:24; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:32; Romans 7:2)

Paul the apostle also emphasizes the sanctity of marriage. He states that marriage should be held as sacred and as such there should be no divorce or remarriage while one's spouse is living. This is God's plan and Christ's cardinal teaching on marriage (Matthew 5:32; 19:6). God hates and prohibits divorce and remarriage (Malachi 2:14-16). His perfect will is that marriage should be a lifetime commitment between a man and his wife to the exclusion of all others. What God joined together should not be put asunder by any man. Breaking up the family unit, for any reason at all, is never God's intention. Anywhere the cord that binds a couple breaks, individual members of the same family suffer bruises that are hard to heal. This is because hearts are broken and destinies are shattered.

However, there are certain grounds upon which separation may be allowed in a marriage. But these are extreme cases. And even at that, the right to separate does not confer the right to remarry. One of such grounds for allowing separation is when an unbelieving partner decides to leave the marriage (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). Obviously, this is in reference to a couple who married as unbelievers and one of the partners later got converted to Christ. In such a case, the believer should continue in the marriage if the unbelieving partner agrees to stay; but if, despite all legitimate efforts to make peace, he/she decides to leave, the unbelieving partner should be allowed to go. Now, the question then is: is the believing partner free to remarry a believer after separating from the unbeliever? The plain answer is: **"The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord"** (1 Corinthians 7:39). The right to remarry is only conferred upon the death of one's spouse. Therefore, separation may be allowed but remarriage is not allowed while the estranged spouse lives.

Another ground for separation in marriage is a clause in Christ's teaching on marriage. **"And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth**

adultery, and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matthew 19:9). But in this context, fornication refers to immorality with another person before marriage. Among the Jews, after a woman has been betrothed or espoused to a man, even before the actual wedding, she was referred to as his wife. At that stage, if the woman commits fornication, as Mary was erroneously thought to have done, she would be put away by the husband. That was what Joseph planned to do until he was guided aright by God (Matthew 1:18-20). Now, according to Mosaic Law, any person caught in immorality would be stoned to death and that would set the innocent party free to remarry. So, for the Jews who were the primary audience of Jesus Christ, there was no controversy on the matter of remarriage.

However, under the dispensation of grace, the standards are higher. The grace of God cancels the death penalty and rescues the offending party; and it also can enable the innocent party to forgive and forbear. Therefore, when people argue about the right to divorce and remarry, it is a sure sign that, to some extent, we undermine what the grace of God can do. Otherwise, if we allow God’s grace to have its full effect, both the offending party and the innocent can still have a wonderful relationship.

Question 3: What are the scriptural grounds for allowing separation in a marriage? Does the right to separate confer the right to remarry?

To buttress the fact that it is not God’s will for men to divorce and remarry, Jesus referred the religious Pharisees to the beginning of the marriage institution. He said, **“Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so”** (Matthew 19:8). God’s perfect will for marriage from the beginning is that a man should cleave to his wife, and the two of them should be one flesh (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:46). Divorce and remarriage while the former partner lives is man’s contraption that is not in consonance with divine directive.

Question 4: In what sense does the presence of a converted spouse sanctify the unconverted members of the family as expressed in our text?

In our text, Apostle Paul offered a strong reason why a believing spouse should rather stay in the marriage relationship with an unconverted partner. **“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy”** (1 Corinthians 7:14). The presence of a believing spouse in the family predisposes the entire household to believe in the Lord. A Christian man or woman who manifests the fruit of the Spirit at home will most likely be an instrument of conversion to his/her spouse. Moreover, the grace of God is sufficient for every believing partner to stay in the marriage.

THE PRIORITY OF SPIRITUAL PURSUITS (1 Corinthians 7:29-35; 1 John 2:17; 1 Timothy 5:5; Matthew 6:33; Luke 10:38-42)

Paul the apostle emphasizes the fact that believers, married and unmarried, should make spiritual pursuits a priority in life. **“But this I say brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none...”** (1 Corinthians 7:29). Believers should not be bogged down with marriage to the extent that they lose proper focus on heavenly realities. This admonition is especially needful now that many people are backsliding on account of marriage-related issues. The single person who seeks to marry as well as the concerned parents who are anxious that their children get married should put eternity in view and not allow the matter of marriage to distract them from pleasing the Lord. Jesus said that in the days before His coming, many people will be preoccupied with marriage just as it was in the days of Noah (Matthew 24:38). For this reason, believers who are heaven-conscious should be watchful against the tendency to become carnal and unnecessarily worked up when it comes to the issue of marriage. The issues of a marriage partner, wedding, reception, etc. should be handled with eternity in view.

There is a general misunderstanding of Paul’s assertion in verses 32-35 of our text. To a casual reader, it would appear Paul was making a case for celibacy or stating that the married state is inferior to being single. But this is not so. Rather, he points out that marriage confers additional

responsibility on a person, and if not properly handled, could become a distraction in our personal walk with God. Obviously, being single does not automatically make a person more spiritual, neither does being married make a couple less spiritual. What makes the difference is the priority one places on spiritual pursuits and the readiness to make the necessary sacrifice for personal growth in the Lord. At different times, God had used both single and married couples to accomplish His purpose among men.

Question 5: What is the scriptural counsel to parents on the marriage of their children, widows and widowers?

The chapter ends with a general counsel to parents over the decision to give out their daughters in marriage. The issue of remarriage of widows and, by implication, widowers was also mentioned. Parents have a major role to play but they should not constitute a stumbling block in the marriage of their children. They should give them all the necessary support, guidance and encouragement in line with the word of God. Then, widows and widowers are free to remarry whom they will, but they must marry believers; and such decision should be taken after much prayer and diligent consideration and consultation.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Genesis	28-29	Psalms	69
TUE	“	30	“	70-72
WED	“	31	“	73-74
THUR	“	32	“	75-77
FRI	“	33-34	“	78
SAT	“	35	“	79-81
SUN	“	36	“	82-85

620 Lesson

LIMITS OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

MEMORY VERSE: “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

In the preceding chapter, Paul the apostle had already treated some issues that cropped up among the Corinthian brethren. They had written to him, seeking clarifications on problems in their church and several questions relating to the Christian faith. In his reply, Paul threw more light on the issue of marriage and other sundry matters.

