

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VOLUME 49

"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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STATE _____

**A Publication Of
Deeper Christian Life Ministry
P.O. Box 59, University of Lagos P.O.
Akoka, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria
ISSN 0795-8994**

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OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

625 Lesson

DIVINE TEST FOR GIDEON'S ARMY

MEMORY VERSE: “And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go” (Judges 7:4).

TEXT: Judges 7:1-15

The previous chapter concluded with Gideon’s test to confirm God’s promised victory in the impending battle. But this study focuses on God’s test to determine the size and composition of the army required for the battle. The text presents us an army mobilized by Gideon to confront the Midian-led coalition who had come not merely to plunder, as at other times, but to crush and destroy the entire nation.

The enemy army was so large, numbering at least 135,000, whereas all the Israelite volunteers were only 32,000 (Judges 7:8; 8:10). The obvious disadvantage of this notwithstanding, the Lord decreed that Gideon’s army should be reduced. In spite of this, Gideon displayed rare courage as he cooperated with God all the way.

THE PURPOSE OF DOWNSIZING THE ARMY (Judges 7:1, 2; Deuteronomy 20:1-4; 1 Samuel 14:6; 2 Chronicles 20:15-29; Psalm 20:7, 8; 33:16-22)

Having been assured of God’s commitment to the success of the impending military campaign by the result of his fleece tests, Gideon’s army “**rose up early...**” (Judges 7:1). This is evidence of diligence, passion and a sense of responsibility. It reminds believers of the scriptural admonition against sloth and the call to diligence in ministerial as well as personal business (Proverbs 31:15; Romans 12:11). This enviable commitment of the army notwithstanding, the Lord decreed that the size be pruned.

Question 1: Why did God decide that Gideon's army must be reduced?

The purpose of the divine instruction to downsize is so clear. **“And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me”** (Judges 7:2). The Lord could see the tendency in the Israelites to attribute the glory of a successful battle to themselves or their human heroes (1 Samuel 18:6, 7). Obviously, God did not want a repeat of such a situation. He wanted His people to realize that He was their Source of victory in the battles of life. Therefore, as believers, whenever we secure any victory or breakthrough, we should ascribe all the glory to God without whom human efforts would amount to nothing (Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 3:5-7; Colossians 1:16-18). God will not share His glory with anyone, and for this reason, He often removes every prop of human confidence from the man He uses so that the excellency of the power will be of God and not of man (Isaiah 42:8; 2 Corinthians 4:7).

The command to reduce the number of soldiers was also to teach the Israelites to rely only on God for their victory and to make them realize that **“there is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength”** and **“there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few”** (Psalm 33:16; 1 Samuel 14:6). In view of the outcome of the battle, it was also to instill confidence in the heart of God's people in every generation that no matter how tense or trying a situation is, trusting God brings definite victory.

Question 2: What challenge can we receive from Gideon's response to God's command to downsize his army?

Gideon's response is an example to contemporary Christians to emulate. He neither overtly nor covertly argued with God. Rather, he instantly complied with divine directives. Evidently, he had control over any apprehension such a situation could evoke, and he was ready to obey God and leave the consequences to Him. Firstly, His implicit submission challenges us to always acknowledge

the superiority of divine intelligence as may be reflected in instructions or guidance we may receive from God's word directly or through His appointed Christian leaders (Haggai 1:12-14).

Secondly, Gideon's disposition teaches Christian leaders to always submit to God's input in the recruitment process for ministerial assignments. Also, each contemporary church worker must reckon himself as God's choice for specific responsibilities and should therefore serve faithfully to accomplish the divine purpose for his life.

Thirdly, Gideon's comportment reveals his faith in the infallibility of the Almighty. Like Him, Christians must avoid the presumptive tendencies that tempt people to succumb to faithlessness and self-management.

The secret of Gideon's confidence was obvious. Between the time of his call and the time he became an army commander, he had series of spiritual experiences which changed him from a timid to a confident personality, aided his consecration, prepared him for the Spirit-assisted ministry, and helped in confirming God's promised victory in the battle ahead. This shows that sound Christian experiences enhance a believer's level of faith and fruitfulness. Therefore, a Christian should not only maintain right relationship with God, but also constantly seek to improve on it. In contemporary times, this can be achieved by employing every scriptural means – personal study, prayer, corporate fellowship, attendance at specially organized church Programs, seeking counselling from mature leaders, and consistent obedience to all the counsels of God – to aid spiritual growth and development (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 10:25).

PROCESS OF DISENGAGING THE ARMY (Judges 7:3-8; 2 Chronicles 19:6-7; 2 Timothy 2:3-5)

“Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand” (Judges 7:3). The divine directive to reduce the size of the army specifically and progressively dictated the test forms as well as the grading guide. This was to ensure that the disengagement would

not be done arbitrarily: the fate of every volunteer soldier was to be determined through verifiable criteria.

The first was a self-assessment test. It was an application of the last scriptural condition for exclusion from warfare – “...**What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren’s heart faint as well as his heart...**” (Deuteronomy 20:8).

From the position of Gideon’s army by the well of Harod, they had a clear view of the enemies in the valley of Jezreel. The sheer numeric size and artillery doused the patriotic zeal of many volunteers; the anticipated outcome of the encounter quickly replaced their earlier confidence with instant paralyzing fear. Consequently, twenty-two thousand soldiers opted out. But their fear was needless given the abundant records of supernatural interventions on behalf of God’s people and promises of divine assistance in such situations (Exodus 14:5-7,13-16,26-31; Deuteronomy 20:1-4).

Question 3: How can one be free from fear?

Fear could be an indication of spiritual weakness owing to an absence of right relationship with God (Proverbs 28:1). To be free from its effects requires repentance, restitution and consistent righteous living. On the other hand, a standing believer can neutralize fear by faith. This can be cultivated by hearing, constantly meditating, refusing to doubt, and contending for the sanctity of the word of God. Faith can be carefully built up by prayer, consciously refusing to walk by sight and trusting in the invincible God in every battle (Romans 10:17; Joshua 1:8; Matthew 21:21; Jude 3; 2 Corinthians 5:7). With faith in the heart, a child of God has no cause to fear in the course of God-appointed assignments.

Given the antecedents of the children of Israel, those who passed the faith test were very few. In spite of this, God still declared the number too large for the operation; therefore, He recommended another test to further reduce the number. The second test was quite simple: “...**bring them down unto the water...**” to drink (Judges 7:4). As simple as this appears, 97 percent failed it. Like the vast majority of these soldiers, many others like Lot’s wife, kings Saul

and Joash, etc. have failed divine tests (Genesis 19:22-26; 2 Kings 13:14-19). However, a good number of believers like Abraham, Job, Daniel and his three friends, etc. have passed tests and trials which God permitted in their lives (Genesis 22:2-13; Job 1:13-22). This indicates that the outcome of a test is not as dependent on its nature as on the character of the candidate. To be victorious in life trials, every believer must maintain Christ-like character and firm confidence in God's promises at all times.

Question 4: What can Christians learn from the condition for the final selection?

The condition for the final selection was to lap at the water instead of bowing down upon the knees to drink. This emphasizes the importance of discipline and vigilance as credentials of a good soldier of Christ (2 Timothy 2:3-5).

COURAGE THROUGH DISCERNMENT (Judges 7:9-15; Psalm 37:34-38; 56:3, 4; Acts 15:36-38; Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Timothy 4:11)

The prospect of 300 men confronting such a large army could be disheartening. Yet, Gideon did not betray any feeling of uneasiness. This is because he could discern God's involvement in the matter, and he was convinced that the result would turn out for his good and the praise of God. Therefore, having finally selected the three hundred soldiers by divine guidance, he sent others back to their homes, not minding any unpleasant reaction that might result from his decision because he was sure God was involved. Christians are thus challenged to always keep faith in God's promises and power in spite of seemingly unfavorable conditions. Also, those who were sent back did not manifest any sign of rebellion or strife; they went back peacefully.

Question 5: What lessons can we learn from the comportment of the disengaged volunteer soldiers?

Like Gideon their leader, the disengaged soldiers could discern God's involvement in the whole process. So, they went back without grumbling or lobbying. Their exit glorified God rather than vilified them. Contemporary

believers who miss opportunity of spiritual service as a result of divine preference of another person should not engage in petty jealousy or feel consigned to failure. Rather, the experience should lead them to enhance their qualification and usefulness at other times. They should also render every physical, financial, moral and spiritual support to aid the success of God's Program through whoever He chooses (1 Samuel 23:16-18; 1 Chronicles 29:2-12).

“And it came to pass the same night that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand. But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host... and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant...” (Judges 7:9-11). Gideon was not superhuman; he had his own natural apprehension. But God did not leave him in that condition. Following God's leading, he went in company of a trusted servant, heard the divinely initiated dream as well as its inspired interpretation and rightly discerned it as a revelation of the enemies' already-defeated mindset. Thus encouraged, he praised the Lord and immediately proceeded with his army to obtain the divinely determined victory for his nation. Like Gideon's army, the New Testament church can always count on divine support in its fight against enemies of the gospel. When believers are able to discern the move of God and cooperate fully with Him, much progress will be made in the course of gospel work (Acts 16:9, 10).

God's tests in the text actually applied to Gideon first. If he had succumbed to doubt, the whole army would have failed to actualize God's plan and the nation would have suffered for it. This then places a great responsibility on those in leadership positions to always allow God have His way. It is as this becomes the norm that others will be able to follow God's Program and enjoy His blessings in full.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Exodus	34	Proverbs	29-30
TUE	“	35-36	“	31
WED	“	37	Eccl.	1-2
THUR	“	38	“	3-4
FRI	“	39	“	5-6
SAT	“	40	“	7-8
SUN	Leviticus	1-2	“	9-10

626 Lesson

GIDEON DEFEATS THE MIDIANITES

MEMORY VERSE: “Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us” (Psalm 44:5).

TEXT: Judges 7:16-25

In the earlier verses of this chapter, Gideon gathered an army to fight the Midianites. With an inspired strategy, the Israeli army used unconventional weapons and methods to scare and scatter their enemies, who in confusion slew one another. Divinely assisted, Gideon’s three hundred men defeated the over one hundred and thirty-five thousand Midian-led army. The victory shows the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His promise, the commendable cooperation of the Israelites and the courage of God’s people in the capture and execution of two fleeing Midianite princes. The whole episode shows that if we must win life’s battles, we must not dread the enemy, no matter how formidable they appear to be; neither must we depend on carnal weapons.

DIVINE STRATEGIES FOR CONQUEST IN BATTLE (Judges 7:16-18; Joshua 8:3-8; 1 Samuel 17:38-40, 45-50; Psalm 20:7; Proverbs 20:18; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Question 1: Why is it important to follow God’s strategy and leading in the battles of life?

Following the divine plan, Gideon divided his already whittled-down army of 300 into three equal groups each. One wonders what 300 soldiers were to accomplish against 135,000 allied forces of the enemy (Judges 8:10). But God who is always wiser, dictated the weapons to be used namely: empty pitchers, lamps and trumpets. These are feeble means by human standard to accomplish great victory for the people but God said, **“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than**

the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

God showed that the battle belonged to Him and He inspired the strategy to be used. Every battle has its own strategy and weapons. Believers can always secure victory over enemy forces by employing divine strategies and spiritual weapons. The lamp was hid in the empty pitcher until the appointed time when the pitcher was broken to reveal the lamp. The trumpet was also blown at the appropriate time. Though these were not conventional weapons of war, God used them to grant His people victory. The strategy of Gideon depicted a brilliant use of the elements of surprise attack and sudden fear to destabilize the enemy. As a matter of fact, the use of appropriate strategies in warfare is a common feature in scripture. Examples are that of Joshua against Ai and David against Goliath.

Question 2: Itemize the factors that aided Gideon’s victory.

Apart from the use of appropriate strategy, Gideon and his army won the victory as a result of leadership example that inspires confidence. Gideon led by showing example in time of war. He said, **“look on me, and do likewise... as I do, so shall ye do”**. As leaders, we must radiate faith and confidence in the face of challenges to inspire and encourage the people of God to confront their challenges (verse 17).

There was also unanimity that generated concentration. The soldiers were unanimous in their operation; they focused on the leader and did exactly what they saw him do. In the early church, when believers prayed with one accord, they had boldness and courage to forge ahead in spite of severe persecution.

The unanimous action of the people was an act of obedience. It was this obedience to divine instruction revealed through the leadership of Gideon that brought the victory. Believers must obey instruction from their spiritual leaders. We also see confession of faith by the people. They confessed with one voice, **“the sword of the LORD, and of Gideon”**. In the face of challenges, believers must base their confession on the word of God and not feelings or human opinions. The recognition of divine-

human partnership in overcoming the enemy is another valuable lesson we learn from Gideon's campaign against the foes. They depended absolutely on "**The sword of the LORD...**" and carried out their own responsibilities represented by the sword of Gideon.

DILIGENT STEPS FOR CONQUEST IN BATTLE (Judges 7:19-23; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6; 1 Samuel 17:48-51; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 6:14-17)

"And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, the sword of the LORD, and of Gideon" (Judges 7:20).

Question 3: Explain why time is essential for Christian warriors. Give examples of saints who waited for the appointed time and the results of their onslaught.

God's 300 soldiers led by Gideon came against the Midianites at God's timing; in the beginning of the middle watch, when "**...they had but newly set the watch**". Bible scholars affirm that the change of watch is the time when there is greatest confusion as it is difficult to know who is in charge in case of emergency. Besides, at such time, it is easy to catch soldiers off guard because they tend to relax. There is a perfect timing for every purpose (Ecclesiastes 3:1). It is great wisdom to wait for God's time in every endeavor of life, for it is then we can confound the enemy and take the victory. David had to wait for "**the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees**" before smiting the host of the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:23, 24). Jesus refused to be rushed into performing the miracle that turned water to wine (John 2:1-11). Paul was initially restrained from going to Asia and Bithynia but later he had a fruitful ministry in the same Asia (Acts 19:9, 10).

To gain victory, the soldiers blew the trumpets, broke their pitchers, beamed the light of the lamp and shouted, "**The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon**". This scenario created bewilderment and confusion in the camp of the enemy and so they fled. To conquer evil forces and extend Christ's kingdom on earth, Christians must 'blow the trumpet' of the gospel. The Israelites had no visible

sword but they believed in the invisible sword of the Spirit and confessed it. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit. Our victory in life's battle is guaranteed with the confession of faith in His word. The Scripture affirms that we shall have whatsoever we confess with our mouth (Mark 11:23). Gideon and his army manifested the steadfastness of courage as **“they stood every man in his place and about the camp”** (Judges 7:21a). God took over the battle and set the enemy against one another. God, not Gideon, is the Hero of this victory. In every age and any assembly where Christ is put at the center, the enemy camp cannot stand. If we will proclaim Christ in every nook and cranny of our community and engage in constant spiritual warfare against the host of darkness, it is certain that God will grant us victory.

