

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VOLUME 53

"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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BEGINNING OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

677 Lesson

REMNANTS OF BENJAMIN RE-ESTABLISHED

MEMORY VERSE “And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day” (Judges 21:6).

TEXT: Judges 21:1-25

In a bid to remove blood-guiltiness from their midst and deal with the compromise of the Benjamites in supporting the evil committed by the men of Gibeah (Judges 19), the entire Israel went to war against the tribe of Benjamin with extraordinary severity that reduced the whole tribe to 600 men. This was a near state of extermination as there were neither children nor women for their men to marry to propagate their tribe. The severity with which the war was fought seemed not only to punish the recalcitrance of Benjamin in supporting the heinous crime committed by the men of Gibeah, but also to revenge the two-time defeat suffered in their hands (Judges 20). The sudden realization that the civil war was self-destructive led the eleven tribes to rethink their actions in the face of a whole tribe almost being wiped out. According to a Roman saying: “In a civil war, no victories ought to be celebrated with triumphs, because, whichever side gets, the community lose”.

The question was, what was the need for the trumpet sound of triumph when a tribe was cut off in Israel? Knowing full well that without Benjamin the nation would no longer represent the Israel of God’s covenant – comprising twelve tribes as written on the breastplate of the high priest – their thoughts became centered on how to re-establish Benjamin. Unfortunately, in the moment of uncontrolled fury, they had made a rash vow not to give their daughters as wives to Benjamin. The challenge then was to design ways out of the quagmire so that no tribe would be lacking in Israel.

Question 1: What was the consequence for the nation of Israel if Benjamin was totally exterminated?

MOURNING FOR THE REMNANT OF BENJAMIN
(Judges 21:1-7,15; Lamentations 1:1-4,12,15; 1 Corinthians 12:14-27)

The outcome of the war had brought Benjamin to near extinction. This realization generated grievous mourning and lamentations among the other eleven tribes. **“And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore”** (Judges 21:2). Benjamin was part of the nation which came out of the loins of Abraham and had been promised the land of Canaan. Now it has been severed, nearly cut off. What a breach! In an ideal atmosphere of godliness, a part of the body had been hurt and other parts must feel the pain. When a member of the body of Christ suffers, the whole body is in agony and looks to bear one another’s burden in order to fulfill the law of Christ. It is said that “injury to one, is injury to all”.

The children of Israel were in heaviness and sorrow of heart because a significant part of them was becoming extinct. Therefore they cried, **“And said, O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel?”** (Judges 21:3). They had gone out with impetuous zeal to render Benjamin desolate, killing all their women and children – a justice carried too far – living only 600 men without wives to propagate the tribe. It was this state of affairs that led the eleven tribes to go before the Lord in repentance to seek redress so that the twelve tribes of Israel would live to enjoy the promise of inheritance given to Abraham. Observe that repentance was a priority; they wept for a day before God and sought direction from Him. They had earlier over-reacted to the problem at hand and were not discerning in judgment as they had destroyed the guilty with the righteous. Moreover, they had considered that the Benjamites, by supporting the action of the men of Gibeah who dealt so lewdly with the Levite’s concubine could not be considered worthy of marrying their godly daughters.

After repentance, comes a redress of the situation so that the remnant of Benjamin might marry and propagate their tribe. Israel then devised a means to ensure that **“his banished be not expelled from him”** (2 Samuel 14:14).

MEASURES FOR THE RESTORATION OF BENJAMIN (Judges 21:8-24; Galatians 6:1,2; Romans 15:1-3)

In the heat of anger, Israel made two rash vows without thinking of the consequences. Firstly, they swore that none of the eleven tribes would give their daughters to Benjamin to marry. Secondly, that any tribe or lineage that was not present at the gathering at Mizpeh would be put to death. By making vows not to give their daughters to Benjamin, they treated them as heathen with whom they should not intermarry. The zeal to deal with the evil committed blinded their minds to reason and to the larger consequences of a rash vow (Judges 11:31; 1 Samuel 14:24). Now that frayed nerves had been soothed, their eyes became opened to the grave consequences of their decision. The situation on ground made them realize the extremeness of their action and need to look for solution without directly breaking their oath. The oaths have been uttered before God which they could not violate, yet they had a responsibility towards rehabilitating Benjamin by finding wives for the remnant.

In seeking the face of the Lord and a possible solution to the problem they created, the children of Israel remembered that Jabeshgilead was not present among the congregation at Mizpeh. So, they sent 12,000 valiant men to destroy them after which they saved all the virgins and gave them out as wives to the surviving Benjamites. **“And they found among the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male: and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan”** (Judges 21:12). It is important to emphasize that this is not a scripturally acceptable solution. Their actions should be condemned in the light of the Scriptures and cannot be a worthy example or pattern for believers when confronted with a problem. We must recall that all these happened after Israel

had gone away from the Lord and there was no king to adjudicate according to the law of Moses (Judges 21 :25). That they resorted to killing the men of Jabeshgilead and counseling the surviving Benjamites to kidnap young virgins at Shiloh fall short of any godly standard.

The punishment of Jabeshgilead was in response to their refusal to join Israel in the war for the extermination of evil and establishment of righteousness. Their supposed inability to be valiant for the truth earned them the destruction they experienced. The clarion call is for Christians is to “join the battle for the truth”. Their virgins, four hundred of them, were spared and given as wives to the surviving Benjamites. To be able to supply wives for the remaining two hundred men, another plan was hatched that would not contravene the letter of the oath.

Question 2: Explain practical lessons in the steps taken by the eleven tribes towards re-establishing Benjamin.

However, there are some godly lessons from the steps the Israelites took to rehabilitate the Benjamites. **First**, there was *contrition*. They all came and cried before the Lord with penitent hearts as they looked at the tragedy that had befallen Benjamin; they did not see it as a mere tribal issue but a national calamity. Therefore, they offered burnt and peace offerings and also repented of their action against Benjamin (verses 2-4,6,15). **Second**, they showed *concern*. They were bothered about the precarious future of the tribe of Benjamin and said, “... **how shall we do for wives for them that remain...**” (verses 7,16). Except something was done, the tribe would be wiped out, thus reducing the number of the tribes contrary to the plan of God.

Third, they had *compassion* on the remnant. They realized that justice must be carried out with compassion because God does not take delight in destroying people. Though He chastises, it is to bring such transgressor back to Himself. **Fourth**, they discovered that the situation was dire and required *commitment*; therefore, they committed 12,000 valiant men to fight against Jabeshgilead from where they preserved 400 virgins for

the Benjamites. **Fifth**, there was *conciliation*. They made peace with the estranged tribe and sent representatives who spoke peaceably and assured them of safety and acceptance back into the fold (verse 13).

Sixth, they took *care* of them. At this time, the remaining Benjamites were in distress and holed down in a cave and needed both physical and material care in order to be integrated back into the larger society. **Seventh**, there was *cooperation* and all the people pursued the matter to a logical conclusion. No one went back to their inheritance; the entire congregation remained together with the elders until they had found solution to the problem. It was after that that **“the children of Israel departed... every man to his tribe and to his family, and... to his inheritance”** (verse 24).

When there is a problem in the body, every member is expected to demonstrate needed compassion, commitment, care and cooperation to get solution. These must be sustained till issues are resolved. If it is a challenge that requires prayers, members should be bound by the love of Christ to pray until heaven intervenes (Acts 12:5). We must not stay aloof and be unconcerned in matters that affect the brethren when it is within our power to help. The entire Israel was united and unanimous in ensuring that Benjamin was restored to favour and to their inheritance. They fulfilled the scripture which admonishes us to **“Bear... one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ”** (Galatians 6:2).

Benjamin was eventually settled in their own inheritance. From this tribe, the first king of Israel, Saul was produced, and Paul, who became the greatest apostle of Christ that ever lived. One would have thought that such a diminished tribe would not produce a great apostle like Paul who became a mighty instrument in the hand of God to take the gospel to the nations.

MORAL ROT OF BACKSLIDERS (Judges 21:25; 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 1 Samuel 8:7; Deuteronomy 12:8; Romans 1:21-32; Proverbs 14:12,14; 29:18)

“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges

21:25). The conclusion of this chapter and the entire book of Judges was an indication of the near state of anarchy and lawlessness that prevailed in Israel at that time. Four times, the statement recurred that “**in those days there was no king in Israel**” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) and twice that “**every man did that which was right in his own eyes**” (17:6; 21:25). This accounted for the many lawless and uncharitable conducts and behaviors in the book of Judges. Consider the idolatry of Micah and the Danites; the barbaric act that led to the death of the Levite’s concubine; the vengeful rigour and severity with which the Israelites treated their brethren, the Benjamites; the slaughter of the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead and the abduction of the daughters of Shiloh! It is unthinkable that the same Israel that failed to exterminate the heathen inhabitants of the land (Judges 1:1-36) as commanded by God through Moses was overzealous to the point of almost eliminating Benjamin who was part of the covenant.

Question 3: How does the spiritual condition of Israel then compare with the moral situation today?

We live at a time when a thick moral fog has settled on the society, eclipsing the ancient landmarks of decency, godliness, uprightness, and above all, righteousness. The evils of selfishness, nepotism and greed have resulted in great moral declension. Individuals believe that they own their lives and can do whatever they liked with it. They feel that they have no king, lord, guide or controller they are responsible to, but self. They believe they do not have any moral obligation to be upright.

The situation is worse with backsliders who previously served God but deliberately turned away from Him. Now they justify those things they once condemned and abhorred (2 Peter 2:22). The Lord abhors those who knew the truth and turns back to folly. The truth of Scripture is absolute; it does not vary from nation to nation or from one generation to another. God’s standard remains unchanging and unchangeable.

Question 4: How can people avoid putting their lives on autopilot and doing whatever they liked?

Irrespective of modern-day perversions, the lewdness of the corporate world and licentiousness of the society, holiness remains the only panacea to escape the corruption in the world. Those who desire to be partakers of the divine nature must seek the face of God and turn from their sins; people who have backslidden and turned away from the Saviour must return to Him while those sitting on the fence should take a clear and definite stand for the Lord. Those who feel they have no king or lord over their lives and resort to doing what they liked will one day give account of their lives. Christ is King over the whole earth. Those who will escape His judgment must recognize His kingship and lordship, and demonstrate absolute loyalty to Him.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Tim.	5-6	Jeremiah	38
TUE	2 Tim.	1-2	“	39
WED	“	3-4	“	40
THUR	Titus	1-3	“	41
FRI	“	3	“	42
SAT	Philemon	1	“	43
SUN	Hebrews	1-2	“	44

678 Lesson

ELIMELECH'S JOURNEY TO MOAB

MEMORY VERSE: “Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons” (Ruth 1:1).