Our text deals with another sensitive issue in the Corinthian church - the believer’s attitude to “**things offered unto idols**”. They wanted to know how to handle buying and eating of things that were offered in sacrifice to idols. They wondered if they were participating in the worship of idols by partaking in such meals. It was against this backdrop that the apostle wrote to explain the Christian’s position and what our attitudes ought to be so “...**that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus**” (Colossians 1:28).

It is worthy of note that the apostle was always on hand to counsel the brethren, answer their questions, address issues bothering them and reveal to them the mind and will of God.

Question 1: What should be the primary responsibilities of Christian ministers to their congregation?

It is the duty of Christian ministers to teach their flock the whole counsel of God and watch against apostasy and grievous wolves that may seek to destroy the flock. It is not enough to win souls for Christ: we must be available to assist them grow in grace, answer their questions touching the doctrines, and clear their doubts and uncertainties through God’s word. Like Apostle Paul,

Christian leaders must be ready to take proper care of the sheep entrusted to them and ensure that the congregation is fed and prepared for the coming of the Lord.

ENRICHING KNOWLEDGE OF GOD’S LOVE: THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT (1 Corinthians 8:1-3; Ephesians 3:17-19; Colossians 1:10; 2:6, 7)

The Church at Corinth was peculiar for spiritual gifts, talents and knowledge. They seemed to be ahead of others and were said to “**come behind in no gift**” (1 Corinthians 1:7). Right as it is to acquire good knowledge, Paul cautioned them not to allow it to lead to pride. This is because “**knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth**”. The effect of mere knowledge is that it causes men to be proud. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that acting on the basis of knowledge without consideration for other believers could hurt the faith of such saints. Instead, the love of God should be the basis of the true Christians’ actions so that they would not destroy the faith of others in the name of liberty.

The Scripture remains the only source of true knowledge. All the philosophies and ideas of this world cannot replace the knowledge and wisdom that God’s word teaches. As Christians, whatever knowledge we acquire in this world must be subjected to the infallible word of God, and those that negate its standard must be set aside.

Question 2: How can a believer be enriched in the knowledge of Christ?

In answering the Corinthian believers’ question, the apostle to the Gentiles places much emphasis on love (charity) as the defining element in our relationship one with another. The love he refers to here is no less than *agape* - God’s kind of love.

Jesus Christ is the expression of God’s love to humanity. Christ also loved us and gave Himself to us through His vicarious death on the Cross. Through His love, we are saved, separated from the world and sanctified. The more our knowledge about His love, the more we would love others and the greater our consideration for the spiritual welfare of other believers. Apostle Paul understood this better. No wonder his yearning was to “**know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his**

sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10). Christians who fill their head with knowledge without corresponding heart experience, cannot **“know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge...”** (Ephesians 3:19).

Question 3: How is the love of Christ revealed to humanity?

God’s grace offers the penitent sinner salvation from sin. And through confession and forsaking of sins, accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, the love of God is shed abroad in his heart. The amount of God’s love in our heart is directly proportional to our obedience to His commandments. **“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous”** (1 John 5:2, 3).

EXHORTATION REGARDING THE LIMITS OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY (1 Corinthians 8:4-8; 10:19,20; Psalm 115:4-8; Jeremiah 51:17,18)

“As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4). The apostle here addresses the issue at stake specifically. Drawing inspiration from the Old Testament (Isaiah 49:9, 10), he describes an idol as a nonentity, and the pagan ritual of sacrificing to it meaningless. As far as the Scripture is concerned, there is no god but God. Some people may dissipate energy trying to create idols and reverence same, but they are altogether worse than nothing. To the apostle therefore, there is nothing awesome about an idol and what is sacrificed to it.

“Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge...” Not everyone is mature enough to handle this knowledge about idols; not everyone has this understanding; hence, the exhortation to be circumspect and considerate. After all, **“charity”** that **“edifieth”** also **“seeketh not her own”**. For the sake of believers with **“weak”** conscience, eating meats sacrificed to idols can defile their conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7).

Weakness here is interpreted to mean ignorance; that is, some are unaware of the non-existence of idols. They do not know that beside the Almighty God, there cannot be any other living god. The result of their ignorance is that they go about believing that an idol god has a real existence. It means that such believers still carry the remains of heathen opinion and superstition.

Question 4: How can strong believers help the weak brethren?

Paul the apostle admonishes the strong believers to be mindful of the weak ones in the exercise of their Christian liberty. He maintains that food or meat does not commend us to God; “...**for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse**” (1 Corinthians 8:8). The believer’s liberty should not be a stumbling block to others. As we interact with one another on daily basis, our actions and inactions should be to glorify God. We must be willing at all times to jettison anything that will not edify other brethren and lead to the glory of God.

The love of God should constrain us to be mindful of believers who are not as spiritually strong and mature as we are. Those who have just given their lives to Christ are babes in the Lord and must be handled as such. We must not do anything that will weaken or cause a shipwreck of their faith. Bearing this in mind, we should care for and nourish them with God’s word until they attain spiritual maturity.

Question 5: What are the principles that should guide Christian liberty?

The liberty of believers should be guided by the principle of *What Would Jesus Do?* If others were to follow our example, will it honor Christ or bring reproach to His name? Our liberty should not be used as a license to make others stumble and fall. Paul’s assertion that, “**if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend**”, is a timeless lesson for all believers. We, too, must weigh our actions in the light of how helpful, useful or expedient they are to others. Some things may appear lawful or legitimate “**but all things are not expedient...**” (1 Corinthians 6:12). The disadvantages of some actions far outweigh their advantage; hence, they can be avoided. Our characters

and conduct should not be repelling; instead, they should serve to attract others to Christ. We must follow the footsteps of our Master. **“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked”** (1 John 2:6).

CAUTION ON SINNING AGAINST THE BODY OF CHRIST (1 Corinthians 8:9-13; Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42; 1 Corinthians 10:14,19-31; Colossians 2:16-22; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:10; Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 5:3)

“But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9). Though Paul’s scriptural submission on the matter of meats is, whether we eat or not makes no difference, brotherly consideration is much more the reason to refrain and abstain from certain actions where such would cause offence against others.