DESIRABLE SUPPORT FOR CONQUEST IN BATTLE
(Judges 7:23-25; 5:9, 23; 2 Samuel 10:11; Exodus 17:11-13; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20)

“And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali and out of Asher, and out of Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites. And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, come down against the Midianites and take before them the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan. Then all the men gathered themselves together and took the waters of Beth-barah and Jordan” (Judges 7:24).

Fear and confusion gripped the Midianites. They fled and were discomfited. Other men of Israel who were not among the 300 but possibly of the 31,700 that returned regathered and joined in finishing up the work of pursuing and spoiling the enemy. Eventually, they brought the heads of the princes – Oreb and Zeeb – to Gideon (Judges 7:25). The cooperation of the Israelites at this point is very instructive. We are all to cooperate to accomplish God's work. Not being selected for a task presently is not exclusion, as the need may arise later for involvement. At such times, believers are to demonstrate unity and maturity.

Question 4: What are the roles of believers in finishing the unfinished task?

Advancing the kingdom of Christ is every believer’s ministry. Completing the unfinished task and exercising spiritual dominion is left for blood-washed saints to accomplish. We cannot fold our hands and sit on the fence. There is a call to enlist in God’s army for the final war in this end-time. Christ has spoiled principalities and powers and made an open show of them. Believers therefore must join forces to root out every remnant of the prince of darkness through unrelenting gospel proclamation. No true believer should refuse the call to go after souls for Christ. **“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”**, our Master commands.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Leviticus	3-4	Eccles	11-12
TUE	“	5-6	Songs	1-2
WED	“	7	“	3-4
THUR	“	8	“	5-6
FRI	“	9-10	“	7-8
SAT	“	11-12	Isaiah	1
SUN	“	13	“	2-3

627 Lesson

GIDEON'S CONQUEST OF ISRAEL'S ENEMIES

MEMORY VERSE: "And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host" (Judges 8:12).

TEXT: Judges 8:1-21

In the previous chapter, we learnt how Gideon encountered the host of Midian with three hundred men and how the Midianites fled to Bethshittah and Tabbath, the border of Abelmeholah. We also saw how he sought the assistance of the tribe of Ephraim against the Midianites leading to the killing of the two princes of Midian – Oreb and Zeeb. This chapter now gives us an account of how Gideon, through God's help, conquered Zebah and Zalmunna, the two kings of Midian and discomfited all the host of Midian despite various distractions on his way to victory.

GODLY WISDOM FOR PACIFYING ANGRY ACCUSERS

(Judges 8:1-3; Proverbs 15:1, 18; Leviticus 10:16-20; 1 Samuel 25:23; Joshua 22:15-34; Hebrews 13:1)

"And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply. And he said unto them, what have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer? God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that" (Judges 8:1-3).

Though the men of Ephraim yielded to Gideon's call to come down against the Midianites as they were being pursued by men of Israel (Judges 7:24), they were not happy that they were not involved in the campaign against the Midianites from the beginning and so expressed their

displeasure very sharply. This expression of anger either showed the desire of the men of Ephraim to cooperate with the other tribes to fight their common enemy, or was a manifestation of their tendency to complain when not given special recognition (Judges 8:1; 12:1). Whatever the case, Gideon had to abate their anger in order to maintain peace and avoid unnecessary distraction in the campaign against the real enemies whom they pursued. He therefore employed wisdom by exalting the exploits of the Ephraimites, praising them for doing even more than he himself had done.

Question 1: Explain the basis of the anger of the men of Ephraim against Gideon. What lessons do we learn from Gideon's response?

Gideon used the illustration of how the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim was better than the whole crop of Abiezer; and that pacified their anger. We need godly wisdom to pacify accusers, fault-finders and critics. We cannot but have people who will criticize our actions and deeds and, when they do, it needs not result to disagreement that will mar our relationship or slow the work as it would have done if Gideon had not pacified the Ephraimites. Criticisms have a way of putting us on our toes to make our conducts better. Some critics have good intentions as their criticisms can make us perform better or give us better understanding of the task at hand. It would be better to evaluate criticisms in order to ascertain the motive and the profit before we react negatively. We gain our brethren who criticize us if we apply godly wisdom in our answer. But when we respond negatively to all criticisms, we may miss important checks and balances that could help us perform better; and invariably, we get bogged down by unnecessary warfare with our brethren while the real enemy we ought to fight gets an opportunity to escape. This is one of the chief methods of Satan against believers that we should avoid.

“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife” (Proverbs 15:1, 18). The answer of Aaron to Moses' anger against Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron, for not eating the sin offering in the holy place pacified the anger of

Moses against them (Leviticus 10:16-20). Also the answer of Hannah to Eli when she was accused of drunkenness made Eli to pray for her (1 Samuel 1:15-17). The answer of Abigail to David when David was enraged against Nabal, her husband, pacified David's anger (1 Samuel 25:23). The soft and reasonable reaction of the Reubenites, Gadites and half tribe of Manasseh to the accusation of their brethren also pacified the anger of the children of Israel (Joshua 22:15-34). We therefore learn that: (i) we should be patient in the face of serious accusation or criticism before we react; (ii) we should pray for godly wisdom to answer our accusers or critics; (iii) our so-called critics or accusers may not be our enemies as their contribution to our actions may make us better.

GIDEON'S PERSISTENCE DESPITE WEAKNESS AND DISTRACTIONS (Judges 8:4-17; John 8:31; Acts 26:22; 1 Timothy 4:16; Colossians 4:2)

“And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them” (Judges 8:4).

Gideon never allowed the distractions from the Ephraimites to stop him and his 300 men from pursuing the Midianites. He offered his reply to their question and continued to pursue the Midianites. Although his men were fainting, they were able to cross river Jordan yet pursuing because of their persistence. They must have expended much energy in pursuing and trumpeting, yet they were pursuing. The Christian race is not for the faint-hearted; it is for those who can remain steadfast even amidst serious distractions. Paul claimed that he continued because he received the help of God (Acts 26:22).

In order to strengthen his fainting army, Gideon approached the princes of Succoth and the elders of Penuel for bread which they deliberately refused to offer. He did not yield to the temptation to fight these people, but continued to pursue the Midianites, planning to come back to them after winning the victory over Zebah and Zalmunna. This portrays Gideon as a very focused, persistent and determined man despite distractions and physical exhaustion of his army. We also need to remain steadfast in our journey towards heaven despite distractions and

oppositions from the enemies of the Cross! The battle for heaven can only be won through persistence in prayer, watchfulness and thanksgiving. Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in the east of Nobah and Jogbehah and smote the host. This caused Zebah and Zalmunna to flee. He pursued them until he was able to capture them alive, thus discomfiting the host. The reward of persistence is manifested here as they were able to conquer their enemies eventually.

Question 2: How can we overcome distractions in our journey towards heaven?

After capturing the two kings, Gideon returned to Succoth as promised. He caught a young man who helped him to identify the princes and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven of whom he encountered and displayed the two kings of Midian that God helped him to capture. He afterwards taught them lessons with the thorns and briars of the wilderness. He also went to the city of Penuel beating down their tower and slaying the men of the city. The princes, elders and the people of Succoth and Penuel suffered such a bad fate because they refused to help the people of God in the battle against their enemies by denying them food and by implication the needed strength for the battle when they had the means. They never believed the Israelites could defeat the Midianites. **“And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?”** (Judges 8:6). We need not give conditions before helping people especially when they are in the good course of the Lord. When we help the people of God, we are indirectly helping God. We are to do good unto all men, especially men of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

Question 3: What is the significance of helping people in their time of need?

Gideon had his priorities right and never allowed anything to deter him from them. We need to be focused on anything we do if we want to ride above all our circumstances. He was also able to return from the battle before the sun was up because he set his mind on it. We can easily accomplish our daunting tasks through good planning, focus and persistence.

GOD'S FINAL DEFEAT OF ISRAEL'S ENEMIES (Judges 8:10-13, 18-21; Psalm 9:10; Nahum 1:7; 1 Peter 3:8; Matthew 9:36; 18:27)

Zebah and Zalmunna camped their host in Karkor, about 15,000 men that were left of 135,000. Traversing the camp from the east of Noba and Jogbehah, Gideon was able to smite the host in a secured state without any hindrance. Hence, he quickly accomplished his purpose because God was with him in fighting the battle against the Midianites. We need to align with God as we fight the battle of life against sin, sickness, disease, poverty and other grievous foes in order to have a very easy ride against them. It was clear that God really fought for Israel and helped them to defeat their enemies. It is also instructive that their leaders cooperated with God by not giving up when they were weak as they pursued their enemies. They minded the same thing; their goal was to defeat their enemies and never allow any form of distractions.

Question 4: What were the secrets of Israel's victory over their enemies?

“Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men *were they* whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, as thou *art*, so *were they*; each one resembled the children of a king. And he said, they *were my brethren, even the sons of my mother: as the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you*” (Judges 8:18, 19).

The two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, killed Gideon's brethren. This particular deed portrayed their wickedness and ruthlessness. It was a deliberate show and act of wickedness on the part of these kings. They displayed their hatred for the people of God by killing Gideon's own brothers. Gideon never hesitated to give them the judgment they deserved. Gideon would have spared their lives if they had been more merciful. They failed the test of compassion that would have saved their own lives. We need to be compassionate even when under serious pressure! Though their actions are condemnable, the two kings did well in confessing their evil deed. It is, however, sad to note that they did not show any repentance for this deed. It is only the sins confessed and repented of that God forgives. Also, we note that time or circumstances never

cancelled their sin of murder. No sin will go unnoticed by God except it is confessed, repented of and forsaken (Proverbs 28:13).

Jether, Gideon's firstborn, was given the assignment to complete God's judgment on the enemies but he feared, being youthful and inexperienced. The kings, knowing they deserved death, requested Gideon to slay them probably to avoid further punishment or torture. They preferred to die quickly without considering the future judgment.

Here, we see the final defeat of Israel's enemies. The enemies of God's people will be finally defeated at the end of age and those who refuse to repent of their sins will be eternally judged when the kingdom of the earth will be turned to that of Christ. To escape the imminent judgment, every sinner is being called upon to repent of his sins, forsake them and have faith in the atoning work of Christ at Calvary.

Question 5: What can a sinner do to escape God's judgment?

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Leviticus	14	Isaiah	4-5
TUE	"	15	"	6-10
WED	"	15	"	8-9
THUR	"	17-18	"	10
FRI	"	19	"	11-12
SAT	"	20-21	"	13-14
SUN	"	22	"	15-16

628 Lesson

TEXT: Judges 8:22-35

GIDEON DESCENDS INTO IDOLATRY

MEMORY VERSE: “And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house” (Judges 8:27).

Our previous lesson focused on how Gideon conquered Israel’s enemies and punished the men of Succoth and Penuel who refused to assist him in the capture of the fleeing Midianite kings. He also subdued the faultfinding Ephraimites with a soft answer that turned away their wrath; whereas he overpowered the men of Succoth and Penuel forcefully (Judges 8:1-9, 13-14). In this study, we see the conclusion of the ministry of Gideon as a judge in Israel. Though he began with God in a very humble way and was used to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Midianites, his ministry ended on a sad note. His case is typical of how some servants of God end their ministries.

Indeed, Gideon was mighty as a military commander and strategist. He was strengthened by God until he became unwavering in faith; but our text portrays some of his weaknesses which marred what would have been a flawless life of a sacrificial servant of God.

The account of Gideon’s last days serves as a warning to believers not to allow any root of sin to spring up in their hearts. The sanctification experience must be diligently sought and obtained so that every form of hidden lust may be discovered and purged from the heart. The catastrophic end of Gideon’s ministry teaches us that regardless of what God has used a person to accomplish in the past, there is need for constant watchfulness and absolute dependence on the Lord to avoid falling into sin. “**Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall**” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Question 1: Why is it absolutely necessary for a Christian to possess the sanctification experience?

GIDEON'S HUMILITY IN REJECTING THE OFFER OF KINGSHIP (Judges 8:22, 23; John 6:15; Jeremiah 45:5; 1 Samuel 10:20-22; Acts 14:11-18)

“Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian” (Judges 8:22). After the defeat of the Midianites, the children of Israel expressed their appreciation to Gideon by offering him a hereditary monarchy. They made this offer to Gideon apparently out of gratitude and appreciation for delivering them from servitude and leading them to victory.

Question 2: What challenge does the response of the Israelites to Gideon’s heroic leadership role pose to believers today?

From the response of the Israelites to Gideon’s heroic leadership, we are challenged to always show gratitude to God for the victories He gives us in the battles of life. We should be thankful and appreciative of His leading and interventions which always make us triumphant over the enemies of our soul. The best way to show gratitude to God is to enthrone Him as King over our lives and be willing to surrender all to Him. Though the children of Israel missed the point by looking unto Gideon as the worthy king over them rather than the Almighty God, their motive and enthusiasm to show gratitude to their benefactor is instructive. When Gideon requested for the golden prey that they should have proudly kept as tokens of their conquest, they willingly parted with them. Are we as willing or ready to give our talents, time and possessions unto God who we claim to be our King? Do we so much appreciate God’s interventions in our lives to the point that we are ready to surrender unto Him whatsoever He asks of us?

However, it should be noted that the children of Israel made the offer of kingship to Gideon without thinking about its full implications. To appoint Gideon as their king would amount to setting God aside from ruling over them (1 Samuel 8:4-9). By making this offer, they inadvertently ascribed to Gideon the honor meant for God. Unknowingly too, they were asking Gideon to replace God in their lives.

But Gideon declined this offer. He said, **“I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you”** (Judges 8:23). The offer to have Gideon and his descendants rule over them showed how unthinking and ungrateful men could be. Rather than see God as the Source of their victory, they ascribed the glory to a mortal man. This teaches us that, inasmuch as we should appreciate the human instruments God uses for our deliverance, we should beware lest they displace Him in our lives. We must avoid hero-worship or ascribing the glory due to God to any human being.

Question 3: What is the significance of Gideon’s response to Israel’s offer of kingship?

First, Gideon’s response in rejecting Israel’s offer of kingship portrays his humility. He was not seeking position or power. Second, he was able to discern the implication of the people’s offer and would not take the place meant exclusively for God in their lives. It shows that Gideon had high regards for God’s rule over His people and would not usurp His position, no matter the pressure. Third, the strength of Gideon’s character was made visible in what he rejected: the honor conferred on him by men because it conflicted with God’s purpose for his life as a person and also for Israel as a nation. God’s purpose for Gideon was to be a judge, not a king; and His purpose for Israel was to be a theocracy, not a monarchy.

This attitude of Gideon is actually a Christ-like virtue. Jesus Christ declined the prospect of being made a king when it was the Father’s purpose for Him to be a suffering Servant. As believers, we must ever be discerning and sensitive to know the will of God for our lives and ensure we conform to it. We must also learn to discern when to receive honor and when to reject it.