TEXT: Ruth 1:1-5

The book of Ruth is historical. Written after the reign of the fifteen Judges (Othniel to Samuel) in Israel, the book zooms in on a family – their quest for greener pasture, relocation to a strange land, misfortune, return of the remnant to their country home, and restoration to divine favour. It is encouraging to note that God took interest in this family caught in the eyes of the storm, the marriages of their children, and the care and rehabilitation of their widows who trusted in His mercy and benevolence.

Surely, God is interested in the believer's family and the affairs of their lives. He is also interested in widows and widowers. We must therefore, be careful the way we live and take decisions to be sure they are in line with His will so as to avoid plunging our families into any misfortune. From the Scripture, we discover that God sometimes permits negative circumstances to bring about His purpose and program. Famine occurred at different times and affected the people of God in divers ways. Abraham, Isaac, Elijah, the children of Israel and others experienced famine at various times of their lives (Genesis 12:10; 26:1; 41:56,57). There is no doubt that God loved Israel, settled them in a delightsome land flowing with milk and honey and had been faithful to His promises. Famine at the time of the Judges, which was characterized by moral laxity, violence, spiritual inconsistency and lack of faith in God, was indicative of divine displeasure against their infringement of the terms of His covenant. The Scripture records that such cases were in fulfilment of God's threat of discipline for the nation's sins (Leviticus 26:1-5,14-20; 1 Kings 17:1;

18:17,18,21,22). Whenever God punishes people for sinful conduct, He expects contrition, repentance and a humble disposition (2 Chronicles 7:13,14). The sooner people return to Him, the earlier He restores them to His favour. Unfortunately, Elimelech's reaction and subsequent experience was contrary.

REFLECTIONS ON ELIMELECH'S DECISION TO RELOCATE (Ruth 1:1,2; Numbers 22:1-7; 25:1,9; Judges 11:17; Proverbs 3:11,12; Romans 8:5-8)

“Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons” (Ruth 1:1).

Faced with the challenge of a depleting barn, lean purse and a bleak future, Elimelech decided to emigrate to another country. But the journey to Moab was either ill- advised or not well thought through. We are not told he sought God's guidance. While Abram nearly lost his wife when he made a similar mistake, God had to intercept Isaac from going to Egypt during another incident of famine (Genesis 12:10-20; 26:1-6). By divine arrangement, Joseph became the prime minister of Egypt to preserve the lives of his father and siblings from a seven-year famine. In this instance, Jacob's migration to Egypt was the will of God (Genesis 46:2-4). The point is, believers need to trust God wholeheartedly to guide them in times of famine or adversity.

Question 1: Why was it wrong for Elimelech to relocate to Moab?

Moab was not a wise choice of destination for a true Israelite. Despite being descendants of Lot, the Moabites were proven enemies of the Hebrews. They were needlessly hostile to Israel in the wilderness and resorted to use diabolical means and seduction to overcome Israel. Through their seduction, twenty-four thousand Israelites died in the wilderness. Besides being haughty and proud, they were welded to Chemosh, an idol whose worship pattern was similar to Baal. So, residing in Moab was risking exposure to

idolatry and the consequent divine displeasure (Genesis 19:33,36,37; Numbers 24:17; Deuteronomy 23:3- 5). Whatever the attraction for Elimelech's move to Moab, it was unjustifiable without divine directive.

Before a believer decides to relocate, he should seek God's face for proper leading (Proverbs 3:5,6). Moab portrays the contemporary world of sinners. Christians should beware of alluring alternatives in the world. A believer who hobnobs with unbelievers will find it difficult to blend his scriptural conviction with their corrupt practices. He will either suffer avoidable persecution or risk spiritual contamination, compromise, backsliding and perdition. It is wise for a believer to prayerfully consider all relevant factors before taking a decision; spiritual consideration should take precedence over mundane benefits.

Question 2: What are the implications of Elimelech's relocation without seeking divine guidance?

Elimelech's escape option was neither reasonable nor profitable. The relocation showed that he focussed more on the physical than the spiritual and eternal. Thus, he missed out on God's purpose for the situation and led his family to serious sorrow and regret.

Though Elimelech and Naomi were righteous, God expected a national repentance from the people. The righteous, no doubt, will suffer when God's rod of correction comes upon the community he lives. It is a change of heart that brings pardon, restoration and blessings (Proverbs 28:13; Micah 6:8,9).

Adversity is not a proof of God's weakness or wickedness. Through His guidance, however, it can become an opportunity for promotion and enlargement for the righteous (Genesis 26:1-3,12-14; Romans 8:28). Abiding in the Lord and in the place He has appointed for us will enable us claim His numerous promises of protection, preservation and provision (1 Kings 8:37-40; Job 5:20-27; Psalm 33:18,19; 37:18,19).

Question 3: Why is Elimelech's story instructive for contemporary believers?

As spiritual relations of Christ, the decisions individual believers make are very important to God. He is interested in what we do, our motives, the steps we take and the direction we face. He takes records of minute details of our lives. Therefore, our reactions to vicissitudes of life should constantly reflect the consciousness of our peculiarities (1 Peter 2:9). We should not allow a downturn in business, finances, physical fortunes, resources or persecution lead us to take any decision contrary to the will of God. Like Elimelech, we may not be in control of the causative agents of a misfortune but are completely responsible for the decision we make regarding it.

RESULT OF ELIMELECH'S WRONG DISPOSITION (Ruth 1:3,4; Numbers 15:31; Job 5:3,4; 20:4-8; Psalm 73:25-27; 139:7-10; Proverbs 14:12)

Attempt to escape famine resulted in three funerals in a foreign land and left the family with three hapless widows. The event portrayed Elimelech as a failed husband, father and leader who misled his family away from God's positive influence. Actually, the famine was not the real cause of his woes; after all, the destiny of those who did not migrate and the turn of events in Bethlehemjudah proved that God was in control of the situation.

That Elimelech descended from a godly parentage is evident in the meaning of his name – my God is king. It was meant to dedicate him to a lifelong submission to the Almighty, and to serve as a buffer of confidence in times of despondency. But he did not live up to the name as he acted without seeking divine approval. Believers should live up to the name of the Lord by which they are known and called. They should always commit their ways to the Lord and trust Him who has promised to take care of them (1 Peter 5:7).

Elimelech's decision later led his children into marrying Moabitish women, a decision that ran contrary to the commandment of God (1 Kings 11:1,2). How one wrong move leads to another! After the death of the husband, Naomi could have headed for home with her children

or even directed them to marry from their tribe in Bethlehemjudah. But she stayed at Moab.

THE SOLITUDE OF WIDOWHOOD (Ruth 1:5; Isaiah 28:22; Matthew 3:8-10; Luke 13:1-9; Romans 2:4-9; 2 Peter 3:9-11; Isaiah 1:9)

“And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband” (Ruth 1:5).

Within ten years, Naomi lost her husband, Elimelech and her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. She became a widow together with her son’s wives. She was bereft of all life’s joys. Solitude set in as there was no acquaintance, helper or breadwinner for the aging woman. The calamity, bereavement and solitude taught her to do the needful – return home to meet the people of God. Believers who notice the devastating effects of their wrong decision must not wait too long but retrace their steps back to the Lord who is able to help them recover their loss.

Question 4: What is the significance of the sparing of Naomi’s life?

We cannot fail to notice the grace of God in sparing Naomi because whatever it was that claimed the lives of her family members could have claimed hers too. Though she was as guilty as others who died in the strange land, God was merciful to spare her in keeping with His sovereign resolve to preserve a remnant. God still shows such grace to the undeserving. Sinners and backsliders who escape punishment or untimely death should not attribute their preservation to sheer luck or smartness. Instead, they should see it as a call to repentance and an opportunity to get right with God. Besides, it presents a new opportunity to make important decisions that would help shape their future and eternity.

Naomi would have to decide to remain in the strange land or return home; the two Moabite widows would have to decide to cleave to God or remain with their gods. These decisions determined the rest of the events in the entire book.

Whenever an unexpected or unpleasant situation arises, perhaps as a result of a wrong step or decision, we should return to God and His people. We should see such as a test of our character and determine to be steadfast and unmovable, thus giving glory to God. It is wiser to retrace our steps back to the presence of God than remain in a strange assembly. Believers should not abandon the fellowship of brethren or the household of faith just because there is crisis. Those who have left the place of truth and sound doctrine as a result of crises should not be ashamed to return to the company of saints. Our decisions should be faith-based not fear-induced.

For believers who have bungled opportunities and plunged their families into disaster through wrong decisions, there is hope of rebirth, reparation and restoration to greater blessings.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Hebrews	5-6	Jeremiah 45-46
TUE	“	7-8	“ 47-48
WED	“	10	“ 49
THUR	“	11	“ 50
FRI	“	12	“ 51
SAT	“	13	“ 52
SUN	James	1-2	Lam. 1-2

679 Lesson

NAOMI RETURNS WITH RUTH TO BETHLEHEM-JUDAH

MEMORY VERSE: “And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

TEXT: Ruth 1:6-22

The previous study gave insight into the ugly consequence of Elimelech’s sojourn in Moab in an attempt to escape the famine in Bethlehemjudah. The ten-year sojourn witnessed his death and his two sons, leaving Naomi alone with her Moabitish daughters-in-law.

In this study, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehemjudah after hearing that the famine was over. Her two daughters-in-law also decided to return with her, but eventually only Ruth followed through with that decision; Orpah went back to her people and to her idols. This shows that it is not enough to make decisions; we have to follow through against all odds with steadfastness and determination.

Question 1: What is the difference between the decisions made by Ruth and Orpah?

COMMENDABLE ACTION AFTER A CHEERY NEWS
(Ruth 1:6,7; Exodus 4:19,20; Genesis 42:1,2; Luke 2:10-15; Mark 16:15-18,20)

After the death of her husband and two sons in Moab, Naomi became desolate and burdened with the care of two younger widows in a foreign land. According to a Bible commentator, “there was almost nothing worse than being a widow in the ancient world. Widows were taken advantage of or ignored. They were almost always poverty stricken”. Her expectation of a better life in Moab turned into a bitter experience but she did not lose her faith in God. Although she was quite shaken and low in

spirit, she still held on to God. **“Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread”** (Ruth 1:6).

It was famine that prompted Naomi and her family members to relocate from Bethlehemjudah to the land of Moab. But she heard that God had visited His people and the famine had ended. Here, we learn that adversity never lasts forever. Whatever negative circumstances we may be compelled to pass through will certainly come to an end because God will not forsake forever His people who trust Him. The news of God’s good dealings got to Naomi in Moab. **“As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country”** (Proverbs 25:25). The gospel is the good news for the world, and believers should ensure it gets to all people. They must urgently carry the message of hope to sinners who are already drowning in the ocean of sin.

Question 2: In disseminating the news of God’s goodness, what are the essential qualities we should possess?