Christian freedom is inseparably tied to Christian responsibility. Some actions may be justifiable and lawful but they may be harmful to others due to their limited exposure or age in the faith. Christian believers should be spiritually sensitive enough to avoid those things that will affect others negatively.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ warns us to avoid offending **“one of these little ones which believe in me”** (Mark 9:42). He places much premium on the soul. Therefore, we must be careful not to offend believers who are still young in the faith. Heavy judgment is even prescribed for such people. For, **“whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea”** (Matthew 18:6).

The priority of our relationship and interaction in the household of faith must be to edify one another. In all areas of life, our character and conduct must be Christ-like. **“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity”** (1 Timothy 4:12).

Question 6: What areas of life should we edify the body of Christ in exemplary lifestyle and conduct?

There must be a clear distinction between the believer and unbeliever. In conducting Christian marriages, naming ceremonies, burial rites, graduation Programs and other social activities, we must seek Christ’s glory. We must not be found doing whatever is questionable – whether in the secret or in the open. Our love for others and the glory of God will make us exercise our freedom with caution and prudence, lest we become a stumbling block on their way to heaven.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Genesis	37	Psalms	86-88
TUE	“	38	“	89
WED	“	39-40	“	90-92
THUR	“	41	“	93-96
FRI	“	42	“	97-101
SAT	“	43	“	102-104
SUN	“	44	“	105

621 Lesson

PAUL'S EXEMPLARY LIFE IN MINISTRY

MEMORY VERSE: "For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me" (1 Corinthians 9:17).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 9:1-27

Apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthian Christians on the need for self-denial in the preceding chapter. Lack of this virtue and fruit of the Spirit makes believers extend their liberty beyond the borders of grace. It leads to a life of freedom without responsibility towards fellow Christians who are weak. Apostle Paul revealed that lack of self-control makes knowledgeable believers hurt fellow Christians and sin against the Lord.

In our present study, we are brought face to face with his remarkable example in self-denial for the good of others which the apostle himself practiced as a matter of lifestyle. This noble virtue of practicing what he preached revealed itself while the apostle assayed to respond to questions raised by some in the Corinthian church impinging on his apostolic credentials and rights. It should shock us that a man of such unassailable spiritual stature and indefatigable zeal for Christ should still have some who labored to lessen his character, and that, of all places in Corinth where he bestowed much selfless labor to plant the church (Acts 18:9-11). While we admire the exemplary calmness and eloquence with which the apostle responded to his detractors, we learn not to think it strange or new to be assaulted with unkind insinuation where our goodwill, self-sacrifice and successful labor should have drawn commendation. Paul's defense turned out to be a lesson in self-denial and an abiding example in ministerial conduct and character.

Question 1: What lesson can we draw from the belittling of Paul's apostleship by some believers in the Corinthian church and his response?

THE LEADING MARKS OF A TRUE MINISTER (1 Corinthians 9:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 1: 9; Hebrews 2:4; Acts 22:14, 15; 26:16; Romans 4:25)

The rhetorical questions which the apostle asked in the early verses of our text and which he tried to answer may have arisen from the words of some in the Corinthian church who suggested that because the apostleship of Paul stood on such unsure ground and is the reason he did not insist on the rights, privileges and maintenance which the other apostles appropriated. They inferred that it was a clear admission of the deficiency of his apostolic credentials that made him refrain from demanding and enjoying the privileges that they consider to be the proof of apostleship. Responding to these notions, the apostle went on to show his high standing on all true apostolic benchmarks. By giving answers to his own rhetorical questions he highlighted the virtues that are the hallmarks of a true apostle and minister of the gospel.

“Am I not an apostle?” (Verse 1). The proof of whether he is an apostle can be found in the answers to the three other rhetorical questions in this verse. Undoubtedly, an apostle is one who has a genuine experience of salvation and is free from both outward and inbred sins. To the question **“Am I not free?”** he shares his testimony of salvation by grace in 1 Timothy 1:13-16; Galatians 1:13-16; 1 Thessalonians 2:10 that he was one **“Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief... Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe”**.

Question 2: What are the proofs of true Christian ministers?

Since an apostle is a believer who is commissioned by Christ such as the twelve apostles, it was expected that anyone who claimed to be one have a personal experience of seeing the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21, 22). The question from Apostle Paul then is, **“Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?”** On this criterion, Paul was eminently qualified as an apostle. On the day of his call, Ananias, a devout man, speaking by the Spirit said concerning him, **“The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldst know**

his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard” (Acts 22:14, 15). His commission was unmistakable and direct from the Lord. On the day of his conversion, the Lord Jesus spoke to him directly: **“I am Jesus whom thou persecuted but rise and stand upon thy feet for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee. Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee”** (Acts 26:15-17).

“Are not ye my work in the Lord?” In answer to this question, the apostle pointed to the success of his ministry among the Corinthians themselves and his spiritual benevolence to them as proof of his apostleship. The truth of his claim in this regard was self-evident. **“If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you; for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord”** (verse 2). Earlier, many Corinthians turned to God from idolatry and were endowed with spiritual gifts. These were proofs of his apostolic commission since God approves His true ministers by confirming their word and work with the stamp of His power (Hebrews 2:4).

The city of Corinth was a very difficult place to minister. That the apostle accomplished such a great work in it could only have been by divine enablement. A commentator writes: “In the presence of a finished structure that draws the world to gaze, it is too late to ask if he who builds it is an architect.”

In contemporary times, none can claim to be a minister of Christ who does not have a personal spiritual encounter with the living Christ and who does not believe that He **“was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification”** (Romans 4:25). Apostles bear witness of His resurrection as those who have been reconciled unto God by Jesus Christ and given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). To this extent, all believers have a ministerial responsibility to the world at large. They must bear testimony of His power of resurrection by their lifestyle of victory over sin and the flesh; for if those who claim to be ministers of Christ themselves **“also are found sinners,**

is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid”
(Galatians 2:17).