The fourth significant instruction from Gideon’s rejection of kingship is that leaders should beware lest they allow the emotional response and appreciation from their admirers push them into the common pitfall of sharing God’s glory. If a leader allows the praise of men in his heart, it may bring divine judgment (Acts 12:20-23). Fifth, the Israelites had a tendency to imitate other nations around them. Those nations had kings who ruled over and led them out in

battle, but Israel was under a theocracy whereby God was their Ruler and Captain. By this request to have Gideon rule over them, it appeared they were subtly seeking to fulfil that desire to be like other nations. But Gideon would not be a party to such an agenda. We should be watchful lest we, in any way, encourage or support those who want to execute evil agenda in the church or society which may appear to hold a promise of personal gain for us.

GIDEON'S REGRESSION INTO IDOLATRY (Judges 8:24-27; 2:5-12; Exodus 32:1-5; 2 Kings 18:4; Galatians 2:18; 1 John 5:21)

“And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites)” (Judges 8:24). Though Gideon rejected the offer of kingship, he requested for the golden prey which the Israelites collected in battle, and they willingly gave him. Then Gideon used the gold to form an ephod which he put in the city of Ophrah. This became a stumbling block to him and the entire nation because they began to worship it. The ephod was part of the attire of Jewish priests.

This tragic mistake of Gideon began with the strange request for all the gold taken as spoils by the Israelites. If only he had resisted the lust for gold as he had stoutly rejected the crown, his story would have ended differently. But sadly, what the sword of the Midianites, the harsh criticism of the Ephraimites, the uncooperative attitude of the men of Succoth and Penuel could not do to Gideon, the gold of Midian did. His unbroken run of victory was cut short because of his unsubdued lust for gold, and he eventually slipped into idolatry.

Question 4: Point out the steps that led to Gideon's downfall.

Backsliding takes a gradual process. The steps that led to the downfall of Gideon should be well marked and avoided by every believer in Christ. First, he collected the gold and made an ephod without asking counsel of God. Though the Bible is silent on his motive or aim, it was clear that he did not consult God before this fatal adventure. Moreover, at the time of Gideon, the Ark was in Shechem, and that

was the proper place he should have set up the golden ephod if actually he did not have an ulterior motive. By this act, Gideon manifested an attitude of self-dependence that was the bane of many believers who were totally dependent on God at the beginning of their ministry, but as soon as they climbed the ladder of success, they became presumptuous and resorted to self-management.

Another notable step in Gideon's downfall was that he disregarded God's specific instruction that forbade rulers of the people from multiplying silver, gold and wives to themselves (Deuteronomy 17:15-17). The inevitable consequence of such violations of divine precepts was the kind of disaster Gideon experienced. The Bible warns against the love of money and the tendency to accumulate riches on earth (1 Timothy 6:6-10; Matthew 6:19-21). As a matter of fact, it is not only the love of money that becomes an idol in the heart, but anything we desire so strongly and exalt over and above the will of God for our lives. The Bible commands: "**Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen**" (1 John 5:21).

The third step in Gideon's downfall was his relapse to the idolatrous practice which he had discarded at the beginning of his ministry. Earlier, he had destroyed his family idol when God commanded him to do so (Judges 6:25-32). How tragic then that at the end of his life, he raised another idol in his family. In effect, he built again the thing he once destroyed, and by that he made himself a transgressor (Galatians 2:18). Believers should beware and not turn around to the evils they left behind. Under no guise should the people of God bring back into their lives or fellowship the idolatrous practices or methods they once repudiated.

The fourth step in Gideon's downward journey was that he did not consider the evil effect his golden ephod would have on the Israelites later. To a casual observer, the making of a golden ephod might appear to be a creative and ingenious religious innovation in the worship of God, but its potential evil would be foreseeable only to a discerning mind. The point is, the Israelites were known to be prone to idolatry – partly because of their association with Egypt and partly the influence of other nations around them. For a people of such background or pedigree, any monument, even the

legitimate and inspired ones could easily be turned into an object of worship. A case is the brazen serpent that Moses made for the healing of those who were bitten by fiery serpents in the wilderness. Though it was made as a result of divine instruction, and typified an aspect of Christ's redemptive work, the children of Israel turned it into an object of worship and King Hezekiah had to destroy it later (Numbers 21:8,9; 2 Kings 18:4). We should be wary of taking decisions, or initiating anything that could predispose other people to sin and produce negative results in the lives of upcoming generations.

Question 5: Is the action of the Israelites justifiable in going a whoring after Gideon's ephod?

The action of Gideon in making the golden ephod was wrong, but the Israelites too were not justified for turning it into an object of worship and idolatry. This is a challenge to the church that the membership should be on guard irrespective of their status against unscriptural innovations that some may want to introduce in the church. People are prone to venerate mere religious objects which are designed to illustrate some deeper and basic spiritual truths. In our day, people have almost idolized personalities, so-called holy water, anointing oil, mantle, apron, handkerchief, etc. Even the emblem of the Cross or the Bible as a book can become idols in the hands of the ignorant. Believers should avoid such abominable error and realize that whatever tokens God decides to use in teaching us some basic spiritual concepts should not be turned into objects of worship.

GIDEON'S FAMILY LIFE AND DEATH (Judges 8:28-35; 9:1-6; Deuteronomy 17:17; 1 Corinthians 7:2; 1 Kings 11:1-9)

“And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives” (Judges 8:29, 30). Our text concludes with a brief summary of the family life of Gideon. Though he was a successful warrior who overcame the Midianites, his family life portrayed his moral laxness and tendency to a life of excess. He was a polygamist. Although he rejected the offer of kingship over

Israel, he dabbled into those things which were forbidden by God (Deuteronomy 17:17).

Question 6: How can believers avoid the kind of failure we observe in the family of Gideon?

As believers, we must identify and deal with those tendencies in our lives that may ensnare or imperceptibly lead us to evil. We must allow God to uproot completely from our hearts every inordinate desire for wealth, pleasure, praise of men, power, leadership position and prominence. From Gideon, we learn that it is possible to be heroic and very strong in battle but morally weak.

In order to avoid the tragic consequences in the family of Gideon, believers must keep the standards of marriage as shown in the Holy Scriptures. Monogamy is God's unchanging standard for marriage. Therefore, all forms of multiple marriage – polygamy, wife-swapping, adultery, concubinage, divorce and remarriage (while other partner is still alive) – must be avoided.

Gideon lived long and died in a good old age. But after his death, the children of Israel forgot the Lord and plunged into full-scale idolatry. What began in the twilight of Gideon's life as a small spiritual digression snowballed into full-blown idol worship. They worshiped Baalim and ascribed the covenant pact they had with the Lord to Baal-berith (meaning the lord of the covenant). They also forgot Gideon and did not show kindness to his family. The end of Gideon was disastrous and his ministry did not outlive him.

As we conclude on the latter years of Gideon, we are reminded to emulate his faith which helped him to subdue kingdoms (Hebrews 11:32, 33); his focus and tenacity of purpose which motivated him and his men to keep pursuing, though fainting (Judges 8:4); as well as his self-effacement that made him defer to the criticizing people of Ephraim, and his rejection of the offer of kingship (Judges 8:1, 22, 23). We are, however, warned to avoid his lusts and presumption that swayed him into idolatry.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Leviticus	23	Isaiah	17-18
TUE	“	24-25	“	19-20
WED	“	26	“	21-22
THUR	“	27	“	23-24
FRI	Numbers	1	“	25-26
SAT	“	2	“	27-28
SUN	“	3	“	29

629 Lesson

THE CONSPIRACY OF ABIMELECH

MEMORY VERSE: “He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail” (Proverbs 22:8).

TEXT: Judges 9:1-33

The last study ended with the unscriptural family life of Gideon and the descent of Israel into idolatry. The current study presents a clear picture of the dire consequences of polygamy and deviation from the path of righteousness. Truly, **“the way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble”** (Proverbs 4:19). This is reflected in the family life and regression of Gideon.

Abimelech, the son of Gideon’s concubine, aspired to become king. This he pursued by unscriptural means: he killed his father’s sons and usurped kingship. He used tribal sentiment to achieve his goal. Shortly after usurping the kingship, God began the process of retribution for his ominous act.

People who desire power always seem to outnumber those who are able to use the power wisely once they have it. This is because power has a way of taking over the control of the person wielding it. This is especially true in the case of inherited or usurped but unmerited power. Abimelech’s life showcased corruption through power-mongering.

Question 1: What was the driving force that made Abimelech to kill his half-brothers and the repercussions of his unguided quest for power?

Abimelech’s lust for power pushed him to wipe out not only his brothers, but a whole city that would not submit to him (Judges 9:5, 45). Ironically, he was fatally bruised by a woman. Believers should submit to the control of God. They should not be occupied with the quest and lust for power or position (Jeremiah 45:5a; James 1:14-16).

CRAFTINESS AND CARNAL PLOT OF ABIMELECH

(Judges 9:1-16; 2 Samuel 15:1-6, 10-18; Proverbs 13:10, 11; 1 John 3:15)

“And he went unto his father’s house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being three scores and ten persons upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself” (Judges 9:5).

Sequel to the death of Gideon, Abimelech wanted to reign over Israel. In order to achieve this, he went to the city of Shechem, his mother’s hometown to drum support for himself. In the course of seeking the position his father humbly reserved for God alone, Abimelech slew all his half-brothers, except Jotham who managed to escape. God’s word is against carnal ambition and self-exaltation. **“And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased...”** (Matthew 23:12). This was the type of unscriptural audacity manifested by Absalom that eventually led to his untimely death.

Question 2: What are the pitfalls a believer must avoid on his path to progress?

Believers should not use any carnal means such as lobbying, campaign, calumny, god-fatherism, etc. to get to position of authority, whether in the church, place of work or the society at large. Some today even send assassins to terminate the lives of individuals whom they intend to overthrow, or cunningly destroy them with their tongues. This kind of attitude is unethical, ungodly and unscriptural.

Israel’s king was to be the Lord and not man, but Abimelech wanted to usurp the position reserved for God alone. In his selfish quest, he killed all but one of his seventy half-brothers. People with selfish desires often seek to fulfill them in ruthless ways. Check your ambitions to fathom if they are approved of God or they are egocentric.

Question 3: Apart from the bloody action of Abimelech, mention at least four other events that took place at Shechem.

“And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver...” (Judges 9:4). The complicity of Abimelech’s

kinsmen in Shechem is condemnable. It is unfortunate that the inhabitants of the city where Israel renewed their national covenant with God could descend so low as to support the open dissent against the word of God (Joshua 24:32). Their financial support aided Abimelech's plan to kill his half-brothers. Besides, they collaborated to install him as king thereby displacing God as King in the land. It is disturbing that there was no record of any dissenting voice against this move. Believers should be careful not to partake in evil through overt or covert support of the same (Exodus 23:2; 1 Timothy 5:22). Also, Christian parents and guardians should be bold enough to correct any wrong move or tendency they may notice in their children or wards.

JOTHAM'S PARABLE AND ITS INTERPRETATION

(Judges 9:7-21; 2 Samuel 12:1-13; Luke 3:9; Matthew 13:3; Leviticus 19:15; 1 Timothy 5:21)

Question 4: What is a parable? In Jotham's parable, what do the trees and the brambles signify?

A parable is a short prose which illustrates one or more principles or lessons. Nathan used a parable to speak to David when he took Uriah's wife after terminating his life in the battlefield. Our Lord Jesus also made use of parables to convey His messages to the hearers (Matthew 13:3).

In Jotham's parable, the trees represented Gideon's seventy sons, and the bramble represented Abimelech. The parable stressed that a productive person would be occupied with good activities that glorify God and benefit humans other than power politicking. Believers who vie for political posts may be easily influenced negatively by the carnal majority who surround them. A worthless person on the other hand would be glad to seek or accept the honor but would destroy his subjects. Like the bramble, no real security or protection could come from Abimelech. Jotham's parable came true when he destroyed the city of Shechem and burned "**the tower of Shechem**" (Judges 9:45-49). He was finally killed through the instrumentality of a woman who broke his skull with a piece of millstone and one of his armor bearers who slew him eventually at Thebez (Judges 9:53,54).

Jotham told the story about the trees in order to help the people order their priorities right. He did not want them to appoint a leader of low character. This is the first allegory in the Bible, and perhaps the most ancient parable on record. Jotham's interpretation and application of this allegory to the present anointing of Abimelech makes clear the purpose of his speech. It was prophetic of the curse upon the reign of Abimelech and of the destruction of the men of Shechem and Millo (Judges 9:19, 20). Our motive of serving as leaders should be critically examined. It should not be for the purpose of praises, prestige or power. In the parable, the good trees chose to be productive and to provide benefits to the people. As we aspire to leadership positions, we should make sure our priorities are right. In choosing leaders in the church, favoritism, tribalism and sectionalism must be shunned. It should be done based on scriptural qualifications and the Spirit's guidance which will involve seeking the face of God earnestly and not just by outward judgment. For **“man looketh on the outward appearance but the Lord looketh on the heart.”**

GOD'S VENGEANCE AND FULFILMENT OF JOTHAM'S PARABLE (Judges 9:22-29; 1 Samuel 16:14; Exodus 9:1-7; Acts 9:1-9; Ecclesiastes 8:12, 13)

After reigning for three years over Israel, God allowed an evil spirit of disunity and contention to cause disagreement between Abimelech and the men of Shechem who dealt treacherously with him (Judges 9:22, 23). The demon worked through Gaal to trigger the trouble between Shechem and Abimelech. God allowed this judgment for two reasons: to punish Abimelech for killing his half-brothers and the men of Shechem for aiding Abimelech in carrying out murderous acts against his brothers. The men of Shechem who aided him to accomplish his plan were the first to turn against Abimelech in his downfall.

Question 5: Why is God's judgment delayed in some cases?

During Abimelech's short reign, it appeared there would be no retribution for mass murder of his brothers. Eventually, the day of divine recompense came. Those who persist in their evil and pernicious ways should also expect God's judgment, if they fail to repent and retribute their ways. We are at sea sometimes as we ponder on why

evil seems to prevail. But the scripture has established it that no matter how long, sinners and wicked people will not go unpunished. **“Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God”** (Ecclesiastes 8:12, 13; Job 18:1-21; Jeremiah 12:1; Ecclesiastes 8:10, 11).

God promised to deal with sin but in his own appointed time, not ours. God gives space for sinners to repent because of His tender mercy. If they remain adamant and unyielding, He will then execute His wrath on them. Pharaoh had opportunities to repent but he resisted God’s mercy and was judged. Saul of Tarsus embraced the opportunity and privilege of God’s mercy; he bowed before Christ in repentance and recognition of His lordship. He was transformed and became an apostle and winner of souls. God is patient with evildoers only because He does not want them to perish. He is **“longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”**. Sinners and evildoers are called upon to repent before divine judgment falls.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Numbers	4	Isaiah	30
TUE	“	5-6	“	31-33
WED	“	7	“	34-35
THUR	“	8-9	“	36
FRI	“	10	“	37
SAT	“	11	“	38-39
SUN	“	12-13	“	40

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

Lesson 30

WARNING AGAINST BACKSLIDING

MEMORY VERSE:“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 10:1-15

In the preceding chapter, Apostle Paul pointed out the possibility of a believer becoming a castaway after an initial experience of salvation and a lifetime of service to God. Comparing the Christian life to a race, he emphasized the fact that a participant could be disqualified from receiving the prize if he/she does not run according to the rules. Therefore, there is the need to maintain self-discipline and avoid those things that can cause a person to be rejected by God.