However, the bringer of good tidings must be sincere, urgent, enthusiastic, explicit and compelling. The good news must be told to all those who have never met the Lord. Also, the likes of Naomi who have left the people of God to a far country need to be told of the goodness of the Lord on His people. Indeed, God has been visiting His children with great blessings. Therefore, we need to be urgent on this task before backsliders die in their condition. We have the mandate from Christ to tell our friends, neighbours and acquaintances that all things are now ready (Luke 14:17). The night is far spent and we cannot afford to delay any further.

CHALLENGES AND COMMENDATION OF CONSECRATION (Ruth 1:8-18; Joshua 24:15; Luke 9:57,58; John 6:67; Luke 14:26-33; 2 King 2:2).

Naomi’s promptness in her effort to return to her home country is noteworthy. Although she commenced the journey in company of her daughters-in-law, she later urged them to return to Moab, their country home. Her

first plea was premised on the affection that she had for them. She appreciated, prayed and encouraged them to return to Moab, start a new family and feel secure with their people. When this offer could not deter them, she spoke of a bleak future they are likely to have concerning marriage. She was not economical with the truth concerning the cost of following her to Bethlehem.

Naomi's action may be strange to some believers who expected her to encourage her daughters-in-law to follow her to Israel where they could come to the knowledge of the true God. But it is likely that Naomi wanted them to prove their sincerity to follow her after counting the cost. However, believers are to be careful not to hinder or discourage people who want to join them on the way to heaven. But at the same time, they must make prospective disciples know that following Jesus comes at a cost. Christ Himself taught the importance of counting the cost before embarking on discipleship. After a multitude of His followers had departed from Him, He tested the seriousness of the remaining ones by asking: **“will ye also go away?”** Surely, the need for personal conviction in following Christ cannot be overstressed.

Question 3: What lessons do we learn from Orpah's return to Moab?

Orpah resisted the initial pressure to return to Moab but could not sustain the decision. Her professed love for her mother-in-law and her people could not stand the test of time. She made a quick decision to follow Naomi but was equally quick in turning back at the slightest hint of the challenges ahead. Some people hastily profess their love for the Lord but when confronted with the challenges of life, they rescind their decision. They are like the people in Christ's parable of the sower and the seed (Matthew 13:19-21). Orpah's promise and purpose proceeded from passion instead of principle. She lacked the grace to persevere to the end. She was also an example of a backslider returning to her gods because of the challenge of walking the unknown path with God.

Ruth had similar challenges as Orpah. She was faced with an idolatrous background and a bleak future. After all, God had said that a Moabite should not come into

the congregation of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:3), yet she prevailed over these challenges. She acted like a true heroine of faith that saw the invisible. Her action was consequent on the strong affection and attachment she had towards Naomi and the leaning of her heart towards the God of Israel, rather than on any prospect of temporal benefits.

Question 4: Itemize Ruth's resolve in her statement to Naomi's urge.

Believers who want to remain faithful to the end must be firm in their decision to serve God, keep godly associations and focus their attention on heaven. We are to keep looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. We should also endure the cross, challenges and life's mishaps while running the race that is set before us.

Meanwhile, the cordial relationship that existed between Naomi and her daughters-in-law is worthy of mention. Orpah and Ruth's good affection for their mother-in-law was enough proof that Naomi was very kind to them and had won their love. This should serve as an example to contemporary Christian mothers-in-law who are always prone to be at loggerheads with their daughters-in-law or sons-in-law. We must strive to follow peace with everyone. And with the grace of God and godly wisdom, we can live in peace and unity with others and win them to the Lord.

COUNTING LOSSES AFTER COMPROMISE (Ruth 1:19-22; Psalm 57:7; Acts 11:23; Exodus 15:13; Proverbs 21:6; 13:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Despite the challenges that Naomi and Ruth had on the way, their resolve strengthened them until they arrived Bethlehem. Their determination encourages us to cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart.

Question 5: Point out reasons Naomi was wrong in blaming God for her woes.

When they got to Bethlehem, Naomi requested that she be called Mara, meaning bitterness. She proclaimed that her calamities were caused by God and accused Him

of dealing bitterly with her, emptying her of everything and afflicting her. But Naomi was wrong in blaming God for her woes. They were only reaping the negative consequences of their decision and she should not have charged God foolishly for what befell them. Men should learn not to charge God foolishly when they are faced with the consequences of their wrong decisions in life. As believers, God will certainly discipline us when we err, but such chastisements are for our own good. The right attitude would be to examine ourselves and repent of any wrongdoing where necessary. At such a time, our prayer should be that: **“that which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more”** (Job 34:32).

Question 6: What are the proofs that Naomi did not return empty?

Despite her physical losses, Naomi had reasons to give thanks to God. Her life was preserved and the timing of her return coincided with the time of harvest when there would be adequate provisions for her. Above all, Ruth came with her. Bringing a heathen woman, who would have perished in idolatry to serve the living God was more than all Naomi had lost. She reckoned that she came back empty because she could not count her blessings well. Like most men, she placed more value on physical gains than the spiritual. Unknown to her, she had been instrumental to snatching out of Moab, a woman who later became a great ancestor of the Messiah. Ruth turned out to be a great asset, not only to Naomi but the entire nation. Like Johnson Oatman rightly admonished in his song:

“Count your blessings, name them one by one, Count your blessings, see what God hath done; Count your blessings, name them one by one, And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.”

We are to give thanks to God in everything.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	James	3-4	Lam.	3
TUE	"	5	"	4-5
WED	1 Pet.	1-2	Ezekiel	1-2
THUR	"	3	"	3-4
FRI	"	4-5	"	5-6
SAT	2 Pet.	1-2	"	7-8
SUN	"	3	"	9-10

680 Lesson

RUTH'S PIETY AND HARD WORK

MEMORY VERSE: "The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust" (Ruth 2:12).

TEXT: Ruth 2:1-23

In the first chapter of the book of Ruth, the sad events of the demise of Elimelech, the husband of Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion were recorded. Ruth, the wife of Mahlon had demonstrated uncommon commitment and loyalty to her mother-in-law by doggedly following her from Moab back to Bethlehem-Judah. She had also openly professed her faith in the God of Israel. Eventually, the duo **"came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest"** (Ruth 1:22).

Upon their return from Moab, Ruth demonstrated again and again those virtues that stood her out, in addition to her faith in the God of Israel. She would not hide under the excuse of being a stranger in a strange land and become a burden to her mother-in-law; she was determined to find sustenance for herself. Like the virtuous woman of king Lemuel's description, **"She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar"** (Proverbs 31:13,14). She demonstrated the virtues of industry, piety and hard work. These earned her approbation and favour and paved the way for her integration, not only into the commonwealth of Israel, but a place in the lineage of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ruth's decision to go and glean in the fields, her industry and piety, the divine favour and connection which attended her efforts and encounter with a near kinsman and future husband, form the thrust of this study.

RUTH'S REACTION TO CHALLENGES (Ruth 2:1-3,7; Proverbs 13:4; 10:4; 12:24; 22:29)

Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem having lost virtually everything. Indeed, Naomi had lamented: **“I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty..”** (Ruth 1:21). But Ruth had already made up her mind that though materials and men were lost, the God of Naomi was going to be her sufficiency (Ruth 1:16). She did not exhibit negative character in the face of seemingly excruciating challenges. Such instances as were faced by her were capable of drawing evil speaking, foolishly charging God, discouragement, loss of virtues, or outright backsliding from some people, but she faced her challenges with equanimity, courage and dogged optimism. She demonstrated resilience and unflinching determination based on unshakable convictions (Isaiah 50:7; Psalm 27:3; 56:4).

Ruth further demonstrated respect, obedience to her mother-in-law and rectitude in her interactions. Honesty, loyalty and trustworthiness were her hallmarks in all her undertakings. She received and kept the instructions given to her by her mother-in-law. **“And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter”** (Ruth 2:2).

Question 1: Mention some reactions that people put up in times of adversity.

The Lord God, through Moses had earlier instituted the rules of kinsmen and communal life expected to guide the people of Israel during harvesting. **“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God”** (Leviticus 23:22). The purpose of this command is the realization that in every society, there are the less privileged, people who may not have

access to the good things of life (Deuteronomy 15:11). Such should not count themselves unworthy of life; hence, the Lord made provision for their sustenance. Moreover, it is to show that the Lord is the God of the poor and cares for them (Exodus 23:11; Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 15:7-9). Taking advantage of this provision, Ruth requested from her mother-in-law that she might go to the fields and glean ears of corn. **“And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech”** (Ruth 2:3). It was obvious from her experience that the Lord was in the arrangement. That she found herself in the field of Boaz was not a coincidence – it was divine. Besides, the way and manner Boaz took note of her presence underscored divine favour and connection. God is still in the business of guiding the footsteps of the pious, humble, obedient and righteous today (Psalm 37:23; Isaiah 30:25; Psalm 32:8,9).

A RICH MAN’S RESPONSE TO THE LESS PRIVILEGED (Ruth 2:4-16; Deuteronomy 8:12,13,17; 15:7-9; Ephesians 6:9; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Proverbs 31:29)

“And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee” (Ruth 2:4).

Boaz was of the family of Elimelech, Naomi’s late husband. He lived in Bethlehem but had a large farm where Ruth, guided by providence and God’s predetermined counsel, went to glean. He was a noteworthy person. Though a mighty man of wealth, he maintained a cordial relationship with his workers. When he got to them, he said, **“The Lord be with you”** and they responded, **“The LORD bless thee”**. How pleasant and productive a workplace when the employer and employee, manager and messenger, director and workers labour in an atmosphere devoid of fear, threat, intimidation and insubordination! Boaz displayed godly character lacking in many men and women of substance. Wealth makes many haughty and conceited, yet the Bible warns against vainglory,

pride in uncertain riches (Deuteronomy 8:12,13,17; Ephesians 6:9; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Philippians 2:3).

Besides his cordial relationship with his workers, Boaz manifested humility, love and care despite his wealth and position. He was quick to spot the ‘stranger’ among his workers and inquired accordingly. No doubt, this man was diligent to know the state of his workers. How often strangers sneak in among workers in many Christian assemblies and they continue unnoticed for a long time.

Question 2: What lessons can be learn from Boaz’s nobility and humility?

Boaz was not only a diligent employer, he was also benevolent. He instructed his men to deliberately leave behind some grains for Ruth to glean. This would make Ruth enjoy the favour of her benefactor without rubbishing her dignity. Believers who are blessed with material wealth are enjoined to show benevolence to needy brethren; but those who would enjoy such acts of kindness should also be ready to work and not live in idleness.