THE LABOURER’S WAGES OF A TRUE MINISTER: (1
Corinthian 9: 3-14; 1 Timothy 5:2)

After proving his apostleship, Paul went on to assert his authority and right to expect sustenance from the Corinthian church while laboring for their salvation and edification. Though he did not write so that **“it should be so done unto”** him, he firmly anchored his advocacy of ministerial sustenance and maintenance on five unassailable proofs. **“Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard and eateth not the fruit therefore? Or who feedeth a flock and eateth not the milk of the flock?”** (Verse 7). He showed, first of all, that it is normal that those who labor in any business should expect a livelihood out of their occupation. It is therefore very reasonable for ministers to expect a livelihood out of their ministerial labors. He also showed that out of the Jewish law. **“Say I these things as a man? Or saith not the law the same also?”** He maintained that it was in consonance with Old Testament laws in which God ordered that the ox treading out the corn must not have its mouth muzzled or hindered from eating out of its labor while preparing the corn. The apostle reveals that the primary intent of this law was not the ox but to teach men to encourage those who are employed in any service for their good, by adequate remuneration. **“He that plougheth should plough in hope and he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.”**

The apostle also supported his position from a sense of equity. **“If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?”** (Verse 11). His point here is that what the minister sows to his church or audience (spiritual things) are much higher than what they may reap (carnal things). Should a congregation receive so much good (eternal life) by the teaching and exhortation of a minister and yet grudge about his subsistence and maintenance?

Paul argued further from what they give to others who are not ministers. **“If others be partakers of this power over you are not we rather?”** Who had a better claim than

Paul from the Corinthian church where he manifested so much apostolic evidence and sincere selfless labor? If the real value of the labor of Christ's true ministers are rightly evaluated, there could be no question about the need to **"esteem them very highly for their works sake"** (1 Thessalonians 5:13).

Finally, the apostle relied on the established Old Testament tradition. **"Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?"** If the Jewish priests were maintained out of the sacrifices then offered, certainly Christ's ministers should be maintained by their ministry. **"Even so hath the Lord ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel"** (verse 14).

Question 3: Give at least 3 cogent reasons why true ministers of Christ should be maintained by those they minister to.

"Nevertheless, we have not used this power, but suffer all things lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ" (verse 12). The apostle must have felt freer to advocate ministerial privileges and maintenance while in the Corinthian church because his custom there was to forego them. When the apostle asked, **"Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife...?"**, he was using the two words interchangeably, for he would have considered it improper to go about with any sister or any woman other than a wife, not even a woman servant (1 Timothy 5:2). We ought to take notice of the noble spirit manifested by the apostle by his fighting for a cause he believes to be just, though in which he did not intend to benefit. It was here like a warrior who fights for the weak and declines to participate in the spoils of victory. We may degrade our self-denial by a dogmatic insistence that others follow our steps or by sneering at those who cannot follow our heroic examples. On the contrary, Paul rather than dwelling on the merits of his self-denial made it seem as if his self-denial was a duty he had to do in the circumstance in order not to hinder the salvation of some in the church.

Apostle Paul renounced his rights rather than hinder the salvation of souls which he considered his ultimate success and topmost priority. This must be the highest aspiration

and purpose of every true minister, and should inform his attitude and priorities always.

Question 4: What should be the highest priority of every Christian and minister of Christ apart from their own salvation?

LIBERTY'S SUBJUGATION TO DIVINE GLORIFICATION (1 Corinthians 9:16-19 ;)

Though the apostle asserts his right, it was not with the intent to claim them. **“But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!”** (1 Corinthians 9:15, 16). His reason for vacating his right and liberty is lest **“any man should make my glorying void”**. This glorying refers to nothing of man’s admiration, applause, blasting or self-conceit but to a higher pleasure arising from a voluntary self-denial which is neither commanded nor compulsory but which enhances success in God-given assignment. It is the glory that is expected from God for a job well-done. He cheerfully relinquished those privileges for the greater success of that which will guarantee glory for God alone.

Question 5: What do you understand to be the “glorying” which the apostle would never part with and why?

We learn that going beyond our duty to make extra sacrifices with a willing and cheerful mind will attract God’s gracious reward. We ought therefore to see our duties under God a pleasure and whatever may impede the successful accomplishment of our objective under the Lord must be jettisoned for the greater reward of the glory which comes from Him (John 5:44).

In his pursuit of glory from God only, the apostle made himself adaptable to various classes of men, with a view to accomplishing the greater glory of and from God. **“For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain some. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the**

law that I might gain them that are under the law...” (1 Corinthians 9:19, 20). The desire for God’s glorification made the apostle not only willing to forego his rights but to subsume his own preference to his ministerial assignment of soul-winning. As far as he could go, he adjusted his approach to make it effective to reaching different classes and cultures. This is not the same in application with the worldly saying, “when in Rome do as the Romans”. It rather implies accommodating himself with different people wherever he can do so without compromising the standard of the word of God so that he could overcome their weakness or breakthrough their prejudices, to be able to preach to them. It teaches us that a minister who has zeal for Christ’s commission must be resourceful and wise (both virtue received by earnest prayer) so that men’s diverse cultures and norms do not constitute a barrier to the great commission.

Question 6: Differentiate between Paul’s policy of being all things to all men and the worldly notion of “when in Rome do as the Romans”.

Finally, the Apostle explains what drives his self-denial and willful self-effacement – the hope of a glorious incorruptible crown. He sees and compares the Christian race with their familiar/Isthmian games in which many people contest but only one wins the prize. **“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain”** (1 Corinthians 9:24). This was the apostle’s way of encouraging Corinthian believers to steadfastness and perseverance in the Christian race. Unlike the Isthmian race where only one winner is declared, the Christian race admits all who run faithfully, constantly, diligently and perseveringly in the faith to the end. Though there is room for all to win, we must so run as if we aim to outrun our fellows and so win the best prize in heaven. In this, we please the Lord and sharpen the spiritual countenance of fellow believers and achieve the greater glory of God.

Question 7: What lessons can believers learn from comparison of the Grecian race with the Christian race?