In the present chapter, Apostle Paul continues this train of thought, apparently to warn some people in the church who felt eternally secured in their salvation even though they lived in sin. He warned believers against the danger of backsliding and thereby debunked the damnable heresy of the doctrine of eternal security. He emphasized that the great privileges that the Israelites enjoyed in their relationship with God were typical or illustrative of what believers in the New Testament enjoy. But it is sad to note that despite those privileges the Israelites enjoyed, many among them who went into sin were destroyed. And the account of their failure was written to warn subsequent believers of all ages against the danger of falling back into sin.

There is no truth in the doctrine of unconditional security of believers. Those who are secured in Christ are those who continue in the word of God and in true righteousness to the end.

Question 1: From the example of the children of Israel, how true is the doctrine of eternal security?

The Corinthian church which is the focus of our study had a special place in the heart of Paul the apostle. They enjoyed very deep teaching of the word of God and witnessed the great manifestation of God's power. They became a very strong church but later began to lose the grace of God. Like Israel of old, the Corinthian church enjoyed great privileges and spiritual blessings from the Lord but they backslid. Their records are shown to contemporary Christians **"to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted"**; and their backsliding should serve as a warning to us, **"upon whom the ends of the world are come"** (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11).

PROPER PERSPECTIVE OF DIVINE PRIVILEGES: (1 Corinthians 10:1-5; Zechariah 9:16,17; Romans 2:4; 11:18-22; Hosea 4:6; 2 Chronicles 14:2; 16:9-12; Nehemiah 8:8)

In our text, Apostle Paul enumerated some of the special privileges that the children of Israel enjoyed as a result of their covenant relationship with God. They were under the cloud and they crossed the Red Sea. These were tokens of divine protection, deliverance and guidance. They were also identified with Moses, ate manna and drank of the spiritual Rock, which was Christ. But despite these peculiar privileges, they backslid and incurred the wrath of God. This reminds ministers of their responsibility to always ensure that God's people are clearly taught the word of God **"line upon line"** (Isaiah 28:10). This is to avoid the trap of ignorance that pervades the community of many so-called Christians today. Knowledge of the truth is the panacea to the destructive bait of false teaching and satanic deceptions that make many steadfast believers backslide. Apostle Paul's statement, **"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant..."** buttresses this point. Believers need to be enlightened on the essence of God's goodness so as to avoid the error of thinking that the enjoyment of God's favor can be equated to His approval of one's life even when lived in sin. In our contemporary age when men seek after miracles, signs and wonders and are careless about holiness and righteousness, we must not fail to declare all the counsel of God. We must not be negligent, **"to put [them] always in remembrance of these things..."** (2 Peter 1:12).

This study drives home the often forgotten truth that a

person can partake in astounding miracles and yet miss the kingdom of God if careless with his Christian stand and commitment. It is often said that “privilege is no insurance against ultimate failure”. The same people who enjoyed special favor and great privileges from God were punished by Him when they backslid.

Question 2: Why should ministers of the gospel be committed to emphasizing the truth from time to time?

Paul rehearsed the examples of the Jews in order to dissuade the Corinthian Christians from communion with idolaters and a false sense of security in any sinful course. Divine blessings and privileges not seen in the right perspective can lead to unrestrained euphoria which makes the believer forget where he started and thus lead him to eternal damnation.

The teaching on eternal or unconditional security has no scriptural basis. There exists the possibility of departing from the faith once delivered to the saints if we allow our hearts to be “**overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life...**” (Luke 21:34). You can fall from grace to grass through spiritual pride. God’s favor will continue to abide only with those who are living right and whose lives are constantly glorifying His name. At the time Judas was chosen, he also had the prospect of being faithful to the end. He was a disciple and apostle of Christ. He was called like others, he witnessed the miracles and blessings of Christ’s ministry like others, yet he fell from grace. You might have come out of Egypt but you have not reached Canaan land. You might have been redeemed from sin but you have not reached the heavenly portal. It is not the beginning of the journey that matters most but making it to the end. We must not presume upon our great privileges or profession of the truth. “**Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it**” (Hebrews 4:1).

Question 3: What do you understand by eternal security? And how can a believer be secured eternally?

PERTINENT PRECEPTS FROM PREVIOUS PARTAKERS OF DIVINE PRIVILEGE (1 Corinthians 10:6-11; Hebrews 12:1; Proverbs 14:14; Romans 12:3; 15:4; Judges 8:22-27; 2 Chronicles 26:5, 15-20; Matthew 26:69-75)

As a faithful minister, Paul put the church in remembrance of those things which led to the fall of previous partakers of God's grace. This was done to caution them against falling into similar sins. The devil has not changed his pattern or strategy. He still plays upon man's intense and passionate desire for prosperity, pleasure, power, progress, popularity, possession and pre-eminence. He uses the bait that is relevant and related to our inward desire, pleasure and liking to draw us to himself. True children of God must therefore be cautious to not only flee idolatrous ceremonies, festivals and events but ensure that they do not turn their career, family, pursuit, wealth or academic laurel to an idol. Idolatry is a precursor to frivolity, lewdness and hardness of heart. Therefore, beware!

Question 4: How do contemporary believers practice idolatry today?

Murmuring against God or against His servants under any circumstance is not a tag for heaven-minded saints. It is a sin that greatly provokes God. Corrections from the pulpit should be taken with humility so that it can bring **"peaceable fruit of righteousness"** in our lives. Those who reject correction are not children but bastards. **"But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons"** (Hebrews 12:8).

That Bible characters like Noah, Gideon, Asa, Uzziah, David, Peter, etc. fell into sin after they had good testimonies underscores the need for us to be watchful at all times. If you are redeemed and made righteous by the precious blood of Jesus, then you need to be careful. If others fell, you too can fall. Presumptuous and self-confident people often fall into sin. Peter wanted to honor the Lord. He wanted to stand by the Lord till the very end. But he was too self-confident and therefore denied the Savior thrice. **"Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come"** (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Question 5: How can a believer avoid backsliding in these last days?

Believers can avoid backsliding by laying aside the things that bring temptations and taking necessary steps to victory through vigilance (1 Peter 5:8), prayer (Matthew 26:41), conviction (2 Timothy 3:14), trust (2 Timothy 1:2), obedience (Psalm 119:60), resistance (James 4:7), and yieldedness to God (Romans 6:13). As heaven-bound pilgrims, we must depend on the Lord for His sustaining grace and power.

PERTINENT PLEA AGAINST OVERCONFIDENCE AND EXHORTATION AGAINST DESPAIR (1 Corinthians 10:12-15; Judges 16:20, 21; 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5; Jude 21, 24)

Our salvation, boldness at the throne of grace, conviction and uncompromising stand on the truth are all by grace. Without grace, we are as ordinary as other people.

Some moral weakness was shown by King Asa. For thirty-five years he reigned as king, he ruled with the fear of God. There was no idolatry but peace, rest and tranquility in his domain. But later, he began to waver in his commitment to the Lord. He became oppressive and dictatorial. The Lord sent His prophet to warn him. But he would not listen. Instead of taking corrections, in his pride, he became angry at the prophet's rebuke. Chastisement came by way of disease. The warning was meant to draw him back to the Lord. But he was unrepentant. He could not seek the Lord. Instead, he sought cure from the hands of herbalists and witch doctors. He died from the disease. Uzziah was helped by the Lord to become a highly successful inventor and an engineer but success made him to swell with pride. He became high-minded, arrogant and incorrigible. He died a leper. David, the man after God's heart became so morally weak that he killed the husband of a woman with whom he committed adultery. Peter walked on the water, witnessed the transfiguration of Christ and stoutly defended the Lord by cutting off someone's ear when they came to arrest Him. Thereafter, he denied the Lord thrice.

Question 6: Mention two characters in the Old and New Testaments who fell due to self-confidence.

From the example of Israel as recounted in our text, we can identify the causes of backsliding. First, ignorance of the word and ways of God. Second, belief in false doctrine. When a person believes the lie of eternal security and other perverted notions of the gospel, there is every tendency for that individual to be careless. Third, overconfidence. The feeling that one has come a long way in following the Lord and can no longer fall is a serious mistake that has led to the fall of many frontline soldiers of the Cross. This was the mistake of Peter when the Lord warned him concerning his impending fall (Matthew 26:31-35). As a Christian, the devil is battling for your soul. To be victorious in the battle, you need to be violent with self, bad habits or anything that can hinder you from getting into the Kingdom.

Fourth, failure to watch. Fifth, permitting so-called 'small sins' like murmuring and lusts to remain in our lives. This will open the door to other sins. Sixth, failure to take the way of escape that God graciously provides in times of temptation. Seventh, presuming that God's judgment against sin is remote simply because it is delayed.

In most cases, backsliding occurs among God's people when there is no strong leadership; when there is compromise and unequal yoke; inability to manage worldly success and love for the world (Exodus 32:1-8; 1 Kings 11:4; 2 Chronicles 25:2-14; Luke 8:12-14; 2 Timothy 4:10).

<p>Question 7: How can a believer avoid despair and maintain victory over Satan and sin?</p>

We are most likely to fall when we are most confident of our own strength. Distrust of our strength makes us to be vigilant and to put our trust and dependence on God. This gives us the best security against all sins. God is able and indeed has promised to keep us from falling but we must look to ourselves (2 John 8).

While warning us against the danger of backsliding, the Lord adds a word of comfort. As much as he warns against presumption, He would also keep us from despair and undue feeling of insecurity. God is faithful to keep us from the tempting world full of snares. Though we are to be watchful and vigilant, he will proportion our burden to

our strength. Hence, we should not be terrified or amazed when temptation comes.

We have all the encouragement from the word of God to flee from sin and prove faithful to God. We cannot fall by a temptation if we cleave fast to Him. To keep and maintain our victory, we are warned to be wise, walk uprightly, wash and be clean, wage war against the flesh and Satan. If we remain watchful and faithful to the end, we shall win the crown of life from our Savior.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Numbers	14	Isaiah	41
TUE	“	15	“	42-43
WED	“	16	“	44
THUR	“	17-18	“	45-46
FRI	“	19-20	“	47-48
SAT	“	21	“	49
SUN	“	22	“	50-51

631 Lesson

CAUTION AGAINST COMPROMISE

MEMORY VERSE: “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s Table, and of the table of devils” (1 Corinthians 10:21).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 10:16-33

The possibility of backsliding after conversion has been highlighted in the last lesson. Backsliding starts with little acts of compromise such as feasting with unbelievers at worldly ceremonies or partaking of food dedicated to idols. Our text examines the differences of opinions among Christians concerning food sold or presented in public and the propriety of Christians eating such meats. In the first century Corinth, most meat sold in the market may have been offered in worship to different gods.

In our text, Paul the apostle addressed the controversy of what the believer’s attitude ought to be in order to avoid any form of compromise with the world. He also talked of the exercise of Christian liberty and consideration for the conscience and faith of other people. Here, the apostle encourages believers to maintain sound Christian conviction without compromise.

After being saved from sin, a believer still lives in the world and continues his normal relationship with other people. But the challenge to every heaven-bound Christian is to live a righteous life in spite of the evil and possible allurements of the world (Titus 2:12). Compromise is evil; it is a canker that can destroy faith and lead to backsliding of many true worshippers of God.

Question 1: What is compromise?

A dictionary defines compromise as “a settlement of differences by mutual concessions; an agreement reached by adjustment of conflicting or opposing claims, principles

etc. by reciprocal modification of demands”. In scripture, compromise is when a believer adjusts God’s standard of righteousness to accommodate or agree with his own or a worldly standard. A compromiser tries to live in two worlds at the same time. He wants to live as a Christian and also as a worldling. Thus, he modifies God’s strict demands and lowers His standard of holiness to the level that is comfortable to him. So, compromise is having fellowship, conformity and agreement with the world in any form. A person may compromise in doctrine or in practice. There are those who profess and preach sound doctrine but compromise when it comes to practice. But the Bible warns believers against compromise of any form (Proverbs 1:10).

COMMON CAUSES OF COMPROMISE AMONG CHRISTIANS (1 Corinthians 10:16-19; 8:1-13; Romans 14:1-8; Genesis 3:3,4; Judges 13:14; 14:3; 1 Kings 13:1-19; 22:1-4; Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Colossians 2:16-23)

Redeemed, believers are integrated into the body of Christ. Their fellowship is not only with God but also with fellow believers. They partake of the communion of the body of Christ as their spiritual lives continue to blossom (1 Corinthians 10:16).

However, the believer begins to lose spiritual steam whenever he starts admiring and associating with the people of the world. The scripture said the believer should steer clear of any form of association with the world (2 John 2:15-17). Even in the face of scientific advancement, information technology and the resultant modernization, civilization and globalization, God’s standard remains unchanging. Believers should remain free from worldly entanglements and religious syncretism.

Idolatry in any form is sin. Verses 16 to 19 of the text show that to eat things offered to idols is utterly inconsistent with true Christianity and it is downright idolatry. It amounts to having fellowship with devils and it is a disconnection of fellowship with God.

Christians are admonished to accept, pray and eat food or meat presented to them in the name of the Lord without doubting in as much it is certain that it was not connected with idol worship.

Question 2: Mention some causes of compromise among Christians.

Temptation to compromise may come from peers, ungodly colleagues, family members and through interactions with people. Some unsaved friends and relations may be used of the devil against us to shift our ground on wholesome truths which we have believed. This comes in the following ways: (i) wrong relationship and association with backsliders or carriers of false doctrine (1 Corinthians 15:33; 2 John 9-11); (ii) performing dubious functions and engaging in or promoting falsehood; (iii) collection of gifts that lures into immorality or dresses that expose nakedness (Ecclesiastes 7:7); (iv) giving or receiving money or gifts to have favor or give advantage; (v) desire to compete with others in fashion and socialization; (vi) desire to please peers, business partners or kinsmen (1 Kings 11:4; Hosea 7:8,9); (vii) low persuasion and lack of knowledge of the Word (Hosea 4:6); (viii) unequal yoke in pursuit of ambition, career, partnership or sourcing for financial assistance; (ix) fear of men; (x) desire for pleasure (1 Timothy 5:6); (xi) intimidation by the crowd; (xii) satanic influence and deceit (2 Corinthians 2:11; 11:11-14); (xiii) uncontrolled appetite (Genesis 25:31-34; Hebrews 12:16,17; Judges 14:1-3).