It was apparent that Boaz had heard so much about Ruth though he had not met her (Ruth 2:11,12). In his remarks, he extolled some of her virtues. He testified of all that she had done to her **“mother-in-law since the death of thine husband”**. He eulogized her decision to separate from her own people and **“come unto a people which thou knowest not heretofore”** and to forsake her idols and take refuge under **“the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust”**. As a result, Boaz decreed blessing on her. He said: **“The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel...”** He further charged Ruth to keep up her hard work (Ruth 2:8,9) while encouraging her to expect a full reward from the Lord God of Israel.

Ruth remains a worthy example to all women professing faith in Christ. In spite of her adverse condition, **“she guideth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms”** (Proverbs 31:17). Widows who have become

beggars and unnecessarily dependent on others should have a rethink. If they are not infirm, they should work willingly with their hands and refuse to sit back to eat the “**bread of idleness**”.

Question 3: Mention some condemnable ways the less privileged are treated in our communities.

The custom of treating widows in unsavoury, wicked ways negates the teachings of the Scriptures. Widows are to be taken into fellowship, cared for, consoled, comforted, supported and encouraged (Deuteronomy 24:17; Job 29:13; Isaiah 10:1,2; Matthew 23:14; Acts 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:3; James 1:27). Accusing a Christian widow, depriving her and her children of the properties of her departed husband, subjecting her to heathen rites and idolatrous mourning practices are wicked, ungodly, inhuman and condemnable.

RUTH’S REPORT AND STEADFASTNESS (Ruth 2:17-23; Proverbs 31:29; 3:21-24; 7:1-3; Matthew 24:13)

Ruth demonstrated that her virtues were not as dews that could not withstand the rising sun. She was consistent in her responses, character, hard work and devotion. As soon as she returned from the farm, she reported back to her mother-in-law and showed her what she had gleaned. “**And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed**” (Ruth 2:18). That she found favour, sustenance and an assurance of further provision from Boaz were not enough to embolden her against Naomi. There was no feeling of independence and self-sufficiency. Ruth brought of the meal she ate after she was satisfied and gave it to her mother-in-law. What an embodiment of virtues! “**Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all**” (Proverbs 31:29).

Ruth was diligent enough to enquire about the owner of the plantation where she gleaned and his counsel that she should keep fast by the young men; a counsel that Naomi restated. “**And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter, that thou**

go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field” (Ruth 2:22). She was instructed not to wander into another field, to abide fast by Boaz’s maidens, to let her eyes be on the field being reaped and to go after the reapers. Interestingly, she kept to this advice and remained steadfast. This was to pave way for a bigger and more glorious future for her in the economy of God.

Steadfastness and consistency are the rule and not the exception if a man is to succeed here and make it to the kingdom of God (Matthew 24:42; Mark 13:33-35; Matthew 26:41; Luke 12:37-39; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Acts 20:31; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Peter 4:7).

Ruth “...**dwelt with her mother in law**” (Ruth 2:23). Her contact and continued stay with Naomi must have accorded her the privilege to know about the God of Israel and His ways. It must have enabled her to become a proselyte of the faith of Rahab and the religion of Abraham which gave her a place in the commonwealth of Israel (Joshua 6:25; Hebrews 11:31).

<p>Question 4: From Boaz’s and Naomi’s instructions to Ruth, how can a Christian pilgrim remain consistent to the end?</p>

Believers are warned not to depart from the living God, from the faith or wander about (Hebrews 3:12; 1 Timothy 4:1; Jude 11-13); but to look unto Jesus and run with patience the race set before us (Hebrews 12:1,2). There is no room for idleness and indolence in the kingdom of God (Matthew 20:4,6-7, Proverbs 12:24). Christians should be diligent in business and fervent in spirit (Romans 12:11). New converts are to keep fast by proven, mature, steadfast children of God, serving the Lord as we all journey to our heavenly home.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 John	1-2	Ezekiel	11-12
TUE	“	3	“	13-14
WED	“	4-5	“	15-16
THUR	2 John	1	“	17-18
FRI	3 John	1	“	19-20
SAT	Jude	1	“	21
SUN	Rev.	1	“	22

681 Lesson

RUTH FINDS FAVOUR WITH BOAZ

MEMORY VERSE: “And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:11).

TEXT: Ruth 3:1-18

The preceding chapter reveals the piety and industry of Ruth. On arrival at Bethlehemjudah, she displayed virtues of godliness, chastity and hard work as a young widow. Widowhood did not crush her will to survive and live a worthy life. For some young widows, the next step would be to begin to beg, borrow, murmur and bemoan their lot in life; others could become licentious, immoral and dependent. Ruth, like the virtuous woman described in Proverbs 31, went into the fields to labour and fend for herself and mother-in-law. As she ventured out, providence guided her to the field of Boaz, a near kinsman of her late husband.

In this lesson, Naomi expressed concern for her marital status, and God showed favour and prospered her way. Naomi said, “**My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?**”

Question 1: From the text, what kind of rest was Naomi seeking for Ruth?

The rest Naomi meant is marriage and a settled life. She hinted earlier in her parting remarks to Ruth and Orpah (chapter 1:9) that: “**The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband**”. There is a measure of rest from acute lack that marriage grants. Apart from rest and provision, the blessedness of marriage includes protection, partnership, procreation and power of joining forces together to overcome the challenges of life. In the New Testament, young widows are instructed to marry to enjoy this rest (1 Timothy 5:9-16).

NAOMI'S INSTRUCTIONS TO RUTH (Ruth 3:1-5; Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Isaiah 1:16; Matthew 6:17; 1 Timothy 2:9,10; 1 Peter 3:3-5)

Question 2: What can believers learn from Naomi's concern for Ruth's marital status?

Naomi showed the concern of every true mother for her children. She called her, "**my daughter**" because Ruth's affection and care for Naomi was endearing. Since Ruth had consecrated her life to the God of Israel, it was proper for Naomi to desire that she should be settled and blessed in a marriage union. Naomi's concern for the happiness of Ruth revealed her virtue of selflessness. Her plan for her daughter-in-law was not only commendable, but worthy of emulation by godly parents.

Naomi revealed to Ruth that Boaz was of the same kindred with her late husband. Acting on information that Boaz "**winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor**", she gave Ruth a detailed instruction on how to approach the matter. She instructed her to wash and anoint herself, put on her raiment and go to the threshing floor. She told her, "**make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking**". She further instructed her to stealthily "**uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do**".

Some Christian writers have argued on the propriety or otherwise of Naomi's counsel to Ruth. They alleged that the approach was at best indecent or immodest. But from the perspective of Naomi and Ruth's virtues of chastity and piety which they had manifested aforetime, it is fair to suggest that their action was meant to draw Boaz's attention to his duty as a kinsman towards the wife of the dead (Deuteronomy 25:7-9). In the Jewish context, if a man married a wife and died childless, the nearest relation to the dead was required to take her.

The commandment was: "**the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother**

unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel” (Deuteronomy 25:5,6).

The Scripture also reveals what the wife of the deceased was to do when the near kinsman-redeemer showed unwillingness to comply. **“And if the man like not to take his brother’s wife, then let his brother’s wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband’s brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband’s brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; Then shall his brother’s wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face...”** (Deuteronomy 25:7-10).

It should be noted however, that it had not been ascertained whether Boaz or the nearest kinsman would perform the part of the kinsman or not. So, uncovering his feet was to serve as a reminder. Though he had been benevolent by giving grains to Ruth and passing complementary comments, the task of kinsman-redeemer, which was equally important, remained unattended. Naomi’s instruction to Ruth was aimed at reminding Boaz of this duty and eliciting his response regarding it. Naomi was sure that if Ruth obeyed her instruction, **“he [Boaz] will tell thee what thou shalt do”**. New Testament believers know however, that those Old Testament practices require spiritual application today. For example, Abraham’s instruction to his servant to take a wife for his son, Isaac, from among his kindred only serves to remind believers not to marry a nonbeliever (Genesis 24:2-4; Deuteronomy 7:3,4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Having seen the sincerity and affection of Naomi for her welfare and happiness in life, Ruth demonstrated obedience. **“And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.”** She knew her mother-in-law was godly and God-fearing and would not put her in harm’s way.

RUTH'S PROPOSAL AND BOAZ'S ADHERENCE TO THE SCRIPTURE (Ruth 3:6-14; Genesis 39:9; Job 31:1; 1 Timothy 6:11; Titus 2:5; Revelation 14:4; Galatians 5:22,23; 2 Peter 1:5-8)

After receiving instruction from Naomi, Ruth **“went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her”**. At midnight, Boaz discovered the uninvited guest. To his question, **“Who art thou?”**, he got the proposal: **“I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman”**. Being a godly man himself, Boaz realized the import of the proposal and his own responsibility as a near kinsman. He was discerning enough to understand the message that Ruth's gesture conveyed.

Question 3: From the godly example of Boaz and Ruth, how should intending couples relate before wedding?

Boaz's response was polite and tender. He began by heaping compliments on Ruth. **“And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.”** Boaz referred to Ruth's act of kindness in her choice to follow Naomi to become a member of God's covenant people. The second kindness was her willingness to offer herself as a bride to him even when she could decide to find a young and rich husband outside the law and custom of the people of Israel. Boaz said further, **“... For all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman”** (Ruth 3:11).

Boaz made a plain and truthful explanation on the rightful order of a near kinsman. Being a just man, he would not outwit the nearest kinsman in the matter, but gave Ruth a comforting assurance that if the nearest kinsman would not redeem her, he would do so. No doubt, Boaz was ready to maintain his righteousness and integrity in the land. Though nothing went wrong between them, he knew the implication of being seen with a woman on the floor in the night. Believers need to

be wise and transparent during courtship. God expects Christian singles and intending couples to be holy in all their dealings.

Boaz was conscious of the presence of God as revealed in his response to Ruth. A Christian writer summed it up this way: “Boaz, instead of touching her as a wanton, blesseth her as a father, encourageth her as a friend, promiseth her as a kinsman, rewards her as a patron, and sends her away laden with hopes and gifts, no less chaste, more happy, than she came. O admirable temperance, worthy the progenitor of him in whose lips and heart there was no guile!”

Note that though Ruth was a mature woman, she followed the instructions of her mother-in-law. The Marriage Committee in the church was set up to guide bachelors and spinsters in their journey to a happy marriage. It is expedient for intending couples to seek the counsel and guidance of the committee so that they can be properly guided in their wedding ceremonies and in their homes.

True Christian believers know that the steps taken by Ruth in approaching Boaz cannot be a precedent or pattern for the church. It should be interpreted in the context of the culture and times in which they lived. Moreover, we now have a better understanding and light concerning knowing God’s will in marriage. We have the Holy Spirit and the word of God to guide us in all things.

GIFT FROM BOAZ AND HOPE OF REDEMPTION BY A KINSMAN (Ruth 3:15-18; Hebrews 9:12; John 3:16; Matthew 1:5,6)

Question 4: Explain the Scripture’s stance on the responsibility of believers towards widows.