“And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a

corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible” (1 Corinthians 9:25). The apostles’ message of encouragement is clear: if Greek sportsmen kept themselves to abstract menu and disciplined habits, keeping off some delectable foods, denying bodily appetites all in pursuit of a prize of a bough of withering olive leaves, a Christian ought to much more bring his bodily appetites and fleshly inclination to stricter control for the sake of **“an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you”** (1 Peter 1:14).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Genesis	45	Psalms	106
TUE	“	46	“	107
WED	“	47	“	108-110
THUR	“	48-49	“	111-115
FRI	“	50	“	116-118
SAT	Exodus	1-2	“	119
SUN	“	3-4	“	120-126

END OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

SPECIAL STUDIES

622 Lesson

THE LORD'S SUPPER

MEMORY VERSE: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

TEXT: Matthew 26:17-30; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34

Two major ordinances are commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ to be carried out physically by all believers. The first, water baptism, is a once-for-all ceremony symbolizing the believer's identification with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. This is to be submitted unto after an individual has repented, exercised saving faith in Christ's atoning blood and received the grace to live a life above sin. The second ordinance is what we have for this study - the Lord's Supper - a perpetual observance instituted by the Lord Himself and commanded for all born again believers.

Question 1: What are the two major ordinances left by Christ for believers' observance in the dispensation of grace?

A careful study of the gospels reveals that the most outstanding issues of the Christian faith are those recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John who wrote, each from different perspectives of the Savior's life. It is important to note that all the four evangelists kept a record of this important event in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides, Paul the apostle who got converted some years after the ascension, had a revelation about this and kept the record (1 Corinthians 11:23, 24).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PASSOVER AND THE LORD'S SUPPER (Exodus 12:1-36, 41-47; Matthew 26:17-19, 26-30; Luke 22:14-20)

It was the practice of Christ to observe the yearly Jewish Passover, which was a commemoration of the great deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The ceremony was a pointer to the anticipated vicarious

sacrifice of the Messiah. Not much record is kept of these occasions during the first two years of the Lord's ministry but the last Passover is of such unforgettable significance that its record rings through the gospels and the epistles.

Question 2: What is the correlation between the last Passover and the Lord's Supper?

The Lord's Supper was instituted during the course of the Lord's last Passover with the disciples. This is because there is a correlation between the two. The Passover was kept as a remembrance of God's great deliverance that brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt. The high point of this momentous event, the Passover, was the slaying of a paschal lamb without blemish which symbolically and typologically occupies the place of a substitutionary sacrifice. This was about three millennia ago. The Lord observed this ordinance more than two millennia ago and reiterated its significance. On that night, He intimated that a Great Sacrifice, the actual Lamb of God who has come to take away the sin of the world would soon be made. He therefore initiated the Lord's Supper and brought it in the place of the Passover. Henceforth, we are to remember Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, and that through the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:14-20). Unlike the Passover, the Lord's Supper is not once a year but **"as oft as ye do it"** (1 Corinthians 11:25). The Lord's Supper is to be kept in remembrance of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice. After Christ's passion, an end was to be put to the observance of the Passover as with other Old Testament ordinances (Hebrews 10:1, 14-20). The Lord's Supper is now to be celebrated perpetually by the redeemed in remembrance of the Lord's death.

THE SCRIPTURAL OBSERVANCE (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19, 20; John 13:1-4; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20-34).

Question 3: What emblems are to be used for the Lord's Supper and what do they symbolize?

Two emblems are to be used for the Lord's Supper, namely, unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. Leaven means yeast. Yeast, from the Old Testament times, has always been symbolic of sin. The unleavened bread is symbolic of

the sinless body of Christ **“which is broken”** for us. It will therefore be wrong to use bread baked with yeast to serve the Lord’s Supper. However, the unleavened bread is not the actual body of Christ; it is only representative.

The fruit of the vine is symbolic of the blood of Christ which was **“shed for many for the remission of sins”** (Matthew 26:28). Jesus gave this to the disciples after He had blessed and given them the unleavened bread. Again, this is representative; it is not the actual blood of Christ. It would be wrong to substitute the vine juice with fermented or intoxicating wine, black currant, any other artificial juices or water. In fact, the fruit of the vine will still be used when we have the supper with the Lord after the rapture at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Matthew 26:29). These are the only two emblems approved for use by the Lord.

Christ commanded the perpetual observance of this ordinance **“till he come”** (1 Corinthians 11:26). And every believer ought to partake of the same on a regular basis (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17). The early church did this (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7). There is, however, no law in the New Testament on the frequency of the observance of the Lord’s Supper by any group or assembly.

Question 4: What are the purposes of the Lord’s Supper?

The purposes of the Lord’s Supper are: for remembrance (Luke 22:19); to show His death (1 Corinthians 11:26); and to anticipate His promised return (1 Corinthians 11:26; John 14:1-3). In partaking, believers look upward to heaven, back to Calvary, and forward to His coming and our eternal fellowship with Him (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 5:6-8; Revelation 19:7-9).

Question 5: How should believers approach the Lord’s Table?

Basic as the Lord’s Supper is in the church and for the Christian, it cannot be approached carelessly, listlessly or presumptuously. It should always be preceded by a personal preparation just as the Old Testament Passover was preceded by seven-day abstinence of leaven from the home and bread of the Jews. New Testament Lord’s Supper is essentially preceded by a lifetime adherence to holiness

and abhorrence of sin and evil. Whoever would come to the table for the observance of the Lord's Supper must of necessity examine himself or herself lest he eats unworthily. Whole self-examination – life, conduct, character, word, thought, heart and even motives – cannot be traded off with the zeal to partake at the Lord's Table. Second, a church whose membership is rife with suspicion, ill-feeling, mudslinging, backbiting, hypocrisy, bootlicking and acrimony should not come to the Lord's Table without confession, repentance, restoration and renewal.

CONSEQUENCE OF PARTAKING UNWORTHILY (1 Corinthians 11:27, 29, 30).

Question 6: What are the consequences of partaking unworthily in the Lord's Supper?

The consequence of partaking at His table unworthily is disastrous both on the church and her individual membership. **“Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep”** (1 Corinthians 11:27, 29, 30).