CONSEQUENCES OF COMPROMISE (1 Corinthians 10:20-30; Genesis 3:4-19; 16:5-12; 34:1,2; 1 Kings 13:18-25; 22:4, 31-33; 2 Chronicles 20:35-37; Judges 16:20; Matthew 27:5; Acts 1:16-20; 2 Timothy 4:10; Hebrews 12:16,17)

“But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils” (1 Corinthians 10:20). It is inconsistent as well as shocking for believers to partake at the tables of the Lord and of devils. The Apostle dissuades from such idolatrous practice which culminates into the dangerous consequence of stirring up the Lord’s jealousy, fighting against Him and attracting His anger and judgment. **“Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?”** (Verse 22).

Compromise with the world is nothing but abomination to God. It is not possible to be in alliance with Christ as true children of God and still worship idol in any form.

The expression of social and religious lives in Corinth was rooted in idolatry. Virtually every aspect of their lives was linked with idolatry. But the nature of idolatry might not necessarily be a physical idol: money, position, power, pleasure and fame are idols that people worship with passion and dedication today. Yet, God is jealous and warns His children not to get involved in idolatry in which ever form it appears.

A life of compromise puts a Christian in a situation where he/she comes under pressure to go contrary to God's commandments. For instance, a close alliance, friendship or joint business venture with a non-believer would, sooner or later, press a believer to succumb to unscriptural practices. Unbelieving friends would expect believers to respect and accept their idolatrous practices and partake of their dainties. And, in a bid not to offend them, the believer is tempted to compromise his stand. The only safeguard for believers then is to remain separated from the world and be committed to God.

Question 3: Mention some people in the Bible that compromised or formed alliance with the ungodly, and state the consequences.

Adam and Eve, Saul, Esau, Dinah, the young prophet, Jehoshaphat, Demas, Judas Iscariot, all had their sore spots of compromise. This led to defeat, destruction and even death for some of them. Compromise has hindered many believers who began their Christian race in a glorious style from finishing well and strong.

There is always a high premium to pay for compromise. Esau compromised his birthright and lost it forever. Eli's weakness brought generational curse upon him. Jehoshaphat had unnecessary wars and almost lost his life prematurely. Judas Iscariot died without repentance and found no place in the kingdom of God. Demas also left the fellowship of God's people to associate with the evil world. Moreover, compromise leads to failure (2 Chronicles 20:35-37), cuts off from fellowship with God, brings defeat and suffering, renders its victims powerless (Judges 16:20), brings curse (Galatians 1:8, 9), changes the course of history, may lead to untimely death and loss of heaven if there is no repentance (Matthew 27:5). In the midst of a perverted gospel, worldly music, fashion, satanic worship

and abuse of modern technology, the Lord commands the believer to remain uncompromising.

While warning against compromise, Apostle Paul also emphasized the need to use our Christian liberty with discretion and moderation. He said: **“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not”** (1 Corinthians 10:23). This is an obvious call to self-sacrifice and deliberate moderation of our liberty in Christ for the benefit of others. **“Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth.”** True believers should not exercise Christian liberty in such a manner that it would embolden weak believers to do things that would hurt their consciences. Rather than insist on our own liberty, we should be eager to edify our fellow believers even if that would demand that we sacrifice our rights and privileges in the process.

CHRISTIAN PILGRIMS’ CONSECRATION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLE (1 Corinthians 10:31-33; Colossians 2:16-23; Galatians 1:6-9; 2:18-20; Leviticus 18:3-4; Romans 12:1,2;14:13-15; Jeremiah 35:1-8; Exodus 34:12-15; Psalm 15:4; 101:4; Jude 3)

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). This is the hallmark of Christian walk, work and worship in this present world. The admonition given by Paul the Apostle to the church at Corinth is a divine charge to all pilgrims on their way to heaven. He enjoined believers to seek the glory of God as their priority. Whatever we do as believers, our major preoccupation should be that God be glorified in all things. This should be our consecration and guiding principle, and it is one index of genuine discipleship. True followers of Christ would not want to be a stumbling block to other persons; neither would they ever want to please themselves at the detriment of another.

Question 4: Mention some Bible characters that lived uncompromising lives.

The Bible remains the only standard of godly living for all Christians, in all generations, across races, tribes, languages and gender, irrespective of their background or educational status. The likes of Gideon, Samuel, Josiah,

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Ruth etc. all stood at different times despite pressures and challenges of life. Apostle Paul would not imitate those who were before him when he saw that they were lowering the standard. This is a challenge to us today to take our stand on the side of truth no matter who is involved in enticing us to do something short of Bible precepts.

Question 5: What is the secret of uncompromising stand for the Lord?

All the Bible characters that stood in their time had genuine encounter with God. They were able to withstand negative pressures because they had strong determination to stand for God despite pressures and threats. Intimate fellowship with God and people of like faith is not negotiable. We must be prayerful all the time and fortify ourselves with the word of God, coupled with a purposeful heart, if we want to be like them (Daniel 1:8; 3:16-18). We must also be on our guard (1 Peter 5:8, 9; James 4:7; Romans 6:12), avoid worldliness like a plague (1 John 2:15-17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18), love no one above God (Luke 14:25, 26), and put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:12-18). Daniel and his three Hebrew colleagues were honored by God when they stood for Him. Joseph was honored in a strange land for his refusal to sin despite the strong temptation. Paul was granted special ability to perform outstanding exploits.

Stand up for Jesus now and always so that others may be saved and follow Him (1 Corinthians 11:1). Your consistent stand for the truth will enhance the fulfilment of the vision to **D**isciple **A** Whole **N**ation, **D**iscover **A** Waiting **N**eighborhood, **D**estroy **A**dversaries' **W**icked **N**etwork and **D**ouble **A** **W**ritten **N**umber, and populate the kingdom of Christ.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Numbers	23	Isaiah	52-53
TUE	“	25	“	54-55
WED	“	26	“	56-57
THUR	“	27-28	“	58-59
FRI	“	29	“	60-61
SAT	“	30	“	62-63
SUN	“	21	“	64-65

632 Lesson

BELIEVERS' COMPORTMENT IN GOD'S HOUSE

MEMORY VERSE: "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 11:1-19

The preceding chapter of this book ended with exhortation to selfless living for the spiritual benefits of others. This is because the believer is a living epistle of Christ-like character for others to emulate. Today's lesson still bothers on acceptable conduct and comportment, this time, in God's house. As used in this study, God's house does not only refer to the building where believers gather for worship but also the assembly of true children of God. And the Bible contains principles that guide believers' conduct and practice during worship in God's house. Whether in a cathedral or modest church house, due honor and respect for God must characterize our worship (Psalm 33:8).

Therefore, an atmosphere of serenity, orderliness, decency and decorum must be maintained. Also, neatness and moderation should characterize our appearance as our demeanor should depict reverence for God and His house. Although we may not see Him with our bare eyes, every worshipper must acknowledge the divine presence and majesty in the congregation either in urban or rural areas. God is everywhere. Wherever God is worshipped in truth and Spirit must be regarded as a sacred place. **"For the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee"** (Deuteronomy 23:14).

Question 1: Explain why believers must take care of their conduct and appearance in the house of God.

THE STEADFASTNESS THAT ATTRACTS FELLOWSHIP

(1 Corinthians 11:1, 2; 4:16; John 13:15; 1 Peter 2: 21; 2 Thessalonians 3:9; Philippians 3:17)

In the opening verse of the text, Apostle Paul presented himself as a worthy example for believers to follow. **“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ”** (1 Corinthians 11:1). He was a leading light, a steadfast believer, an exemplary leader. Our Lord and Savior was a great Teacher during His earthly ministry. He also practiced what He preached and inspired His disciples to a life of godliness, humility and obedience. In the same manner, every true Christian leader should live such an exemplary life for the followers to emulate. God-approved leaders are supposed to be pacesetters of godly conducts. The pharisaic lifestyle of “do what I say and not what I do” is condemned by God. Those who live contrary to what they teach come under the same denunciation of woe that the Lord pronounced on the Pharisees. In his epistle to Timothy, Paul charged him to be **“an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity”** (1 Timothy 4:12). To teach sound doctrine of scriptures and live contrary to such tenets brings greater condemnation upon such teachers and preachers.

Apostle Paul went further to commend the Corinthian brethren for putting him in remembrance and keeping the ordinances he gave them. Praise and commendation are stimulants which should be utilized at appropriate times by Church leaders to encourage, promote and elicit further positive actions from followers, parents, church leaders and masters. Generally, every human being acknowledges praise (1 Corinthians 3:3; 1:10-12; 11:16; 1 Timothy 6:4).

SCRIPTURAL INJUNCTIONS ON CHRISTIAN COMPORIMENT DURING CHURCH SERVICE:

(1 Corinthians 11:3-15; Deuteronomy 22:5; Zephaniah 1:8; Habakkuk 2:20; Psalm 33:8; 1 Corinthians 1:10-12; 11:16; 1 Timothy 6:4)

Having established the truth about the headship of God and Christ overall and that of man over the woman, Paul corrected the observed impropriety of a Christian brother covering his head and Christian sister uncovering her

head while praying or prophesying that became the norm in the Corinthian church.

Right from creation, God put distinctions between the nature and appearance of a man and a woman. The Bible forbids assuming the disposition of the opposite gender in dressing, appearance and behavior. Hence Apostle Paul wrote to correct the indecent, improper and immodest unveiling of the head by women when they come together to worship God. He clarifies that **“Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels”** (1 Corinthians 11:4, 5, 7, 10).

This erroneous practice Apostle Paul set out to correct is still prevalent in many Christian assemblies today in defiance of holy principles of scriptures. In many modern-day worship centers, it is common to see women uncovering their heads during church service. The motivating factor of this unwholesome practice is either to display their ostentatious hairdos or sheer spiritual ignorance. Obviously, leaving the head uncovered may attract the male-folk and thereby becoming a tool the devil uses to distract attention of worshippers. The devil uses this diversionary tactics to lure people away from true and holy worship of God into impure thoughts, lust and immorality. Thus, the church environment which should be characterized with sobriety and sanctity is turned into an arena of ostentatious display and hilarity.

However, God’s word declares that **“true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”** (John 4:23, 24). Prayer is addressed to God and prophecy is the revelation of His mind to worshippers. These are spiritual exercises that give no allowance for manifestation of self and the flesh. Every believer must

shun the vain fashion of the world and obey God in seemingly small matters as well as in weighty affairs.

Question 2: Explain why Christian women should cover their head while men should remain uncovered during worship.

Believers need to understand that God is the One who sets the standard of acceptable outfit, conduct and attitude for pure worship. He does not accept just anything in the name of worship. People who disagree or disobey His prescribed standard of comportment in His house worship in vain as Christian liberty that violates basic scriptural injunctions is unacceptable.

While men generally comply with this instruction and uncover their head during worship, there have been a lot of arguments on the part of the women. The scripture gives clear explanation for everyone to understand. One, the Bible unequivocally stated that **“every woman”** should cover her head while praying so as not to dishonor her head and God who is the Head of all. Besides, women must cover their heads because of the angels. The Bible affirms that angels are **“all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation”** (Hebrews 1:14). Paul reminds us that our worship services are regularly attended by angels. As a result, we should be careful to adhere to the established order during worship and other services. We should be careful not to act in a manner that displeases the Lord when we come to His presence for worship.

Covering the head for women is not a matter of culture meant for the Corinthian church as some claim today but a mark of honor and reverence to the Lord. Every woman should honor God by covering her head during service to show her acceptance of the word of God and obedience to the authority of Christ. Such posture is a wonderful expression of a Christian woman’s piety.

Question 3: Enumerate improper conducts that should be avoided during worship.

Aside our outfits, other conducts that do not glorify God that we must shun include allowing children to litter the place of worship; causing distractions by putting on shoes

that distract or buying foot wears that whistle in the church for the children, wearing dresses meant for the opposite gender, transparent clothes or skimpy skirts, fumbling with mobile phones, allowing them to ring or answering phone calls during service, side-talks/ comments, whispering and whistling when the service is on, reading magazines, newspaper or literature during messages, eating and chewing gum, etc. during worship. These amount to coming into God's house to **"give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil"** (Ecclesiastes 5:1).

Worship time is a period to pay homage to the Lord, focus on Him and listen to His word. Worship is not about us but Christ whom we have come to reverence and adore. Therefore, the underlying principles on which apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church are still applicable to us today irrespective of geographical location, race or creed.

A man usually doffs his cap before his superior as a mark of respect. Therefore, upon entering a church building or outside church building, men should uncover their head as a mark of reverence, honor and obedience to God while women are to cover their heads.

SERIOUS REBUKE FOR DISORDERLY CONDUCTS: (1 Corinthians 11:16-19; 1 Timothy 6:3,4,20; 1 Corinthians 14:33; 2 Timothy 2:16; 1 Corinthians 6:3; 1 Timothy 1:3; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:4-6)

Leaders have the responsibility to reprove, rebuke and correct so as to perfect the saints. This is exactly what Apostle Paul did while addressing cases of divisions, arguments and contentions among the Corinthian believers. **"Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse"** (1 Corinthians 11:17). The Corinthian Christians were not enjoying the benefit of spiritual growth which church attendance offers. They were engaged in frivolous arguments, party-spirit and divisional insinuation. These actions are not acceptable under any guise. Some of the Corinthians were found blatantly disobeying the plain truth of the Scriptures on acceptable pattern of appearance and conduct as they come to worship.

Question 4: (a) Enumerate the evil effects of argument and contention in the Church. (b) What should be the attitude of a believer whenever argument ensues?

In an environment of argument, debate, dispute and disagreement, spiritual progress is stalled; love evaporates; harmony and unity are disturbed. Carnality, confusion and evil works take over (James 3:16). Evil passions that tend to mar the peace of the assembly also manifest. The experience in such assembly will not differ from that of the tower of Babel as there will be no union of purpose and plan. The members will lack cooperation in promoting a common goal. The Holy Spirit cannot remain in such assembly. Every true worshiper must **“endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”**. We must be subject to one another and be ready to hold back personal opinions and suggestions and follow the prescription of Scripture for acceptable comportment and attitude during worship of God.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Numbers	32	Isaiah	66
TUE	“	33	Jeremiah	1-2
WED	“	34	“	3-4
THUR	“	35-36	“	5
FRI	Deut.	1	“	6
SAT	“	2	“	7
SUN	“	3	“	8-9

633 Lesson

PREPARATION FOR 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: 1 Corinthians 11:20-34

In the previous chapters of the first epistle to the Corinthians, Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, had sought to correct several abuses and wrong practices that were prevalent in the church at Corinth. In the current text, he focused on the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, pointing out its abuse by the Corinthians, necessary preparations before partaking, proper mode of observance, and the consequences of participating unworthily.

The Lord's Supper is one of the two ordinances bequeathed to the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ; the other being water baptism (Matthew 26:26-30; 28:19, 20). Water baptism is observed by each believer, once and for all, shortly after conversion. Through it, the new believer identifies publicly with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. However, the Lord's Supper is to be repeated from time to time by true believers in fellowship; and it commemorates the death of Jesus Christ for our sins, and also points to His coming back again in glory.

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper is so important that detailed account of its institution is recorded in four places in the New Testament (Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). It is called different names by believers: The Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, Holy Communion, Eucharist, and Holy Sacrament.