Ruth’s mission was successful as Boaz realized he had failed to fulfil an essential lawful obligation of the near kinsman towards these pious poor widows. In addition to the consolation and assurance he gave her, Boaz **“measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her”** saying, **“Go not empty unto thy mother in law”**. Fair speech and comforting compliments without practical giving to meet the needs of the poor is not an expression

of virtue. The New Testament makes this responsibility very clear. It says, **“If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed”** (1 Timothy 5:16).

Question 5: What should be the believer’s attitude towards God’s promises?

Satisfied with the feedback from Ruth, Naomi encouraged her to **“Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day”**. She was sure that the promise given by Boaz had set in motion the process towards finding rest for her daughter-in-law; and that it will come to pass. The believer must hold on tenaciously to the unfailing promises of God in every circumstance of life.

Boaz was a type of Christ, our Kinsman-Redeemer. God’s promised redemption is only possible through Jesus who paid the price through His death on the Cross to redeem us from spiritual poverty and weakness. Anyone who humbly repents of sin and exercises faith in this near Kinsman will be saved.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Rev. 2	2	Ezekiel	23
TUE	“	3-4	“	24-25
WED	“	5-6	“	26-27
THUR	“	7-8	“	28-29
FRI	“	9-10	“	30-31
SAT	“	11-12	“	32
SUN	“	13-14	“	33

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

682 Lesson

PAUL DEFENDS HIS APOSTLESHIP

MEMORY VERSE: But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth (2 Corinthians 10:17,18).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 10:7-18

In the preceding verses to the text, Paul the apostle emphasizes that spiritual work involves warfare. He makes it clear that believers' warfare is not in the physical realm; that it requires the deployment of spiritual weapons which are "**mighty through God**" to pull down the enemy's strongholds.

In today's text, the self-effacing apostle draws another contrast as he defends his apostleship on very sound spiritual grounds. He even alludes to his rather unimpressive personal appearance which contrasts sharply with his unusual influential personality and apostolic credentials, to draw vital lessons and silence, for all ages, proud boasters who use spiritual privileges and positions as avenue for self-glorification.

PROPER APPROACH AND ATTITUDE TO THE USE OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY (2 Corinthians 10:7-11; Micah 3:5,8; Galatians 1:1; Romans 1:5; 2 Corinthians 12:12; 2 Peter 3:15,16; 2 Corinthians 1:12; Acts 26:16-18)

Using himself as a model, Paul the apostle shows a deep appreciation of the divine purpose in the bestowal and use of spiritual authority. "**Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's**" (2 Corinthians 10:7).

The Jews made a great mistake of looking upon the Lord Jesus only from a carnal point of view and thus

missed the purpose of His divinely ordained ministry. To them, He was just a carpenter's son; in spite of all the signs and wonders He did which ought to have convinced them otherwise. The Corinthians needed to be taught not to commit a similar error with respect to the ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. This was why Paul carefully affirmed and defended his apostleship before the Corinthians who appeared, by their contemptuous attitude, to have been disregarding him and not according him the proper respect due to his office.

However, this did not deter the Apostle from fulfilling his pastoral and apostolic duties to the church in Corinth. He commended their positive points but also rebuked them where necessary.

Question 1: What were the proofs of Paul's apostolic ministry?

“For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed” (2 Corinthians 10:8).

Paul's apostolic authority was real for several reasons. In origin, it was given by a direct commission from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Galatians 1:1). Two, in content and purpose, it was received with grace **“for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name”** (Romans 1:5). His ministry was not a local affair. Three, in manifestation, the signs of an apostle that followed his ministry proved that it was real (2 Corinthians 12:12). Four, even his letters which were **“weighty and powerful”** demonstrated the reality of the spiritual insight and authority that backed his ministry. Five, his deep understanding of the mysteries of Christ (Ephesians 3:3,4) which Peter also acknowledged (2 Peter 3:15,16). Finally, he had a testimony of conscience that he had led the church in Corinth in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God (2 Corinthians 1:12).

Unlike Paul, many Christian leaders today are more interested in the trappings of office than seeking to have God's approval demonstrated in their ministry.

Their craze for big titles has become an addiction. Some leaders also demand a cult-like following. Paul was different. He was a leader under authority who had the boldness to counsel his followers to follow him as he followed Christ. He and his associates who ministered to the Corinthians, like Silvanus and Timotheus, did not concentrate on exercising dominion over the Corinthian brethren for their personal gains. Instead, they encouraged them to stand by faith and be their best for God and for ministry.

Question 2: What should be the believer's attitude to spiritual authority and leadership privilege?

From Apostle Paul's example, we can draw vital lessons in the use of authority and proper attitude to spiritual leadership privileges. First, leaders should not see the privilege of leading God's people as an avenue for self-aggrandizement and pride but a privilege to serve like Christ. Therefore, they should not relish the privilege as an end in itself or opportunity to lord it over God's heritage, but for service. Second, leaders should not be too demanding even for the dues of their office. They should learn to be content in every situation, and continue to fulfill their ministry even where standard provisions are not available. This will be in accord with the pattern of Christ who came "**not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many**". Third, members should respect and trust those vested with spiritual authority and cooperate with them, providing what is necessary to assist them to operate optimally. They should submit to scriptural leadership, take discipline in good faith knowing that the true leader's aim is the ultimate good of the church and the fulfillment of God's plan for His people.

Question 3: What should be the believer's attitude to his spiritual leader?

In our contemporary times, there are wolves in sheep's clothing that masquerade as apostles of Christ and hold multitudes of people in bondage. With their false visions, fake prophecies, commercial prayers and

fraudulent revelations, they strengthen the hands of evildoers. They use their spiritual authority to amass wealth and **“he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him”** (Micah 3:5). Against this background, Micah set his own ministry in clear perspective: **“But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin”** (Micah 3:8).

Question 4: How essential is strong doctrinal leadership in the church?

However, care must be taken to ensure that wayward people are not saved by a compromising leadership without strong doctrinal backbone to correct obvious and subtle errors. Spiritual authority, therefore, must be properly utilized to rid the church of defilement and close the door to backsliding. This was what Paul meant when he stated that the apostolic authority he had from the Lord was given to him for the edification and not destruction of the church. **“For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed”** (2 Corinthians 10:8).

In saying this, Paul was consciously being faithful to his commission (Acts 26:16-18). The church should encourage leaders like Paul who are not fearful to confront false doctrine and false brethren in spite of hatred, opposition or open mockery being cast at them.

TRUE MINISTERS’ CONTEMPT FOR COMPETITION AND COMPARISON (2 Corinthians 10:12-16; 7:16; John 21:20-22)

“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12).

Though a leader and an apostle, Paul clearly sets the bounds of his spiritual authority. In his exhortation,

he attributes the success of his team in the Corinthian church to God's grace. He also makes it clear that his joy and pleasure depend on whatever spiritual increase and growth in faith he is able to achieve in ministering to the Corinthians (verse 15).

Question 5: What should be the aim of believers when setting out on church assignment?

This is a lesson to all Christians, leaders and laity alike. The glory of God must be our primary aim, while the progress of the church, not the applause of men, should be our major preoccupation. We should also be particularly careful not to fall into the trap of Lucifer by overrating ourselves while we berate others through ungodly comparison and class-consciousness. The Apostle used a very strong word in verse 12: **“we dare not make ourselves”**. The word **“make”** in that verse is rendered **“class”** by another translation. Usually, needless carnal comparison happens when a minister begins to compare himself with another minister who either preceded or succeeded him in office or who is engaged in a similar ministry in another part of the Lord's vineyard.

Question 6: Why is comparison wrong?

There is no wisdom, spirituality or benefit in measuring ourselves with others. The reason is because God made each person unique with different character constitution. Two, God is sovereign concerning the grace He bestows on each individual and cannot be questioned. Three, we have different gifts. Four, many times, our circumstances in life and ministry are different. Five, God's plan is to glorify Himself in the life of each individual believer who willingly surrenders to Him. He has specific plans, programs and purpose for each person in His overall redemption plan. Six, our comparison tends to be self-centered and myopic. It breeds pride as it tempts us to see ourselves as super-achievers instead of rendering all glory to God. Carnal comparison can dethrone a believer from the joyful life of gratitude and godly living and cause him to fall into the valley of ingratitude and murmuring against God.

Finally, it has the tendency of distracting us from our God-given goals while we are busy poking our nose into other people's business (John 21:20-22).

Even in secular life, it is said that comparisons are odious. Through unwise comparison, many families have been ruined. In their quest to belong to a particular class, many have soiled their hands with blood or in shady business practices. Many Christians have destroyed their promising dreams through ungodly emulation of unbelievers. We must be wise.

CHRIST'S COMMENDATION: THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF A GOD-HONOURING MINISTRY (2 Corinthians 10:17,18; Jeremiah 9:23,24; 1 Samuel 15:13-29; Luke 17:10; 2 Timothy 4:8)

“But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth”.

As the Apostle rounds off his discussion in this chapter, he guides the mind of the church to consider what should be both the motivating strength and ultimate objective of a God-honouring life and ministry. The Lord must be the center of the believer's life and ministry. Obeying His commands and exercising faith in His saving grace unto personal salvation is the foundation of the believer's life and ministry. Also, the believer's glory does not lie in the possessions and positions attainable in the flesh, but in having the knowledge of His will and doing it. **“Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD”** (Jeremiah 9:23,24).

As the coming of the Lord fast approaches, believers, especially ministers, must ensure that they do not lose touch with eternal purposes. The world and its trappings have a real tendency to dull our spiritual senses. We must be watchful.

Question 7: What are the dangers of self-commendation?

As we receive grace to fulfil our ministry, care must be taken so that we do not enter into the trap of complacency and self-commendation. The Lord Jesus Christ has instructed us on what should be our proper response: **“So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do”** (Luke 17:10).

If we adopt this template from the Saviour, we would conquer the canker of pride and have the grace to patiently wait for the rewards, commendations and crowns that Christ promised us (2 Timothy 4:8).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Rev.	15-16	Ezekiel	34
TUE	“	17-18	“	35-36
WED	“	19-20	“	37
THUR	“	21-22	“	38
FRI	Gen.	1-2	“	39
SAT	“	3-4	“	40
SUN	“	5-6	“	41-42

683 Lesson

PAUL'S CONCERN AND SUFFERING FOR THE CHURCH

MEMORY VERSE: "In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:27,28).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 11:1-33

In his previous epistles, Paul the apostle had declared his apostleship as a true follower of Christ, chosen, ordained and commissioned by God. This he had to do as occasion demanded to drive home salient scriptural lessons and remind those concerned that it was God who gave him the apostolic office. Though he was not the only one approved unto such a noble call and ministry after his encounter with the Lord, he needed to silence some of his critics who were hell-bent on destroying the work God had helped him to establish.