First, the irreverent partaker is guilty of violating the sacredness of the institution of the Lord's Supper. He is guilty of despising the body and blood of Christ. He profanes the ordinance and in that respect crucifies the Savior once again. And instead of being cleansed and healed by His blood, he is guilty of it. This is a contract with death and doom. It is sowing in the flesh, and reaping corruption. It is a great hazard he courts: he eats and drinks judgment and damnation unto himself. He provokes God and will, doubtlessly, bring punishment upon himself.

Sad enough, the punishment could take the form of death – physical, spiritual and eternal. And in its mild form, it could be sickness or infirmity. **“For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep”** (1 Corinthians 11:30).

Should this divine ire against irreverence deter fearful, holy and earnest believers from attending at this holy

ordinance? Certainly not. Watchful, waiting and holy Christians are encouraged to attend the Lord’s Table and enjoy the blessings thereby but not without examining themselves.

SELF-EXAMINATION BEFORE PARTICIPATION (1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5).

“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28). Self-examination includes trying and approving oneself in the mirror of the word of God. In this wise, the communicant should consider the sacredness of this holy ordinance and compare his own thought, conscience, motive and general lifestyle. Such self-examination is both necessary and helpful when the Christian is contemplating participating in Lord’s Supper.

For the worthy communicants and churches, the blessings are numerous. The ordinance brings unity and love among believers and in the process stifles division and strife (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17). The Lord’s Supper, when administered with all its spiritual import, brings the fullness of life and grace to communicants. The benefits procured by the death of Christ and all other gospel benefits are refreshingly delivered again by the remembrance evoked at the Lord’s Table. If eating unworthily attracts sickness, certainly true believers who worthily go to the table will receive healing, health, spiritual vitality and other blessings.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Exodus	5-6	Psalms	127-133
TUE	“	7-8	“	134-136
WED	“	9	“	137-139
THUR	“	10-11	“	140-144
FRI	“	12	“	145-146
SAT	“	13	“	147-148
SUN	“	14	“	149-150

623 Lesson

PATTERN OF SCRIPTURAL GODLINESS

MEMORY VERSE: “In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing incorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you” (Titus 2:7,8).

TEXT: Titus 2:7-10

Apostle Paul instructed Titus to teach different categories of people in the church the lifestyles expected of them. His message was painstaking, pungent and panoramic.

Sequel to this, the great apostle, in our text, charges Titus, the pastor of the church in Crete, to set the pace and lay the example for others to follow. As a minister of the gospel, he must match his morals with his message. Else, he would pull down with one hand what he spent years to build with the other.

Paul seems to say: “Titus, you may be a dynamic, eloquent and persuasive preacher but, if you labor hard to teach sound doctrine without backing it up with your own life, your preaching will be ineffective. Paul himself had striven to follow this pattern all through his ministry. Reflecting on his life, he told the Philippian Christian: **“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example”** (Philippians 3:17).

Question 1: In your own opinion, why was Paul bold enough to instruct Titus on exemplary living?

EXAMPLE TO THE WORLD (Titus 2:7, 8; Matthew 11:29; Acts 20:35)

Paul the apostle held the issue of Christian character and integrity in high esteem. He had little or no room for those whose lives are diametrically opposed to their profession and teaching. He lived the Christian life and saw himself as a pattern worthy of emulation. To Timothy, he confidently testified: **“But thou hast fully known my doctrine,**

manner of life..." (2 Timothy 3:10). His manner was consistent with his message. Expectedly, he knew Titus would not make the desired impact if he did not conduct himself well before the saints. **"In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing incorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you"** (Titus 2:7,8).

On account of Titus' position in the church, he must be ahead in practicing these things, if he expects the virtues of sobriety, temperance, charity, patience and godliness in his members. To instruct others in the specifics of their responsibilities is good and commendable, but the example of the teacher is more important. Good life must tally with good doctrine. In all things, Titus, and by extension, all believers must show themselves models of good works. Men are wont to say: "we are not perfect; therefore we cannot live holy". This is not scriptural. Every New Testament saint is expected to be perfect even as his Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

Every Christian must be a pattern of good works. Goodness, as we know it, is a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit. Christians must be good to one another and to those outside the church. In all we do, we must have good purpose and esteem the good of others. Believers are to be beautiful specimens of the grace of goodness.

Moreover, Titus is admonished to teach the whole counsel of God while maintaining purity. Corruption of the Word, frivolity and shallowness in doctrine and teaching will not make the desired impact. Rather, sincerity, singleness of purpose and commitment to truth, must underline his ministry.

The calling of the servant of God is not secular; it is not meant to be used as a cloak to make merchandise of people but to highlight the glory and honor of God. Our speech must be sound, devoid of the fallible human knowledge. Scriptural truths must be explained in scriptural terms and, as much as possible, in Scripture language.

The idea of being examples to the world and the Church runs through the length and breadth of Paul's writings. In

his valedictory sermon to the Ephesians, he said: **“I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive”** (Acts 20:35). And to the Thessalonians, he wrote: **“For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you”** (2 Thessalonians 3:7). Jesus Christ, the greatest Teacher and Example, also told His disciples to follow Him. **“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you”** (John 13:15).

Question 2: Why must Christian leaders be at the forefront of uprightness?

EFFECTS OF EXEMPLARY LIVING (Titus 2:5, 8; Philippians 3:17; Luke 20:20, 26; Roman 2:24; 2 Samuel 12:14; 2 Peter 2:2)

“To be discreet, chaste... that the word of God be not blasphemed. Sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you” (Titus 2:5, 8).

It is pretty good to preach the gospel, read the Bible and give out tracts and literature to others but our priority should be to be specimens of the Bible in life and conduct. The fastest way to destroy our sermons and doctrines is to contradict them by our lives. What we spend an hour or two to preach, we live the rest of our lives. Our adversaries constantly seek occasion to find fault with us that they might hold us in derision and contempt. This was why, the apostle, on two occasions, gave Titus reasons why the believer must live righteously (verse 5, 8).

David was favored as a man after God’s own heart, but because he erred in a matter of morals, he gave the enemies of God opportunity to speak blasphemously: **“Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die”** (2 Samuel 12:14).