Question 1: Mention the two ordinances Jesus Christ commanded the Church to observe.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Matthew 26:26-30; Luke 22:14-20)

The Lord's Supper was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ on the night he was betrayed. Though Apostle Paul was not present at the time the ordinance was originally instituted, he received a direct revelation from the Lord concerning it. **"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you..."** (1 Corinthians 11:23a).

Question 2: State the purpose of the Lord's Supper.

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper was instituted for a commemorative purpose. It gives participants the opportunity to look back and remember the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary; and in that sense, they are reminded that the work of their redemption is an accomplished task, and now they can sit and eat in enjoyment of all its benefits.

In addition to the commemorative purpose, the Lord's Supper also affords believers the opportunity of thorough self-examination from time to time. At the Lord's Table, each participant can look inward and check to see if there is any iota of sin or things that can make them unworthy partakers and, by extension, unfit for heaven. Such things are properly dealt with through confession and necessary restitution. Furthermore, it is an opportunity to look forward in anticipation of the Lord's glorious return. **"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come"** (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Also, the Lord's Supper promotes unity and fellowship among the brethren. The sharing of the same bread and drinking of the same cup give a practical expression to the oneness and mutual fellowship that exist among believers. Every time believers share this Holy Communion, there is a strengthening of that spiritual bond of brotherly love among them (1 Corinthians 10:14-16).

THE PERVERSION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER: (1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 29; 5:7, 8; 10:21; 2 Peter 2:1)

Question 3: Explain what you understand by the perversion of the Lord's Supper in the Corinthian Church.

In our text, the Corinthian church had virtually trivialized this highly significant ordinance both by the attitude with which they participated and other extraneous practices they had come to associate with it. In order to properly understand the abuse which the Apostle talked about, a short explanation of the historical setting and the context of his message are needful. Apart from the Lord's Supper itself, believers in the Corinthian church had a love feast, wherein the participants brought food from their houses to be eaten in fellowship with others. But with time, this practice brought many problems. There was disorderliness in service, ostentatious display of sumptuous meals by the rich, and this eventually resulted in divisions between the rich and the poor. The wealthy brethren brought and ate their dainties to the chagrin of the poor ones who had little or nothing to bring from home. In fact, these problems became so serious that the Council of Carthage, AD 397, had to ban the love feasts. Due to the carnal practices the Corinthians associated with the Lord's Supper, Paul the apostle said it could no longer be seen as the Lord's Supper. **“When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper”** (1 Corinthians 11:20).

Question 4: Mention some ways the Lord's Supper is being abused in some religious circles today.

In our present day, there are various ways the Lord's Supper is being abused or perverted. Some of these perversions pertain to the attitude of the participants on the one hand, as well as the notions and methods of conducting it by various assemblies on the other. First, there is problem of misrepresentation of the Lord's Supper. Some use the wrong emblems such as alcoholic juice, soft drinks, and bread that contain yeast. But the point is: once the emblems are perverted, they lose their significance at the Lord's Table.

Another misrepresentation of the Lord's Supper is the notion that the bread and the wine actually change to the real body and blood of Jesus respectively. This tends to portray the Lord's Supper as something mystical or superstitious, and this attracts uncomplimentary remarks from non-believers. Then there is also the teaching that the real body and blood of Jesus are present with the bread and wine. This is not true. Rather, the unleavened bread

and the juice of the fruit of the vine are only symbolic of the body of Jesus that was broken and His blood that was poured for the remission of our sins.

But apart from the misrepresentation of the Lord's Supper, some people neglect the ordinance altogether, either because they place little value on it or in an attempt to avoid eating unworthily. This is wrong. The right thing to do if one feels unworthy to participate is to correct whatever thing one is convicted of and partake worthily. The scriptural injunction is: **"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup"** (1 Corinthians 11:28). If a person stays away perpetually from the Lord's Supper because he feels unworthy to partake, it is an indication that such a person is not ready for heaven and needs to take urgent steps to repent and put his life in order.

One of the greatest abuses of the Lord's Supper is the presumption of those who partake in an unworthy manner. This happens when a person deliberately harbors sin and yet, with impudence, partakes at the Lord's Table. To be living in secret immorality, fraud, dishonesty, pride, and keeping grudges or malice against fellow believers while participating at the Lord's Table would amount to a total disregard for the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which the emblems of the Lord's Supper represent. Paul the apostle said people who participate at the table of the Lord in an unworthy manner are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

There is also the perversion of focusing on the emblems and physical service of the Lord's Supper rather than on Jesus Christ whom the emblems represent and who the entire Supper is designed to remember. Christ said: **"this do in remembrance of me..."** (1 Corinthians 11:24, 25). The way and manner the Lord's Supper is celebrated should draw the attention of participants to Christ, not only to their sins, weaknesses and failures. Of course, the participants should look inwards and examine themselves so as to purge all hidden iniquities but in doing so they should remember Jesus Christ and trust Him for their cleansing. At the Lord's Table, we should avoid being so sin-conscious to the point that we lose sight of the power of God to forgive and cleanse all the pollution of sin.

Another common error we should avoid is the tendency to take the ordinance as another shortcut to getting miracles, especially these days when religious people exploit virtually every scriptural ordinance as a means of actualizing their personal pursuit after material blessings.

THE PROPER MODE OF OBSERVING THE LORD'S SUPPER (1 Corinthians 11:23-26, 33, 34; Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20)

The proper mode of conducting the Lord's Supper is for believers to come together in fellowship and share the bread and wine with grateful hearts to the Lord who died for their sins. The atmosphere should be such that the participants can both have a sober reflection of what Christ has done for us at Calvary, and also be able to look forward with great expectation to His glorious return. The Church must ensure the Lord's Supper is celebrated on a regular basis and believers, too, must participate as often as it is served. We must not allow trivial excuses or personal engagements to hinder us from attending the Lord's Table.

In the Old Testament, participation at the feast of Passover was mandatory for all Israelites; how much more then should believers see the Lord's Supper as more compelling and an obligation not to trifle with.

Question 5: What are the requisites for partaking worthily at the Lord's Supper?

The proper emblems for the Lord's Supper are unleavened bread and fresh juice of the fruit of the vine (grapes). These emblems, though very simple and common, are very deep in significance. The simplicity of the emblems instructs us that the expressions of our faith and communion with God need not be complex or complicated. The bread represents the broken body of Christ while the wine represents his blood that was poured for the remission of our sins. In conducting the Lord's Supper, the bread is served before the fruit of the vine.

To participate worthily at the Lord's Table, there must be adequate preparation and self-examination. We cannot approach the Lord's Supper in a careless manner. Every participant must be born again and maintain a vital

fellowship with the Lord. An unconverted individual can neither honestly celebrate the death of Christ nor confidently anticipate His return unless he genuinely repents and gets washed from his sins. Furthermore, participants must be in fellowship and at peace with other believers. To this end, each participant must avoid being a promoter of division in the fellowship.

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

Our text points out grave consequences for those who partake of the Lord's Supper unworthily. These are people who are unrepentant. They harden themselves against the Lord, yet they want to partake of the emblems that are symbolic of His bruised body and shed blood. For such people, there will be divine judgment in form of sickness, physical weakness and death.

But there are blessings for those who participate in a worthy manner. They will inherit the blessings which God has reserved for those who obey Him. Worthy partakers will enjoy sound health, peace with God, prosperity and long life. Eventually, they will eat with Christ at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in heaven and enjoy everlasting bliss with God in eternity.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Deut 4	Jeremiah	10-11
TUE	" 5	"	12-13
WED	" 6-7	"	14-15
THUR	" 8-9	"	16-17
FRI	" 10-11	"	18-19
SAT	" 12	"	20-21
SUN	" 13-14	"	22

634 Lesson

DIVERSITY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

**MEMORY VERSE: "Now there are diversity of gifts, but the same Spirit"
(1 Corinthians 12:4)**

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:1-31

Apostle Paul has been correcting the many ills bedeviling the Corinthian church arising from their ignorance of scripture and operation of God. In the last chapter, for instance, he corrected their improper conducts towards the Lord's Supper. Among the Corinthian brethren also were some who, in our text, misconstrued the purpose of spiritual gifts. Those who had some gifts considered themselves more spiritual than others. This showed they had a serious misconception of the gifts and misused them. Though spiritual gifts are meant to build the body of Christ, the Corinthians used them to factionalize the church. But Apostle Paul, by the inspiration of God, corrects their views of spiritual gifts as status symbol given only to a privileged few in the Church. He clarified that it was a necessary equipment to enable each believer perform their roles in the body of Christ.

The Apostle would have us know that spiritual gifts are meant to foster unity of the church in diversity. They are given to ensure that the different areas of work in God's kingdom are well taken care of. No gift is superior or inferior but they are complementary. All the gifts are essential for the proper functioning and smooth running of the body of Christ. A proper understanding of this lesson should send us on our knees to pray for a genuine manifestation of the Spirit in our midst in order to profit everyone.

This chapter is the most explicit on the subject of spiritual gifts in the entire Bible. It sets forth the Source and diversity of the gifts; their purpose, interdependence, and possibility of abuse; the five-fold ministry gifts in the church, and the exhortation to follow the more excellent way of love. The primary purpose of spiritual gifts is to glorify God and edify believers.

Question 1: What is the significance of spiritual gifts in the Church?

PROPER PERSPECTIVE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS: (1 Corinthians 12:1-5; Romans 12:6; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 3:3)

Apostle Paul declares that people who are living in sin cannot receive or manifest spiritual gifts until they are converted from dumb idols they serve and other sinful practices of the world. He also clarifies that the Spirit of God engenders and speaks the truth. He is not the spirit of error and blasphemy that can call Jesus accursed. The Spirit of God in any professing believer acknowledges the lordship of Christ.

The Holy Spirit manifests Himself through the diverse gifts of the Spirit given to believers. These gifts are manifested to foster the growth of the church. Believers have different gifts as well as different levels of faith in manifesting those gifts. A believer can have more than one gift (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1). We also need to understand that agents of Satan can also manifest counterfeit gifts. Therefore, we must painstakingly try all spirits whether they are of God or not (Matthew 7:21-23; 24:11, 24; 1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21).

Question 2: Mention some misconceptions about spiritual gifts today.

Some believers erroneously believe that the operation of the gift of the Spirit is confined to the apostolic age. Others feel that with the completion of the canon of scriptures, spiritual gifts are no longer necessary. In some other assemblies, the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit is demonstrated in such an unscriptural manner that tends towards exhibitionism and disorderliness. None of these extremes is correct. Those who reject the manifestation of the gifts quench the Spirit while others who abuse the gifts grieve the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19; Ephesians 4:30).

CLASSIFICATION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (1 Corinthians 12:6-11; Colossians 1:29; 1 Kings 3:16-28; 2 Kings 6:8-12; Acts 13:9,10; 11:28; 2:4; 10:44-48; Romans 4:17-21; Exodus 7:10; 14:21)

Question 3: State three natural divisions of spiritual gifts and mention the gifts that fall under each division.

The gifts of the Spirit fall into three natural divisions. In the first division, we have the gifts of revelation also called mind gifts, discerning gifts or gifts of perception. These include the **word of wisdom** – the supernatural revelation or insight into the divine will and purpose, revealing how to solve any problem that may arise, as manifested by Solomon in the case of two harlots who had argument on the issue of a dead and a living child (1 Kings 3:16-28; Matthew 2:20; Luke 22:10-12; Acts 26:16); the **word of knowledge** – the supernatural knowledge or insight into the divine will or plan and the plans of others that are not open to the natural man (2 Kings 6:8-12; Acts 9:11,12; Acts 5:3-5); and **discerning of spirits** – the supernatural revelation or insight into the realm of spirits to detect them, their plans and activities (Matthew 9:4; Luke 13:16; John 2:25; Acts 13:9,10).

Question 4: Explain the differences between the gifts of the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge.

In the second category, we have the gifts of inspiration also called vocal gifts, declarative gifts or gifts of proclamation. These are **prophecy** – supernatural utterance in the common language (1 Corinthians 14:3); divine utterance, not conceived by human thought or reasoning (Acts 3:21; 11:28; 21:1,2; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Corinthians 14:23-32) and involves speaking unto men for edification, exhortation and comfort; **diverse kinds of tongues** – supernatural utterance in other languages not previously known or learnt by the speakers (Isaiah 28:11; Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4; 10:44-48; 19:1-7; 1 Corinthians 12:10,28-31); and the **interpretation of tongues** – the supernatural ability to interpret in the native tongue what is uttered in other languages unknown to the believer who interprets by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:5,13-15,27,28).

The gifts of power also called working or dynamic gifts are in the third group. The gifts of faith, healing and working of miracles come under this group associated with dynamism. **Faith** – This is supernatural ability to

believe God without doubt, unbelief and human reasoning (Roman 4:17; James 1:5-8). It is the extraordinary faith to do exploits in the life of church members. It was the kind David exercised to prevail over Goliath and Moses also manifested it to convey the Israelites across the Red sea. With this kind of faith, Paul averted loss of life during a shipwreck (Acts 27:1-40). The gift of **healing** is the supernatural power to heal all manner of sicknesses and diseases without human aid. The **working of miracles** is the supernatural power to intervene in the ordinary course of nature and to counteract natural laws if need be for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 12:10, 27-31; Hebrews 2:3, 4; Exodus 7:10; 14:21). Raising of the dead, astonishing provision and spectacular healing etc. are all manner of miracles. We must however emphasize that these gifts overlap in their operations.

EXHORTATION TO MAINTAIN UNITY IN DIVERSITY: (1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:3, 13; Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 10:17; Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 1 Peter 3:8)

Here, Paul made use of the human body to illustrate the unity that should exist in the body of Christ. Each part has a specific function that is necessary to the body as a whole. The parts are different for a purpose and in their differences, they must work together.

Question 5: What should be the attitude of believers as regards the manifestation of the spiritual gifts?

There are two common errors that come with the manifestation of spiritual gifts that believers must avoid. The first has to do with pride about personal ability. The second is self-abasement or inferiority complex that makes one think he has nothing to contribute to the growth and spiritual well-being of the church. Instead of comparing ourselves one with another, our different gifts must be used to complement each other in spreading the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. With the different gifts that we possess, we are united by the Spirit into one spiritual body. **“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For the body is not one member, but many”** (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Paul argues that the gifts defer one from another but that we must accept all gifts as given by God. No one should feel superior about his or her gifts; instead, all should use their gifts to willingly serve the body of Christ. We must not disregard or belittle the gifts given to us by God but put them to active use. There must be no envy concerning another believer’s gift that may seem more recognized than ours. Rather, positive attitude should be exhibited when a fellow believer is honored. Possessing a compassionate heart toward those who are suffering is also key to manifesting the gifts of the Spirit (Romans 12:15; 1 Peter 3:8).

There is need for caution in the pursuit and manifestation of spiritual gifts in the church. Spiritual gifts should not be commercialized, for freely we received and we must freely give. We must avoid the error of Simon who thought the gift of God could be bought with money. **“But Peter said unto him, thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money”** (Acts 8:20).