In the text, Paul made himself known to the church at Corinth as an apostle to forestall their doubt. He expressed his concern that they were falling short of Christ's expectation of a mature church. "**For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ**" (verse 2). He therefore, ascertained his commitment to serve them without being necessarily provided for, as a minister of the gospel. At the same time, he corrected and warned them of their spiritual insensitivity which could easily lure them back to the world.

In actual fact, the Corinthian church was prone to being deceived by false teachers and agents of the devil who disguised as if they were sent by God. As a true shepherd, Paul gave a list of some adverse situations and challenges he went through both in the hands of unbelieving men and false brethren, in the course of contending for the faith. His experience, no doubt, portrays the common experiences of all true disciples of

Christ. **“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”** (1 Peter 2:21). Christ Himself said: **“...In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33).

Paul’s concern and suffering as expressed in the text should serve as reference point for the universal church regarding the Great Commission and related activities like church planting, follow-up and maturation of converts. True disciples of Christ and all ministers of God should labour in love and endure hardships in order to present the church **“as a chaste virgin to Christ.”**

PASTORAL CONCERN FOR THE CHURCH (2 Corinthians 11:1-4; Acts 20:28; Proverbs 27:23; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Galatians 1:1-9; Ephesians 5:27; John 8:7-11; 1 Corinthians 11:1)

In the spirit of humility, Paul the apostle presented himself as an apostle called by God and commitment to the course of the gospel of Christ. Here, he came down in a lowly manner to show his calling to be an apostle. **“Would to God ye could bear with me in my little folly”**. Not that he was a fool in the sense of being unintelligent or nonentity: it was an expression that portrayed his humility, self-effacement and graceful perception of himself. He decided to play the ‘fool’ in order to bring the church back to the right track. The call to ministry is a privilege and no one should glory in this exalted role. **“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence”** (1 Corinthians 1:26- 29).

<p>Question 1: How can believers remain humble in the light of 1 Corinthians 1:26-29?</p>
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In all situations and circumstances, believers must never forget the fact of their salvation as an act of God. No one was born righteous or as a child of God. It was the unmerited favour of God that made us sons and daughters of God and joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ. Any attempt to define our salvation as though we worked for it runs contrary to the revealed word of God (Ephesians 2:8,9).

It is obvious that the ultimate goal of Paul's ministry was to present the church "**as a chaste virgin to Christ**". He declared that his concern as a true shepherd over the flock of Christ was to prevent the Corinthian church from straying due to the false claims of false teachers and apostles who have been preying on them and were in the process of corrupting their minds from the simplicity of the gospel of Christ. As a concerned shepherd of the sheep, the Apostle wasted no time in calling Christians to be wary of the predatory wolves in sheep's clothing.

Question 2: How can we avoid being deceived by false teachers peddling false doctrines all around us?

These so-called ministers twist the Scriptures with sweet words to deceive weak-minded babes in Christ and unwary mature believers with the sole aim of turning them away from Christ. We are warned in the Scripture that, "**If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed**" (2 John 10). This was reiterated to the Galatians Church: "**As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed**" (Galatians 1:9).

PAUL'S DEFENCE OF HIS APOSTLESHIP (2 Corinthians 11:5-15; 10:7-10; 12:11; 1 Corinthians 15:10)

"For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5). Apostle Paul's commitment to the whole truth motivated him to join issues with the false apostles who attempted to disparage him. He felt that those laying claims to being ministers of Christ among the Corinthians were no where near

the great works the Lord had wrought through him. He believed that they were mere impostors masquerading as servants of Christ. The fruits of his labour were there to testify for him. In comparison, the apostle towers above all and ranked as the chiefest of apostles. First, Paul's appointment was by the Lord and not men (2 Corinthians 1:1). Whereas many so-called ministers of the gospel arrogate lofty titles to themselves without approval from heaven, he was chosen of God.

Second, Paul embarked on more missionary journeys than any of the early disciples of Christ. The Acts of the Apostles recorded his first, second and third missionary journeys. Third, he stood out from others with his unparalleled suffering for the sake of the gospel. He experienced shipwrecks, endured persecutions, beatings and imprisonments (2 Corinthians 6:4-10; 11:23-27). Fourth, he had wonderful revelations beyond comparison (2 Corinthians 12:1-5).

Fifth, he performed great miracles in the name of the Lord which he termed "**signs of an apostle**" (2 Corinthians 12:12). Last, he wrote almost half of the books of the New Testament – about fourteen in number. Yet, in his characteristic modesty, he attributed all his achievements to God's enabling grace. **"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me"** (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Therefore, the Apostle warned the church to beware of Satan and his agents transforming themselves as if they were servants of Christ. **"And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works"** (2 Corinthians 11:14,15). If there were false teachers and heretics in the time of the Apostles, the tide of events these last days calls for caution and earnestness, with full determination and decision by heaven-bound pilgrims to earnestly contend for the faith. Believers must be fully armed with the truth so as to know when

and how to deal with false teachers and their doctrines. We must not accept every minister as a true servant of God, **“but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world”** (1 John 4:1).

PAUL’S STEADFASTNESS IN SUFFERING (2 Corinthians 11:16-33; Acts 9:16; John 16:33; Isaiah 43:1,2; Hebrews 2:18; 4:14-16; 10:32-36; 2 Corinthians 12:9,10; 2 Timothy 4:16; 3:12; Romans 8:35-39)

In his self-commendation as an apostle of Christ, Paul returned to his trademark language of modesty by alluding to being a ‘fool’ for Christ. **“I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little”** (2 Corinthians 11:16). He sought the consent of the Corinthian Christians to showcase his travails for the sake of Christ. Then, he proceeded to give a list of his suffering for the gospel’s sake and his unrelenting efforts to preach by all means. Like other disciples of Christ, he had his own share of persecutions and suffering. Of his travails, he said, **“...in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches”** (2 Corinthians 11:23- 28). He experienced all these with consummate steadfastness in God’s ability to keep and protect him till he had fulfilled his ministry. It is clear that faithfulness to God does not insulate believers from tribulations, trouble, pain, suffering and trials (Acts 28:16).

Question 3: Why do believers suffer?

Although challenges of life may differ, they all have the tendency to depress the spirit of man and cripple him in the discharge of his duties to God. The devil also uses adversities with the aim of weakening our obedience to God and His word. But if believers manage these experiences with grace, they become steppingstones to stronger faith in the Lord. However, suffering must not be as a result of sin or unequal yoke with unbelievers.

True believers may experience suffering for the following reasons: one, because of their faith in Christ (1 Peter 2:21); two, when their lives oppose the activities and dictates of the world (John 17:14); three, Satan and his followers delight in persecuting believers in Christ (Matthew 5:10; 1 Peter 4:12); four, to underscore our need of absolute dependence on God (Psalm 46:1; 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7); five, to confirm our union and relationship with Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13; Revelation 2:9); six, to prune, purify, and perfect us to conform to the image of Christ (Deuteronomy 4:20); seven, to help us learn obedience (Hebrews 5:7-9); eight, to enable us know how to empathize with others (Hebrews 13:3; 2 Corinthians 3:1-10; Matthew 25:36-40); nine, it makes God to demonstrate His power on our behalf and even through us (Acts 12:1-25); ten, to prepare us for higher calling in the service of the Kingdom (Acts 8:1-4,8; Philippians 1:12-14; Genesis 39:1-20).

Question 4: What should be our disposition as true believers while suffering or being persecuted?

While we suffer unjustly as believers, we must be sure of our relationship with God (1 Peter 4:15); read and meditate upon the word of God (Psalm 119:9-11; 1 Peter 5:7; Isaiah 43:1,2); pray for divine help (Acts 12:5); seek counsel from spiritually mature believers (Proverbs 11:14); be ready to endure without compromise (2 Corinthians 6:4-10); trust God for deliverance with unwavering faith because He is aware of our tribulation (Exodus 3:7-10; Hebrews 13:4); and, rejoice and give glory to God (Acts 5:40-41; 16:25).

In his suffering, Paul was still focused on his calling. He

declared his passion even in the face of persecution. **“If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities”** (2 Corinthians 11:30). This is the expected attitude of believers while suffering or being persecuted for righteousness sake. The Christian attitude and confession today in whatever situation should be: **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Romans 8:35-39).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Gen. 7-8	Ezekiel	43
TUE	“ 9-10	“	44
WED	“ 11-12	“	45
THUR	“ 13-14	“	46
FRI	“ 15-16	“	47
SAT	“ 17	“	48
SUN	“ 18	Daniel	1

684 Lesson

SUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S GRACE

MEMORY VERSE: "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 12:1-21

Paul had, in the last chapter, affirmed his apostleship to silence his detractors who took advantage of his self-abasement to despise his apostleship. He listed all he had gone through in ministry to point them to the great act of God in delivering His chosen and anointed ones. As a result of success in ministry and frailty of human nature, it is possible for pride to set in. In order to keep him from falling into pride, God permitted a thorn in his flesh to keep him in line so that he would appreciate and depend absolutely on God's grace.

Paul informed his audience of the abundant revelations that the Lord gave him, as well as the messenger of Satan to buffet him so as to keep him humble. Although he prayed that the messenger should depart from him, the Lord said that His grace was sufficient for him. Like Paul, the grace of God is sufficient for the believer who is carrying his cross. Today's lesson clearly instructs the believer on the need to shun self-exaltation, depend on the grace of God at all times, walk and serve in holiness of life to be accounted worthy of inheritance in heaven.

PAUL'S GIFTS AND TEMPTATION TO GLORIFY SELF
(2 Corinthians 12:1-5,7,11-13; Acts 9:1-7; Galatians 1:11-15,17; Acts 12:20-23; James 4:16; Proverbs 8:13; Daniel 4:30,31)

Question 1: What were the spiritual experiences of Paul that predisposed him to pride?

Paul made it clear that it was not expedient for him to glory, but that since this was necessary to answer his detractors, he would do so. He thereafter delved into his revelations and ministerial experiences as an apostle. He specifically spoke about his being “**caught up to the third heaven**” and “**caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter**” over fourteen years earlier. Apart from the fact that the Lord personally appeared to him on his way to Damascus, he clarified that the gospel he received and was preaching came not from man but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11,12; 1 Corinthians 15:3). It was to him that God revealed the mysteries of the Kingdom that the Gentiles should partake of the privileges of the gospel with the Jews by faith. Even Peter the apostle recognised that God granted Paul special revelations and wisdom concerning deep truths of the Kingdom (2 Peter 3:15,16).