The critics of Jesus’ day also kept vigil on Him to seek occasion to accuse Him: **“And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so**

they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor" (Luke 20:20). But they failed woefully (verse 26). Our lives preach more powerfully than our precepts and sermons. Majority of the unbelievers do not have a copy of the Bible but can well read the epistles in us. If we live true to our vocation, skeptics will not have occasion to blaspheme the worthy name by which we are called. **"For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men"** (1 Peter 2:15). Finally, they will lack grounds for their evil allegations.

Question 3: What impact does a godly life make on the world?

EXHORTATIONS TO THE GODLY (Titus 2:9, 10; Matthew 16:24; Ephesians 6:5-8; Hebrews 3:1; 1 Peter 2:21)

"Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things" (Titus 2:9,10).

The apostle, here, charges servants in all categories to be obedient to their masters according to the will of God. They are to render service to their masters as unto the Lord. **"Not with eye service, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free"** (Ephesians 6:6-8). They are not to steal but to elevate honesty and faithfulness which bring glory to God. This same admonition applies to every servant of Christ.

Question 4: As servants of Christ, what should be our attitude in service?

Christ calls Himself our Master: **"But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ"** (Matthew 23:8, 10). He has chosen, called and commissioned us to love one another (John 13:35). Moreover, we are mandated to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). As servants of

Christ, our will, time and substance must be placed at the Master's disposal and use. Servants of Christ should be obedient to Him.

In upholding and demonstrating scriptural godliness, Christ remains our perfect Example. He is the spotless Son of God, worthy of our whole-hearted imitation. **“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”** (Matthew 16:24). In spite of difficulties, we must exalt godly living above all things. Our light must shine enough for God's name to be glorified. **“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”** (1 Peter 2:21).

Question 5: Who is our perfect example in godly living and how can we be like Him?

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Exodus	15	Proverbs	1-2
TUE	“	16	“	3-4
WED	“	17-18	“	5-6
THUR	“	19-20	“	7-8
FRI	“	21	“	9-10
SAT	“	22	“	11-12
SUN	“	23	“	13-14

624 LESSON

SOWING AND REAPING

MEMORY VERSE: “But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 9:1-15; Malachi 3:8-12; Galatians 6:7

The teaching of the Scriptures on sowing and reaping is clear. The believer who sows will reap; if he fails to sow, there will be nothing to reap. If he gives to God, he will reap, not just what he has given but more. Somebody puts it this way: “When I shovel to God He shovels back to me”. Prophet Malachi puts it another way: “**Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse ... and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it**” (Malachi 3:10).

SOWING: THE SECRET OF PROSPERITY (2 Corinthians 9:6-8; Luke 6:38; Acts 20:35b; Deuteronomy 28:1-6)

There have been inspiring testimonies in the Bible and in contemporary times of people who have been blessed as a result of giving unto God. The practice of *tithing and offering* is more than a duty that one does mechanically. A business enterprise does not expect a bank to pay interest on money that was not deposited with it. Yet, some Christians expect God to bless them financially when they are not committed to Him financially. Many sing: “Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold”, only to be reluctant each time they have opportunity to demonstrate their love and commitment to God.

In the economy of God, to receive, we must give. The mistake made by man is to want to receive without attempting to give. Many people desire and pray for prosperity but refuse to make use of the divine key to enjoying prosperity - sowing.

Just like farmers who expect to reap must sow, so also believers who expect to reap blessings of prosperity must sow by giving to God. Paul the Apostle said, **“Let every one of you lay by him in store...”** No member of the church is excluded. If we sow, we shall all reap.

Giving is like investing in God’s bank and it is indeed a spiritual sacrifice that brings fruit into the account of the giver. God is interested in your material needs. When you give to God, you reap untold blessings from Him. He says, **“And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightful land, saith the Lord of hosts”** (Malachi 3:11, 12).

Question 1: In what ways can one give to God?

Although God is in heaven, He works actively among men. We may not see Him physically, but we know that the work of the gospel is His major concern on earth. The local church or Christian ministry is synonymous with the storehouse in the Old Testament. We can gladden the heart of God today by entering into partnership with Him and giving our tithes and offerings regularly so that there will be meat **“in my (His) house.”** Evangelistic crusades, Christian literature, church projects and other evangelistic ventures are carried out by the church. God will not send funds from heaven in order to advance His cause on earth. He expects His people to “play” the role of His partners on earth. He rewards those who are faithful.

We must obey the word of God if we want Him to prosper us. There may be economic depression all over the world, God still showers prosperity on those who adhere to the divine blueprint for financial prosperity. In Deuteronomy chapter twenty-eight, prosperity, wealth and abundance are promised to the obedient. **“And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto**

the voice of the LORD thy God” (Deuteronomy 28:1, 2). God has not promised that blessings of prosperity will come to you in small measure, but that they will overtake you. What a blessing!

Just as God will bless the obedient, the word of God clearly reserves curses for the disobedient. **“But it shall come to pass, if thou will not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee”** (Deuteronomy 28:15). Can this be true? Read the words of Prophet Malachi: **“Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me...”** (Malachi 3:9). To prosper financially, you must obey the word of God on giving.

Question 2: Why is it necessary to give bountifully to God?

What is the secret of prosperity? Giving. What is the essence of Biblical giving? Biblical giving centers on the ability to earn material resources and the willingness to use these resources for the maximum benefit of the Kingdom of God. God’s material and financial assets have been put in the believers charge and he is called to give out of them for the progress of His work on earth. This kind of giving is over and above the tithe.

All Bible believers must cultivate the habit of giving. Jesus said: **“It is more blessed to give than to receive”** (Acts 20:35). One does not get into prosperity by hoarding. Have you ever wondered why many dear saints of God are ever incurring debts and finding it difficult to be balanced financially? It is because of their failure to give. **“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself”** (Proverbs 11:24, 25).

How are we sure that we shall reap when we give to God? Here is a divine assurance. **“...prove me now herewith saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven”** (Malachi 3:10). Prove God and you will experience overflowing financial prosperity. Your obedience and faith will attract bountiful harvest. What

you give to God (in tithe and freewill offering) will be returned to you in full and overflowing measure.

Question 3: Explain the law of sowing and reaping.