Spiritual gifts are obtained and manifested by saved, separated, sanctified and Spirit-filled believers. Unbroken communion with God in His word and prayer, commitment to soul-winning, holy living, compassion for others, sensitivity to the Spirit and prompt obedience to God’s word and Spirit make believers effective and grow in the operation of spiritual gifts.

DAILY BIBLE READING

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

END OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

SPECIAL STUDIES

535 Lesson

MODERATION AND CHRISTIAN DRESSING

MEMORY VERSE: “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5).

TEXTS: Philippians 4:5-7, 10-13; 1 Peter 3:1-5; 1 Timothy 2:9, 10.

A sore spot in Christian living and doctrine is the dress code and moderation among believers. Much bickering, arguments and distortions have accompanied this teaching. The Bible gives us moderation as the governing principle that the Christian can safely follow, especially in areas that the Bible does not categorically give commands. Christian conduct during weddings, christening, funeral service, ceremonies, standard of living, music and dressing fall into this category. The Bible principle that dictates our position in such matters is moderation.

Question 1: Mention the Bible principle that dictates our position on moderation.

Moderation, in a general sense, refers to a subdued attitude towards the tendency to indulge oneself. It may also be explained as freedom from excess. This is close to temperance. The word has a deeper meaning in the Bible. It refers to our entire attitude towards life – what we say, do, use, etc. In life, we relate with people and they watch our actions and behavior, even if those actions do not directly concern them. No wonder the Word of God clearly gives commands that touches on our character. “Let not then your good be evil spoken of ... Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded” (Romans 14:16; Titus 2:6).

It is the attitude of patience in life that will establish our souls (Luke 21:19). The impatient, agitated and anxious Christian is not a good example of the forbearance of Jesus

Christ. James has a parallel scripture to Philippians 4:5 that reads: **“Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh”** (James 5:8).

The lifestyles of Christians are to be examples of moderation, not only in physical matters but also in matters of the spirit; not only in outward appearance, but also in inward disposition. Moderation must be reflected in a believer’s mood, comportment, carriage, emotional responses, desires, ambitions and physical actions.

No wonder Paul the apostle, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, enjoined Philippian saints to exhibit moderation so that people will know of this quality in them. He emphasized this quality, when he gave a testimony of his life: **“I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need”** (Philippians 4:12).

<p>Question 2: What is moderation and why is it necessary in the life of a believer?</p>

Moderation cannot be separated from humility. Our Lord Jesus Christ had heaven at his beck and call, yet humble Himself and came down to the earth. Although rich in heaven, He made himself poor on earth. **“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich”** (2 Corinthians 8:9). Even when He and the disciples needed to pay tax. He could have claimed His right not to pay being a citizen. But being humble, He toed the path of peace. He made Peter to work for the money - to catch a fish and extract money from its belly to pay the tax.

CHRIST-LIKE MODERATION ENJOINED (Philippians 4:4,5; 2:5; 1 Peter 4:3,4; Proverbs 23:1-5; Ecclesiastes 7:16)

The exhortation to moderation by Apostle Paul was given to believers. No wonder the injunction to rejoice in the Lord preceded this age-long command. It is therefore obvious that moderation is a spiritual virtue that should be found in any genuine child of God.

“Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5). In our desire for even legitimate things of this life and personal or group rights, there should be moderation. This we could see in the life of Abraham who, though much older than Lot, and being the heir of the promise of God’s covenant blessings, gave Lot the freedom of first choice over the pasture for their cattle. He refused to be drawn into dispute among their herdsmen over grazing land for their cattle. He said to lot: **“Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left”** (Genesis 13:9).

In separating for good, notice also that Abraham did not evict Lot by force, though it was in his power to do so. He even needed to appeal to him, saying, “I pray thee”. How many believers today would confidently comport themselves like Abraham? Would it not be heard in the neighborhood and in the church that they could no longer see eye-to-eye because of money and property? Can a fellow believer safely and freely trust you to show moderation in collecting valuables from his stock of good, and you would not greedily empty the stock? The Word of God teaches godliness and contentment as being of great gain.

Believers must not insist on their rights as that could deny them of heaven. Even the Word of God says, **“Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself?”** (Ecclesiastes 7:16). Therefore, moderation will prolong your life on earth.

Question 3: Mention some areas in which the believer must exercise moderation.

Men-pleasing tendencies, inordinate ambition, elaborate Christian engagements, lavish house-warming, naming and funeral ceremonies are not in consonance with the principle of moderation. Indulgence in trendy fashion, keeping with the styles in vogue, the designs of dress, the indecent, promiscuous dresses in the world are at variance with moderation. They are often a pointer that the individual is a victim of inferiority complex, and lacks confidence in the God he claims to follow.

Similarly, we must manifest moderation in our words for **“in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”** (Proverbs 10:19; James 1:19). A life of talkativeness offends God. God commands sound, faultless speech, and moderation is the wedge.

What about moderation in the things we eat? Many people have developed bodily ailments because of lack of self-control in consumption. Over-eating, otherwise called gluttony, is sin. It is a mark of selfishness and unbelief in the power of Almighty God to provide for us. Some unmanageable appetites arising from unwholesome eating habits have been blamed for obesity, heart diseases, hypertension and high blood pressure. Even when invited to a feast with abundance of edibles, God’s word quietly advises on moderation (Proverbs 23:1-3, 6-8).

Conversely, some people engage in unduly long dry fasting lasting for weeks, and thereby have ignorantly impaired their health. “Let your moderation be known unto all men”. As the coming of the Lord draws nearer, believers must reflect on this important injunction and live by it.

CHRISTIAN ADORNMENT EXTOLLED (1 Peter 3:3-5; 1 Timothy 2:9; Romans 12:16; 1 Corinthians 11:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:22)

Adornment embraces all the things we wear on our bodies. Yet, the Lord is concerned also about our inner adornment, which should produce a moderating and sobering influence on outward adornment. In I Peter 3: 4, the word of God enjoins women, and of course men, to adorn themselves with **“the hidden man of the heart,** in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price”.

In these last days, when some so-called “Christians” and “pastors” give scant regards to obscene and indecent dressing, it will take an unwavering biblical position to bring about a renewal. Those assemblies where indecent and loud dressing have been raised to the level of an art of fascination and entertainment will have to repent.

Curiously, ministers whose adornment can only be mildly described as abomination now occupy pulpits. When ladies or men who profess being Christians wear dresses that expose their chests, cleavages, navels, armpits, or laps into the house of God, it is evident that such ungodly habits are served to distract genuine and sincere seekers from getting to God.

Costly adornments like gold watches and straps, golden hand bands, chains, earrings and other deviations only help to inflame pride and vanity and flies in the face of a meek and quiet spirit. Similarly, worldly haircut and curling or blowing up same are clearly indicative of a depraved heart. **“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price”** (1 Timothy 2:9 10; 1 Peter 3:3, 4).

<p>Question 4: Mention the things that give sparkle and radiance to the believer's life.</p>

What sparkles in the believer is not the dress he wears but a humble, godly spirit that transcends the glitter of the most precious jewels. The real beauty of the Christian is the inner man. A Christian needs not have any special ornament about his dress. It is the holiness that shines through the countenance of a meek and humble Christian, causing him/her to dress carefully and modestly in conformity with the inoffensive dictates of the gospel. The Christian woman must avoid like a plague, the hair-do that is masculine or those that are deliberately served to attract attention. **“For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered”** (1 Corinthians 11:6).

Question 5: What kind of adornment does the Bible recommend to believers?

Moderate and decent dressing must avoid the two extremes of loud dressing or contemptible appearance. The guiding principle in dressing is always in favor of neatness, simplicity and decency. The primary purpose of dressing is to cover nakedness appropriately, modestly, moderately. A real believer must **“abstain from all appearance of evil”** (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

CAUTION AGAINST EXTREMISM AND COMPROMISE (Philippians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:7; Isaiah 3:16-23)

Some people preach that God watches the heart only, and is hardly concerned with the body. They forget that the believer’s body is the temple of God. **“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”** (1 Corinthians. 3:16). Consequently, God will judge those who misuse their bodies.

“Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling (even in the church) with their feet: Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels, The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils. And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well-set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty” (Isaiah 3:16-24).

“Those who argue and split the hair over what to wear are “the mixed multitude”; those who desire to dress in the

attire and style akin to what obtains in the heart of the world. They might appear to have come out of the world at salvation, but the world is substantially, still in them. The soul panting after God, reaching out for true holiness and heaven, is not so much concerned about the style of her outward dress, as she is of her inward dressing and adornment. The spiritually-hungry do not desire the show and style of the world. They are instead thirsty for and desirous of peculiar lifestyle that is wholly pleasing unto God.

There are those who stridently mount opposition to moderation in dressing. First, they say, “my God is not poor”. And did not God give express command by Moses that some among his chosen people should be adorned in the most exquisite manner with gold, precious stones and costly array? True, God indeed did command it so. But for the Jews, especially their priesthood, and we, are under different dispensations. The glory of the whole Mosaic dispensation was chiefly visible and external; whereas the glory of the Christian dispensation is of an invisible and spiritual nature.

Others, in their objection to the Bible position on the use of jewelry and obscene dress designs ask: “What then are gold and precious stones for?” The answer is simple. Not everything in creation is meant for the direct use of man. And there are abundance of things that mortal men have not discovered their correct and appropriate use. Still others say “if all men heed the teachings on Christian dressing and dress the way the Bible commands, how would tradesmen live?” God certainly considered this before He gave these commands. And He knew that man would live much better if the commands are strictly adhered. Besides, those who are engaged directly in gold, silver, precious stones and fashion design and all who would have to make a change in their trade might wonder: “How will we live?” A holiness preacher of the eighteenth century replied thus: “They will live like men, by honest, edifying and Christ-exalting labor; most of whom before lived like swine, wallowing in all gluttony and sensuality.”

Question 6: How can the believer debunk non-Christians’ objection to Bible injunctions on moderation and Christian dressing?

God’s precepts on dressing are clear and unambiguous and should pose no burden to every heaven-bound pilgrim. The simple acid test, which our dressing and indeed our general outlook to life must pass through, is simply this: does it glorify God? If it does not, simply abandon it.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Deut	27	Jeremiah	32
TUE	“	28	“	33
WED	“	29-30	“	34-35
THUR	“	31	“	36
FRI	“	32	“	37
SAT	“	33-34	“	39-40
SUN	Josh	1-2	“	41-42

636 Lesson

SANCTIFICATION: A DEFINITE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

MEMORY VERSE: “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deuteronomy 30:6).

TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4, 7, 8; 5:23, 24; 1 Peter 1:14-16

The experience of sanctification is pivotal to the Christian faith. It is clearly taught in Scriptures as God’s gracious work in the heart of the believer. It is necessary for every Christian assembly to give time to study this indispensable experience and ensure that every member becomes a possessor of the blessing.

MEANING AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SANCTIFICATION (Numbers 8:17,18; 2 Chronicles 29:5,15-19; 7:16; Isaiah 43:21; Leviticus 21:1-15; 20:7,8,24-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:3,4; Romans 6:20,22)

Sanctification is a definite work of grace, subsequent to salvation. Sanctification means “to make sacred or holy; to be set apart for a holy or religious use; to make free from sin or to cleanse from moral corruption and pollution”. Being a Christian experience, it is the act of God’s grace by which the affections of men are purified to love God supremely above everything else.

Sanctification also means to be totally cleansed from moral defilement. Man is born with moral pollution, as such, he needs to be cleansed from depraved passions. The believer, though saved and called (1 Peter 1:14, 15), needs to be cleansed from inbred sin. To this end, we can also define sanctification as the “circumcision of the heart”. It also means purity of heart (Matthew 5:8).

Question 1: Mention some misconceptions that people have today about the subject of sanctification and state the proper views.

Though important in man’s relationship with God, it is one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented Bible

teachings. Some common misconceptions are: one, that sanctification or holiness is not possible: they say that man cannot be holy. This is wrong because God cannot require from us that which is unobtainable and impossible. God commanded that believers should be holy because He is holy (1 Peter 1:15, 16). For man to walk with the holy God, he must be holy. God still gives this gift and grace to everyone who desires to be Christ-like like He gave to saints of old. Enoch, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, Job, Zechariah, Paul, etc. are examples of people who received the grace and lived holy and morally upright lives in a corrupt world. If holiness is not possible, Jesus would not have said, “**Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect**” (Matthew 5:48). Jesus also prayed for it on behalf of His disciples and all believers. Acting on the truth and possibility of living a sanctified life will surely bring answers to Christ and the believer’s prayer to pass (John 17:17, 19).

Two, others believe that sanctification is a gradual, rather than a spontaneous Christian experience. They believe that we grow into sanctification. This is not true. As salvation and baptism in the Holy Ghost are instantaneous Christian experiences, so is sanctification. We do not grow into sanctification but we grow in the experience after we are sanctified.

Three, there are people who believe that sanctification is by works. But the truth is that we cannot work for our sanctification just as we cannot work for our salvation. Christ has already finished the work for our salvation and sanctification on the cross at Calvary. Now, it is a gift to be received by the willing believer. If it is of works, then it is no more of grace. It is a work of grace done by God in sincere, seeking believers.

Four, others there are who believe that it is only after death that one can be sanctified in purgatory. We need to know that there is no place like purgatory where people go after death to be purged and perfected before being sent to heaven. After death, the Bible says that the next thing is judgment.

Five, some others teach that salvation and sanctification are the same thing. They believe that both of them

take place as an individual gets born again. Though a believer is made morally clean with salvation experience, sanctification is a different work of grace, distinct and different from salvation. It is consequent upon salvation. It is an experience that can only be obtained by those who are already born again.

THE NECESSITY OF SANCTIFICATION (Matthew 20:20-24; Jonah 3:4-10; 4:1-11; John 17:17; 1 Peter 1:14-16; Genesis 17:1; Leviticus 11:43-45; 19:2; 20:7,25,26; Deuteronomy 30:6; Hebrews 12:14)

At conversion, righteousness is imputed as the sinner repents of sin and places his faith in the precious blood of Jesus that was shed for the remission of all his sins. But not long after, the new believer, filled with the joy of salvation, begins to notice some inclinations in thought and desire toward the things of the world. He begins to grow cold towards spiritual things. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life begin to overlap his pure spiritual desires. This shows the presence of the adamic nature or the inbred sin. At salvation, the branches and leaves of sin are cut off. But the root or stump still remains. Unless this is uprooted by the supernatural power of God, it has the capability of bringing the believer back to the bondage of sin. This is where sanctification comes in.

Question 2: Why is sanctification an indispensable Christian experience for every believer?