The temptation that accompanies such manifold revelations is pride. Paul was predisposed to fall into this temptation as an independent-minded, self-reliant and strong-willed personality. Believers should learn that if Paul, who had been to paradise, seen the glory of heaven and heard unspeakable words still stood the chance of falling into spiritual pride, they too need to watch against it. A Christian writer aptly puts it this way: “There is no sin that is more subtle, insinuating, deceptive; none that lurks more constantly around the heart, and that finds a more ready entrance, than pride. He who has been characterized by pride before his conversion, will be in special danger of it afterwards; he who has eminent gifts in prayer, or in conversation, or in preaching, will be in special danger of it; he who is eminently successful will be in danger of it; and he who has any extraordinary spiritual comforts will be in danger of it. Of this sin he who lives nearest to God may be in most special danger; and he who is most eminent in piety should feel that he also occupies a position where the enemy will approach him in a sly and subtle manner, and where he is in peculiar danger of a fall.”

However, God detests self-glorification as it is contrary to the Spirit of our Saviour who “**made himself of no**

reputation". Christ wants His followers to imbibe His attribute of lowliness and not the grandstanding of Lucifer. It is unfortunate to find some gospel ministers boasting and blowing the trumpet of their achievements in the world and ministry today (Proverbs 6:17). Pride is part of the evils that will be rampant in the last days, which will be judged by the Lord (2 Timothy 3:1,2; Romans 1:30,32).

Question 2: State some reasons believers should not engage in self-glorification.

Believers must not engage in self-glorification as it derives from and promotes pride which leads to destruction (Jeremiah 48:29; Proverbs 18:18). Herod manifested it and was eaten up by worms (Acts 12:20-23). Two, it robs God of the glory due to Him. Whatever the Lord accomplishes through the believer should be attributed to Him and not to self because **"we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us"**. Power belongs to God; He only delegates it primarily for the expansion of His kingdom. Three, it turns the congregation's attention on the minister rather than on the Lord. Four, it depletes God's anointing on the believer and exposes him to Satan's attacks.

SUSTAINING GRACE FOR PAUL'S CRUSHING EXPERIENCE (2 Corinthians 12:8-10; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Timothy 2:11,12; 2 Corinthians 3:5; John 1:16)

Question 3: What personal efforts did Paul make to remain humble?

Paul knew the danger of pride and vainglory. He preached on the virtue of humility, pointing to Christ as our Model (Philippians 2:3-8). He made it a principle of personal discipline to **"keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway"** (1 Corinthians 9:27). As part of personal discipline, Paul kept his translation to the third heaven a secret for fourteen years so that people will not look at him as some extraordinary being that may lead to pride. Even when he chose to speak about it, he did not

give details of it unlike those who would either produce tapes to sell or rush to publish it in a book.

However, God who granted him those great revelations knew that **“knowledge puffeth up”**; that beyond his personal efforts at disciplining himself to be humble that the abundant revelations he received could still make his head to swell to his hurt. God knows the tendencies of the righteous and a diligent believer like Paul. He can detect and know how to crush the minutest seed of pride in the heart. In love, He allowed him to be afflicted with a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble.

Question 4: What was the thorn in Paul's flesh and the lesson believers can learn from it?

Paul refers to it as a thorn in the flesh, not in his spirit. This nullifies the idea of any demon possessing him as some people think. Moreover, the Holy Spirit cannot dwell in the same body with a demon. Literally, a thorn is a sharp ‘pointed woody growth projecting from the stem of some trees, bushes, and woody plants’. When it pierces, it is very painful to the flesh. From the Scripture, humans can be thorns in the flesh; that is, instruments of oppression or correction (Hosea 2:6; Ezekiel 28:24; Numbers 33:55; Judges 2:3) or use thorns to tear the flesh of people they discipline as Gideon did in Judges 8:7,16.

Paul calls the thorn by another name: **“the messenger of Satan”**. What Satan will do is what he delegates his messengers to do. The commission of this messenger of Satan was to buffet and afflict him. Though Paul chose to conceal the exact nature of this thorn in his flesh, this one thing we know: it is such that did cause infirmity. The affliction was very painful and crushing because to buffet is ‘to knock or strike against something heavily or repeatedly; to hit somebody or something sharply with the fist or hand’. The messenger of Satan caused infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, distresses and weakness.

This great suffering drove the Apostle into repeated prayer for its removal. Rather than remove it, God said: **“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is**

made perfect in weakness". God would rather supply the grace for the believer to bear his cross than free him from cross-bearing which is a mark of discipleship. With the crushing experience of the cross, the believer can affirm that **"I am crucified with Christ"** and now live only by faith in God; that **"I die daily"** (Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 15:31). If the grace of God was able to sustain Paul in the challenges he faced, it is also able to sustain every Christian in whatever challenges he faces.

Question 5: What can believers learn from Paul's attitude during this crushing experience?

From God's answer to his prayers, Paul realized the divine benevolence in allowing the thorn in his flesh. Rather than bemoan his plight, he saw the design of the Lord to keep him humble and preserve him from pride and destruction. The Apostle appreciated the love of God towards him. **"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."** We need to emulate this grateful attribute of the Apostle. Note that this affliction did not affect his spiritual life: **"...though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."**

The promise of sufficiency of sustaining grace does not contradict Christ's doctrine of divine healing. God heals, delivers and keeps the believer healthy. Paul's experience is peculiar and should not be generalized. Christians who are suffering persecution or affliction for Christ should seek the Lord for divine intervention and rely on His promised not to leave or forsake us. We should remain fearless as God has given us the Spirit of power, love and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Besides, we must endure persecution without abandoning the ministry, abide in unbroken communion with the Lord, praise and rejoice in Him.

The Lord's answer to Paul's prayer is equally highly instructive. The sinner is morally weak but he can receive God's grace to be free. Afterwards, he will be

empowered to overcome temptations, sin, self and Satan. **“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly”** (Romans 5:6). Our sanctification and Spirit-infilling are also by grace to do what our natural strength or ability cannot do. The Christian life is lived in the strength of the Lord. Every believer needs sufficiency of grace in every area of life.

AUTHORITY AND COMMITMENT OF THE TRIUMPHANT APOSTLE (2 Corinthians 12:11,14-21; Acts 19:11,12; Romans 1:11; 15:18-29; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28; 1 Corinthians 4:18-21)

While affirming the fact that it was foolish to have boasted, he made it clear that he was compelled to do so by his detractors. He reeled out his credentials as the apostle of Christ. He informed the Church at Corinth that though he could be referred to as the greatest apostle, he was nothing. Indeed, Paul was a man mightily used of God. He demonstrated virtually all the gifts of the Spirit, filled with the fullness of the Lord; God did special miracles through him. Crisscrossing the then known world with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, he was brought before kings and governors. He alone wrote epistles that formed about half of the New Testament. The signs of an apostle were clearly seen in Paul’s ministry.

Question 6: What challenge does Paul’s style of preaching have for ministers of the gospel today?

Paul’s ministry is a challenge to ministers of the gospel today. The gospel of our Lord should be preached with power. Men will not believe except they see signs and wonders (John 4:48). While signs and wonders should not be the reason for gospel campaigns, it should not be neglected because it is a means to an end – so that men may have faith in the finished work of Christ on Calvary and get saved.

All believers need to learn commitment from Paul here. He was visiting these Corinthian believers for the third time. How often do we visit our flock? Leaders at all levels in the church should make it a point of duty to regularly visit and pray for their members. Timely and prayerful

visit can go a long way to strengthen and encourage the flock to continue in the blessings of the gospel (Acts 14:22). We also learn from Paul’s consecration in carrying out the work of the ministry. His determination was not to be burdensome to the brethren. He did not use his authority to ask them to support his ministry, but he chose the path of consecration. He would rather spend and be spent for the flock. In the same manner, pastors should imbibe the spirit of self-sacrifice rather than making merchandize of the flock. The congregation must recognize and respect the authority of the leader and not despise him, though he does not have a domineering outlook. Honour and reverence should be given to the shepherd so that he can joyfully give account of the sheep. Moreover, the church of God should be holy at all times, without which no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). The Lord is coming back for a spotless and glorious church and every minister and member must be ready.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Gen.	19	Daniel	2
TUE	“	20-21	“	3
WED	“	22-23	“	4
THUR	“	24	“	5
FRI	“	25	“	6
SAT	“	26	“	7
SUN	“	27	“	8

685 Lesson

EXHORTATION TO GODLY LIVING

MEMORY VERSE: Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you (2 Corinthians 13:11).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 13:1-14

In this study, Apostle Paul continued his exposition on his apostolic ministry. As the last chapter of his two profound epistles to the Corinthians, he used the opportunity to give appropriate exhortations regarding their personal lives: **“Be perfect, be of good comfort”**; their relationship with others within and outside the church: **“be of one mind, live in peace”**; and the assurance of divine presence if they take care of the first two aspects: **“and the God of love and peace shall be with you”**.

This particular chapter shows the depth of love in his pastoral heart as he demonstrated a deep knowledge of the people under his leadership. Adequate knowledge of the personal lives of members is a prerequisite for a profitable ministry. Leaders who are detached from the people under them cannot demonstrate the real pastoral care that God’s people require. Due pastoral care will include timely warnings, adequate edifying exhortations and appropriate blessings in prayer, all delivered in a loving fashion so that God’s children may abide in His blessings. All these are aptly displayed in our text.

Question 1: What are the major ingredients of true pastoral care?

PAUL’S TIMELY WARNING TO ERRING BELIEVERS (2 Corinthians 13:1-4; Matthew 5:29; Hebrews 12:5-8)

In his first epistle to the Corinthian church, Paul affirmed that Christians are **“called to be saints”**; as such, they are expected to live above board. In matters of godliness,

truth, sincerity and integrity, they must not be found wanting. In order to achieve this, discipline and self-discipline are unavoidable. Self-discipline remains an important ingredient of godly living. No one can lay claim to godly living without a proper attitude to personal and church discipline. Our Lord Jesus counselled in Matthew 5:29: **“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell”**. If Samson had spiritually disciplined (plucked out) his lustful eyes for strange women, he would not have had it done for him in a cruel manner by the Philistines. If the believer fails to discipline his affections, passions and lusts, then church discipline becomes inevitable so that the flesh can be subdued and the spirit saved from destruction.

Question 2: Mention some scriptural principles of church discipline.

Paul, in our text, gave a clear warning that he would not spare to discipline erring members of the Corinthian church who refuse to repent from their sins. God disciplines His children so that they can be partakers of His holiness (Hebrews 12:5-8). Therefore, church discipline, proclaimed through God’s servants and leaders, should not be despised, especially when it is based on sound scriptural principles. Leaders and members should take note of the following principles in church discipline.

- One, church discipline should be applied only when there is clear evidence of default. “...In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1).
- Two, church discipline is meant to re-awaken the erring member to God’s demand of holiness and not to demonstrate a leader’s power over the brethren.
- Three, the ultimate aim of church discipline is to lead to repentance and restoration.
- Four, the disciplined member should see the withdrawal of privileges during the time of discipline

as opportunity to pray and seek God's face, and not to go around courting sympathy.