MANNER AND MOTIVE OF SOWING (2 Corinthians 9:7, 8; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Proverbs 11:24, 25; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7)

God blesses both our manner of giving and motive when we give. Giving should not be done reluctantly but cheerfully. Giving is one of the greatest challenges of the Christian life and one of the greatest privileges that we enjoy as believers. However, many are yet to discover the great potential in giving. The church often runs short of money because of lack of giving on the part of the members. Church projects and evangelistic outreaches are often abandoned, delayed or hindered as a result of lack of funds. Why is this so? It is because many are yet to understand the Bible doctrine of stewardship and the biblical principle of giving. Lack of money is not the problem, but a lack of clear understanding of our responsibilities as stewards of God's money.

Ministers of the gospel who have surrendered their lives for the spiritual benefit of members of the church should be supported. The missionary outreach of the church should also be supported. This is only possible if we give heartily and continuously. A proper estimate of the benefits that we enjoy from a faithful ministry and a true Bible church should propel us to give cheerfully. It is no secret that spiritual benefits cannot be really quantified. The only way of showing appreciation for what God is doing in and through the church is to give sacrificially, cheerfully and consistently towards the progress of His work.

According to our text, our giving should be characterized by bountifulness. Giving should be done with an open, generous heart and a willing mind. The metaphor of the harvest implies that the more generous the gift, the greater will be the return. Bountiful sowing attracts bountiful reaping. God will bless you materially when you give to Him. He will also bless you spiritually. **“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things may abound to every good work... Being enriched in everything to all**

bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God" (2 Corinthians 9:8, 11). Other benefits of giving include being loved of God "...**for God loveth a cheerful giver**" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Also, the Pastor and other ministers of God will glorify God for your liberality and their prayers for you will bring great blessings and they will "**glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you**" (2 Corinthians 9:13, 14).

Giving is not measured by the amount of money you give. In spite of their poverty, the Macedonian believers gave to the Lord: "**How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality**" (2 Corinthians 8:2). There were cases of individuals who made pledges to God without really knowing how to fulfil the pledge but soon found that God gave abundantly above what they even pledged. And they were able to pay their pledges. God is faithful. And giving is a venture of faith.

The Bible says, "**Let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him...**" (1 Corinthians 16:2). Does God expect a wealthy believer to pay his tithes? How about those who have little or no money? The unchanging word of God is the same for all and sundry: "**Let every one of you lay by him in store.**" Whoever you are and whatever your position, make conscious effort always to pay your tithe promptly. Those who are poor are not exempted from giving and the rich too should make conscious efforts to give - we should all give.

<p>Question 4: What are God's conditions for giving and to what extent can a believer give?</p>
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BENEFITS OF SOWING (2 Corinthians 9:8-11; Malachi 3:10-12; Luke 6:38)

Liberal and cheerful giving, though, may be forgotten by the giver - who may not "**let his left hand know what his right hand doeth**" - it is never forgotten by God. Those who see giving as a pleasurable act rather than a painful act will reap abundant fruits. The short-sighted always

feel that giving means losing, and that saving in the bank or some other way, means gaining. But the Bible says, **“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty”** (Proverbs 11:24). Those who sow little will reap little. The niggardly farmer reaps a lean, scanty harvest. A reluctant, miserly giver will reap a lean harvest. It becomes clear therefore that, in the providence of God, liberality in giving is the way of prosperity.

If God expects you to give, then you need to give priority to giving to Him, as you draw your budget week after week or month after month. You must cultivate the habit of giving to God first, before you start spending on your personal or family needs. **“Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty...”** (Proverbs 3:9, 10). God expects you to give the first fruits of your income or gain to Him. In practical terms, that means you give to God before you start spending what God has given you. Many people who are convinced and are willing to give, often fail to pay their tithe and offerings. This is because they often want to delay their giving a little bit and, before they know it, some other pressing expenses crop up and so they find it difficult to fulfil their financial obligation to God. “First-fruits” giving is the biblical pattern of giving. Give to God first. Get into the experience of giving to God today and He will give unto you **“good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over...”** Remember, what you sow is what you reap. Give to the Lord and in so doing, plant the seed so He can bless it and multiply it back to you many times.

Finally, expect a miracle. Believe that the windows of heaven will be opened and God will pour blessings of prosperity on you. Have you ever heard of a farmer who labored tirelessly but refused to gather the proceeds at harvest time? That would be strange. As you give, expect God to give you. **“...Prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it”** (Malachi 3:10).

THE LIFESTYLE OF THE SOWER (Hosea 10:12; Matthew 5:23-25)

One fundamental principle of acceptable giving is righteousness. For God to receive your tithe and offering, you must first give your life to Him. If you are a sinner or backslider, you must repent of your sins, confess them to God, forsake them, and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and personal Savior. Otherwise, God will not delight in your giving, and He will not reward you. **“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”** (Micah 6:8). God loves your soul more than your substance. He does not take delight in the sacrifice of fools. Saul believed more in sacrifice rather than in obedience to God’s word and he lost everything, including his life. **“And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams”** (1 Samuel 15:22). Your sacrifice and your heavy fats of rams burning with enticing aroma cannot please God. They are an abomination to the Lord if you are still living in sin and trespasses. Give your life first, then give your substances to the Greatest Giver.

Question 5: What is the most important thing you can give to God, and why should it be given first before anything else?

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Exodus	24-25	Proverbs	15-16
TUE	“	26	“	17-18
WED	“	27-28	“	19-20
THUR	“	29	“	21-22
FRI	“	30	“	23-24
SAT	“	31-32	“	25-26
SUN	“	33	“	27-28

**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.**

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2. Brooklyn: 140 Saratoga Avenue (718) 919-1166
3. Queens: 188-21 Suffolk Drive, St. Albans, NY 11412 (347) 200-3301
4. New Jersey: 23-39 South 20 Street, Irvington (973) 202-3989
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SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

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

MONDAY BIBLE STUDY

Rockland County	7:00 PM
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TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY

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

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

Rockland County	7:00 PM
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FRIDAY (REVIVAL SERVICE) FAITH CLINIC

All the Church Locations except Rockland County	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	11:00 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
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