Sanctification is necessary because: (1) God commands it (Leviticus 20:7,24-26; 1 Peter 1:14-16); (2) God demands it (Genesis 17:1); (3) it is the nature of God (Leviticus 19:2); (4) it is difficult to maintain a consistent walk with God without it (Amos 3:3; Leviticus 11:43-45); (5) without it, it is impossible to love God supremely (Deuteronomy 30:6); (6) it helps us to obey God and keep His word with a proper motive (Deuteronomy 10:16); (7) in character and conduct, it makes us holy like our heavenly Father (Matthew 5:48); (8) It sets us apart as peculiar children of God; (9) it brings us into perfect bond of unity with other believers (John 17:17,21; Jeremiah 32:39); and (10) it makes us qualified for heaven (Hebrews 12:14).

Question 3: Mention some Bible characters that showed traits of unsanctified life and the challenges their lives pose to the present-day believer.

Abraham's twenty-four-year walk with God was characterized by inconsistencies. God then called him to perfection. When we discover inconsistencies in our Christian lives, it is a sign that we need the second touch of God. Perfection is not possible without circumcision of heart. Although the children of Israel were already God's people, they were required to have their foreskins circumcised before they could enter the Promised Land (Joshua 5:1-15). In like manner, if believers are going to enter the Promised Land (heaven), they will need to have their hearts circumcised.

Jonah showed displeasure at God's decision to spare the lives of the repentant Ninevites. Though he was a prophet of God, it showed the deplorable state of his heart. Jonah needed a new heart of love. If you notice this trait of being angry at God's acts of mercy on others, the cure is sanctification. Christ's disciples also manifested carnal tendencies at different times. Obviously, they were born again: Christ declared that their names were written in the book of life (Luke 10:20). These disciples, though saved, had certain blemishes in their lives that made them different from the perfect Son of God they had as their leader. They were selfish, high-minded, self-exalting and ambitious (Matthew 20:20-24; Luke 22:24-27). The needs of others did not arouse a deep concern in their hearts (Matthew 15:22, 23). They showed a critical, judgemental and censorious spirit as they grudged Christ-honoring suppliant (Matthew 26:7-12). They were impatient and vindictive (Luke 9:51-56). Moreover, their love for Christ was limited though they professed high-sounding affection (Mark 14:46-50).

These traits of the old man that were present in the disciples can be found in many believers today who are yet to possess sanctification experience. God allows these manifestations to show us our need of sanctification. Without the experience, we will see things only as they affect us and defend ourselves at the slightest reproof. We will never accept responsibility for wrongs done by us but

always blame others for our faults. We will not be happy when we are not commended on occasions when we felt we have done something well. The unsanctified always wants to be noticed. The manifestation of these traits in His disciples made Christ to pray for the sanctification of believers of all ages.

THE PROVISION FOR AND POSSESSION OF SANCTIFICATION (Hebrews 13:12,13; Ezekiel 36:26; Ephesians 5:25-27; Deuteronomy 30:6; 1 Peter 1:2; Matthew 5:6; Romans 12:1; 6:19; Matthew 21:22; James 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).

God has made adequate provision for the sanctification of believers. These include the blood of Jesus - Jesus shed His blood for our sanctification; the word of God (John 15:3) and (3) the Spirit of God (1 Peter 1:2).

Question 4: What conditions does the believer need to meet before he or she can be sanctified?

Recognizing that God has made provision for this blessing, we must be ready to possess it. How then does a believer become a possessor? (1) He must be sure of his salvation experience – sanctification is for believers, not sinners. A sinner must first pray for salvation and be sure of his conversion experience before asking for sanctification. (2) He must ensure that he separates himself from the world and its practices (2 Corinthians 6:17). (3) He must consecrate himself and all that he has unto God. His body, soul and spirit must be laid on the altar of sacrifice. He brings all of his past, present and future – personality, possessions, wisdom, talent, intellect, money, ambition, influence, position, etc. – and willingly bind them to the altar. He must be so consecrated that the world and self will hold no attraction for him. (4) He must hunger and thirst for sanctification experience in true humility of heart (Matthew 5:6). (5) He must pray it and (6) believe or receive the experience by faith (1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24). Sanctification is a possibility and it is God’s will for every believer. All those who sincerely consecrate their lives to God, and ask for the experience with unwavering faith will be sanctified.

PROOFS OF SANCTIFICATION AND POSSIBILITIES OF LOSING IT (Deuteronomy 30:6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-7; John 17:21-23)

Question 5: Mention some proofs of a sanctified life.

When we are sanctified, the experience will produce changes in our lives. We will know and others will know. (1) There will be the witness of the Spirit in our hearts. (2) The inner peace of God that passes all understanding will permeate our hearts. (3) We will begin to do things out of pure motive; we will be guided by sincere and pure motive in all that we do or say (Philippians 2:13-15); this makes us free from murmuring and self-will. (4) There will be supreme love for God (Deuteronomy 30:6). When we love God supremely, we will serve Him joyfully. We cannot claim to have surrendered all and still complain about God's demands on us. Sanctification makes us willing and ready to do anything for God. (5) It fills us with pure and sacrificial love for the brethren and sinners (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). (6) We will be entirely yielded unto the Lord – our response to God always will be “yes, Lord, let Thy will be done.” (7) Our affections will be set on things above and not on things on the earth (Psalm 73:25; Colossians 3:1, 2). (8) We will be sensitive to the Spirit's leading and prodding. (9) We will manifest Christ-like humility (Philippians 2:5-8). (10) We will be totally united with Christ and His church (John 17:21-23). Sanctification, not ecumenism, is the only basis for true unity among believers.

However, seekers and possessors must realize that it is possible to lose this experience. How? If we become careless, we will lose it. The Bible says that “**the thief** (the devil) **cometh not but for to steal...**” If we are not vigilant, the precious gift of sanctification will be stolen from us. If we allow little sins to return into our lives – those little foxes will surely spoil the vine (Song of Solomon 2:15). Compromise, excuse-making, censorious and critical tendencies, touchiness, insensitivity, lust, if allowed, will make us to slip into self-management and lose the experience of sanctification.

Question 6: How does the believer keep sanctified?

To keep the sanctification experience, we must: (1) be vigilant and sober always, (2) avoid the company of anybody that can make us frivolous, (3) study the word of God always and be filled with it, (4) maintain a regular devotional life (Joshua 1:8), (6) listen to God's leading always (1 Thessalonians 5:19) and (7) maintain fellowship with people of like precious faith and renew our consecration from time to time.

Sanctification is not optional but an indispensable experience for all who want to live abundant, victorious Christian life on earth and spend eternity in heaven. Christ says heaven is for holy believers. **“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God”** (Matthew 5:8). Pray, possess and preserve the holiness experience to be able to enter heaven.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Josh.	3-4	Jeremiah	43-44
TUE	“	5-6	“	45-46
WED	“	7	“	47-48
THUR	“	8	“	49
FRI	“	9	“	50
SAT	“	10	“	51
SUN	“	11-12	“	52

637 Lesson

LOVING AND SERVING THE BODY OF CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

TEXT: Galatians 5:13-15; Romans 12:3-10

From the text, we discover the scriptural explanation of the relationship of the members of the body of Christ. The Bible is not silent on the duty of each believer in the church. Indeed, it emphasizes the possibility, necessity and the responsibility of serving the body of Christ. The New Testament paints a clear picture of what is meant by the Body of Christ, the Church.

The Church is likened to a bride and members of the Church to the flock being watched/tend by the Shepherd. The Church is also likened to a kingdom where Jesus Christ is the ruling King. The Church is also called the family of God, where Jesus Christ is the Head. She is described as a building whose foundation is Jesus Christ. Over and above all these, the Church is referred to as the Body of Christ. All these metaphors are used for the Church.

THE UNITY OF BELIEVERS IN CHRIST (Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; 10:17; Galatians 3:26-29; John 17:20, 21; Ephesians 2:10-22; 4:4-6)

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many” (1 Corinthians 12:12-14).

The Word of God emphatically dwells on the unity of the Church, the body of Christ. In the twelfth verse, it says: **“the body is one”**, and this truth of oneness in the body runs through the three verses. Though there is unity in the

body, there is also diversity in the function of the members. This is similar to the human body. While we speak of only one body, there are several parts of the body – head, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands, legs, toes. Though these parts of the body are several, they all in unity, constitute the body.

Question 1: How can one become a member of the body of Christ?

The church ought to be one just as the members of the physical body. All the members of the church (blood washed and saved) ought to know that Christ placed them in His body for a purpose. At salvation, the Holy Spirit baptizes (puts) the new believer into the body of Christ: **“for by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body”** (verse 13). That one body consists of all **“Jews or Gentiles ... bond or free”**. As soon as we get born again, all tribal, national, social, professional or academic discriminations are removed and we are fused into one identity - the body of Christ.

“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4: 3-6).

Here we see very clearly how the Holy Spirit emphasizes the unity of the body. This is the prayer of the Lord in John’s gospel:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:20,21).

Question 2: Mention some attitudes that can affect church unity today.

It is a sin against God when brethren in the church divide along tribal or other lines. Our marriages must not be colored by tribal or other ungodly considerations. It is a sin to discriminate and denounce a member of the church along gender lines. Competition, hatred or resentment in

the church contradicts the prayer of Christ and it is a sin. It is resisting the Holy Ghost. The goal and ideal of Christ is that **“all may be one”**.

Question 3: What does it take to keep unity in the church?

It takes humility to keep the unity of the brethren in the church. Cooperation of all the members of the church is required for unity to be achieved. **“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one member’s one of another”** (Romans 12:3-5). None should be self-centered or self-conceited. We should humble ourselves before other believers and let the body be one. The key to the unity of the Church is humility.

UPHOLDING LOVE AND UNITY IN THE CHURCH (John 13:34,35; 15:9-12; Romans 12:9,10; John 17:9-11, 19-21; Galatians 5:13-15; Acts 2:44-47; 1 Corinthians 6:5-8; 12:23-26)

Problems are tests of unity in the church. When there are no problems, almost all members profess love, unity and brotherhood. But when problems arise, real unity is proven. This happened in the Corinthian church.

“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? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. 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? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren” (1 Corinthians 6: 5-8).

We may accidentally step on one another’s toes; our interests may clash at one time or another and we may be bandied about by some so-called brethren in the local church. We may even be overtly cheated. Such offences, when there is unity, are settled in the church by the

leaders where there is unity. Such problems in the family are settled within the family or best by the leaders of the church; never by the extended families or in-laws. The Bible says, offences must come (Matthew 18:7). Whatever the offence, and wherever the source, we must endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the home and the church in the bond of peace. All segregations must stop.

“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34).

Question 4: Mention some reasons why some brethren despise others in the church.

Some people despise because they feel that other brethren are uncultured or uncivilized. But if Christ were to look for reasons why He cannot love us, He would not need to look too far before He spots a thousand and one faults in our lives. Christ loves us just as we are, and He expects us to love the brethren in the same manner. Do not look for reasons why you should not love your brethren. Rather, search for the things in their lives that would compel you to love them.

Question 5: Why must we love the brethren?

God commanded us to love our brethren; that is the reason we must love them. Second, the soul of our brother or sister is precious before God so we must love that which God deems precious. Third, a brother or sister may seem not physically attractive in your estimation, but he/she has a sweet, beautiful spirit and for that, we must love him/her. Fourth, some brethren may not be intelligent in your evaluation but in spiritually, their hearts are perfect and for that, we must love them. Fifth, a brother or sister may not be a possessor of a university degree, but he/she possesses the rich grace of the eternal God to live right and victoriously. For that, we must love him/her. The duty and great service we have one towards another is love.

We should love under all circumstances. Brethren may make obvious mistakes, we should still love one another. Your wife behaves unwisely, still love her. A house fellowship member may deliberately go into mischief, still

love him/her. Your children may playfully damage some household utensils, still love them. People may not grant you the recognition you expect in the church, still love them. A brother may appear to be weeping today, you are to still love him because his face may be lit with joy tomorrow. A sister may be lacking the basic things of life today, you are to still love her; she might be mightily blessed of God with all comforts of life tomorrow. We should love one another unconditionally as Christ has loved us. Our love must also be sacrificial and sincere.

“And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:6).

We have different members of the body carrying out diverse functions. These functions, if not specified and carried out, may cripple the body. We should seek how to best serve the body of Christ. Several services are available in the church.

UNDERSTANDING AREAS OF SERVICE AND MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH (1 Corinthians 12:27-31; Romans 12:4-8; Acts 6:1-6; 8:6-8, 26-40; Galatians 5:13; Acts 9:36-39; Titus 2:3-5)

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

<p>Question 6: Mention some ministries and areas of service available in the church.</p>

The areas of service and ministry in the church ranges from the sensitive assignment/responsibility to the daily regular duty of caring, giving and showing of mercy. There is a duty for you to carry out. In the house fellowship, all the members cannot lead. But all can give something to comfort, assist and cheer up the needy. In the local church, all the members cannot teach, but all can show

mercy one to another, bearing one another's burden. In every church, all the members can be involved in serving one another. Such duty of serving the brethren is described as a "ministry" in the seventh verse. Some serve the body by helping the brethren in various ways: assisting young mothers, comforting the distressed and bereaved, cleaning up the church, visiting the sick, weak and lonely.

"Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" (1 Corinthians 12: 29, 30).

The thrust here is that we should not compete with one another. We should do whatever the Lord has for us with all our might. Philip, in the church, accepted what he was given to do and did it cheerfully. The work looked mean, but he concentrated on it. He later became an evangelist and the city of Samaria received the gospel through his ministry. Some Christians can hardly appreciate or adjust to serve in the days of small things. But they err. We should start like Philip and leave the future to God.

"For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 3:13). If you start on a seemingly low rung of the ministry, the Lord can, in future, lead you into a higher position; there is always the next level.

"The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2: 3-5).

The old women who are supposedly matured in the Lord should be teachers, instructing the younger sisters on Christian living, domestic manners and responsibilities.

<p>Question 7: What is wrong in seeing some services in the church as unimportant?</p>

Some people classify some works in the church as carnal and unimportant, but they miss it. God places high premium on every ministry in the church because He set up all the ministries. Second, the Bible says whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might (Ecclesiastes 9:10). So, do not idolize any ministry. Giving, visitation, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and giving water to the thirsty are as rewarding as any other ministry or position in the body (Matthew 25:31-46).

DAILY BIBLE READING

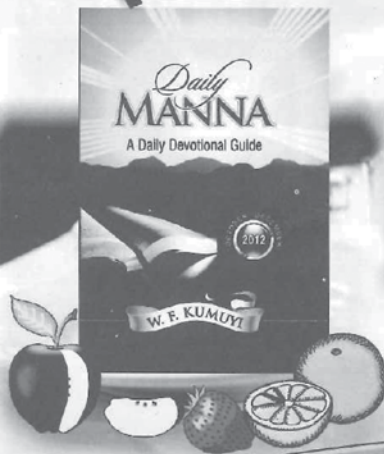
MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Josh	13	Lamentations	1-2
TUE	“	14	“	3
WED	“	15	“	4-5
THUR	“	16-17	Esekiel	1-2
FRI	“	18	“	3-4
SAT	“	19	“	5-6
SUN	“	20-21	“	7-8

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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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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All the Church Locations except Rockland County	7:00 PM
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