- Five, those disciplined should take it in good faith, serve the discipline humbly without imputing ulterior motives to the leader.
- Six, members of the church should have the right attitude to those under discipline: they should not be seen as enemies or encouraged to rebel against the leadership.
- Seven, church rebuke and discipline are meant to be a lesson, not only to those at fault, but to others (2 Corinthians 13:2; 1 Timothy 5:20).
- Eight, the church leadership should not abandon or forget to periodically review cases of those under discipline. Such should be forgiven and restored where there are clear signs of repentance "...lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:6-11).
- Nine, even when a particular disciplinary action appears unjust, the New Testament believer is encouraged to bear it and wait patiently for God to justify him, thus following Christ's example (1 Peter 2:18-23).

In spite of the above principles, there are people in the church who do not profit from warnings, rebukes and discipline. They harden their hearts and recklessly persist in self-will. By rejecting warnings, scorning rebukes and despising discipline, such people expose themselves to avoidable judgment and retribution. **"He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy"** (Proverbs 29:1). Godly living is incomplete without a contrite spirit that is responsive to warnings, receptive to rebukes and amenable to discipline.

EDIFYING EXHORTATION TO STEADFAST GODLY LIVING (2 Corinthians 13:5-10; James 1:22-25; Luke 1:78,79; Psalm 19:7,8,11; Romans 1:28-32)

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own

selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”

The Apostle, without sounding snobbish in the very least, challenged the individual believers in Corinth to self-examination. He assumed that Christ lives in them and unless they had become reprobates (immoral, rejected, damned, backslidden, deceived), are capable of competent self-examination.

This is the beauty of biblical Christianity. There are no secret standards. Everyone in the church has access to the Bible. Unlike a cult, a Bible-believing church has no transcendental, mystic or hidden truths which new initiates are prevented from knowing. Therefore, no true believer in Christ is in darkness about God's demand unless he is willingly ignorant through lack of personal study of the word of God or failure to receive sound teaching. Therefore, we all can examine ourselves to evaluate our motives and regulate our actions simply by looking into the perfect law of liberty. **“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed** (James 1:22-25).

Question 3: What is the advantage of being a member of a Bible-believing church?

Biblical prescriptions for godly living are deep and profound, but they are not mysterious. **“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes... Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward”** (Psalm 19:7,8,11). A believer can become a reprobate when his judgment on spiritual matters and

even that of his own actions and motives are no longer trustworthy. This happens when someone previously enlightened persistently acts contrary to what he knows to be true, either by following wrong examples, imbibing false doctrines or by simply choosing to relapse into sin to meet a felt need like childbearing, prosperity, promotion, employment etc. He therefore, deadens his conscience, deliberately closing his heart to godly impartation. But the Scripture warns: **“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them”** (Romans 1:28-32).

This scriptural truth nullifies the doctrine of eternal security. Our security in Christ depends on our cleaving to the Lord and avoiding whatever will quench the light of God in our hearts. To make this possible, the Corinthians were exhorted not to do evil, **“...for everyone that doeth evil hateth the light”** (John 3:20); instead, they were to live an honest life since **“... he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God”** (John 3:21).

Apostle Paul made it clear to the Corinthian brethren that he desired their perfection, and that the power of discipline which the Lord gave him was meant for their edification in the way of godliness, not for their destruction.

PASTORAL BENEDICTIONS AND SAINTLY SALUTATIONS (2 Corinthians 13:11-14; Ruth 2:4; Judges 6:12; 1 Samuel 25:6; Luke 24:36; Hebrews 13:24)

“Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

In rounding off this epistle, Paul the apostle gave the Corinthian church a loving parting hug. The simple farewell which still contained a summary of the two epistles in very few words was loaded with expressions of love. It is a proof of the Apostle’s statement that love (charity) never fails. We should always remember that the simplest expression of godly affection does lasting wonders in every life. Everyone wants to be loved and cherished, and we can make the difference in a world filled with hatred by choosing to be loving people.

A sincere, cheerful greeting will do more to adorn our spirituality. The courtesy of greeting varies in style from culture to culture. However, from biblical examples, the following are obvious: (a) cheerfulness (b) goodwill (c) respectful conduct and (d) good, appropriate language. **“And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee”** (Ruth 2:4). The Old Testament priests were specifically told to bless God’s people in edifying language.

The Apostle recommends that brethren should greet one another with a holy kiss. Certainly, it was a reference to the slight embrace that was common among the people of the east; it has nothing to do with the sensual immoral kiss of today or the passionate greeting which is permissible only between two married people. Even in the Bible, greeting by kissing was not recorded between members of the opposite gender. The exception was those who kissed the feet as a sign of submission and worship. Contemporary believers who misapply this portion of the Scripture or see it as a license for sensuality miss the truth. Those who indulge in such ungodly practice should consider the word, **“holy”** as opposed to the sensual, carnal kiss of lust.

The apostolic greetings were rounded off by the great benediction of grace for God’s people, love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Paul, in recommending the grace of our Lord Jesus was resting on how: (a)

transforming grace changed him from an injurious persecutor to an indefatigable and irrepressible preacher; (b) sustaining grace helped him to overcome obstacles and weaknesses; (c) ministering grace opened doors of evangelisation for him with abiding fruits in a large part of the then known world. He further wished that the love of God will be with them.

God’s love planned the salvation of man; and, it is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost (Romans 5:5). The communion of the Holy Ghost was added as the ultimate blessing, as no believer can live to enjoy the fullness of redemption blessings without the indwelling presence of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit guides and comforts the believer. The apostolic greeting and benediction teach us to consciously ensure that our greetings, indeed our speech, should always be with grace, seasoned with salt of courtesy so that it can positively impact our neighbours.

Question 4: Summarise the areas in which the grace from the Lord Jesus impacted Paul’s life.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING		
MON	Gen.	28	Daniel	9
TUE	“	29	“	10
WED	“	30	“	11
THUR	“	31	“	12
FRI	“	32	Hosea	1-2
SAT	“	33	“	3-4
SUN	“	34	“	5-6

686 Lesson

DANGER OF PERVERTING THE GOSPEL

MEMORY VERSE: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

TEXT: Galatians 1:1-10

Paul, the apostle wrote the epistle to the churches of Galatia. In his time, the region of Galatia included the cities of Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. The region of Galatia covered the area presently known as Turkey. Paul and his companions had evangelized those cities and, despite intense persecutions, planted vibrant churches there during their first missionary journey (Acts 13:14,51; 14:5-7,21-23). Majority of believers in those churches were Gentiles who were very zealous in their new faith in Christ.

However, news of their conversion eventually reached some Jewish hardliners who believed the rite of circumcision was a prerequisite for salvation. By their attempt to marry the Old Testament rite of circumcision with the New Testament provision of justification by faith in Christ, they inadvertently made God’s simple plan of salvation more difficult and their position actually began to hinder or pervert the true gospel.

The Galatians had believed the true gospel when Paul preached Christ, His death and resurrection as basis for salvation and freedom from sin. Meanwhile, through the influence of the Judaizers, they were led into error. Consequently, Paul had to write this strongly worded epistle to be passed to all the churches in the entire region. The epistle shows the prompt response of the Apostle to the challenge of false doctrine and his determination to maintain sound teaching in the church. All the members and leaders should be diligent to enforce sound doctrine and ensure scriptural practices in the church. This would be achieved through constant

preaching of the truth, exposure of erroneous teaching and rebuke of false teachers.

Question 1: What role should members and leaders play in order to maintain sound doctrine in the church?

APOSTOLIC GREETING AND AFFIRMATION OF THE GOSPEL (Galatians 1:1-5; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; 15:10; Ephesians 1:12; Philippians 1:1,2; Colossians 1:1,2)

Paul began this epistle with greetings and the affirmation of the gospel. He acknowledged the death of Jesus Christ and His resurrection by the power of God, the Father, as the basis for salvation from sin and deliverance from the present evil world. From the outset, he reiterated what constitutes the true gospel before he later addressed the issue of its perversion.

It was customary with Paul in his epistles to greet the recipients and pronounce a benediction of grace and peace upon them (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; Ephesians 1:12; Philippians 1:1,2; Colossians 1:1,2). However, it should be noted that this Pauline greetings which was a trademark of his epistles, was not a mere routine; rather, it was a constant solemn reminder that the Christian life can only be sustained by a continuous supply of grace and peace from God. We can neither be all that God wants us to be, nor do all He wants us do except by His grace. Apostle Paul made this clear when he said “**But by the grace of God, I am what I am**” (1 Corinthians 15:10). After being saved from sin through the initial saving grace of God, we need sustaining grace to keep us in the faith.

Question 2: Point out some notable attributes believers should manifest when correcting those who err in the faith.

It is very instructive that despite the fact that Paul wrote this epistle with a heavy heart and was quite unhappy with the spiritual state of the Galatians, he greeted and pronounced a benediction upon them. This teaches us the need to be courteous, have our emotions under check, and not be overbearing whenever we are

dealing with erring believers. Paul was courteous in his approach to the Galatians but he was also sincere and did not flatter them. He could not honestly write to them, like he wrote to other churches, **“I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken throughout the world”** (Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:15,16; Philippians 1:3,4; 1 Thessalonians 1:2,3). It is only in the epistle to the Galatians that we see Paul failing to mention any reason for thanksgiving, and that underscores the seriousness of perverting the gospel.

Another key point in the opening verses of the epistle to the Galatians is Paul’s affirmation of the divine origin of his apostleship. He described himself as **“an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)”** (Galatians 1:1).

It became necessary for Paul to affirm his apostleship to the Galatians because the false teachers who came to contradict the truth which he had preached also questioned his apostolic authority. They claimed that he was inferior to those who saw Jesus face to face, like Peter, James, John, etc. But their chief purpose was to undermine Paul’s influence and belittle him before the Galatians so they could scale down the impact of his message. This is one major strategy of false teachers. They try to discredit or cast aspersions on true ministers of God and their message so that they can prepare the ground to sow their erroneous doctrine. But Paul simply affirmed that he was called to be an apostle by God, and not by any human authority. He had a direct commission by the Lord Jesus Christ himself and, as such, the message he preached was divine in origin. From Paul’s response to the antics of the false teachers, we learn that our greatest weapon against error is an unwavering affirmation of the truth.

REPROOF FOR TURNING AWAY FROM THE TRUE GOSPEL (Galatians 1:6-9; 5:7-12; 2:11-16; Acts 15:1,5; 2 Corinthians 11:4; James 2:14-26)

Apostle Paul expressed surprise that the Galatians were so soon removed from the gospel of Christ into **“another**

gospel". He reproved them for being so gullible and unstable. They had believed the true gospel which required genuine repentance and simple faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the condition for salvation; but due to the influence of the Judaizers they were confused and almost surrendered themselves to be circumcized so they could be saved.

The Judaizers were not the only group that perverted the gospel in ancient times. There were other Jewish groups such as the Nicolaitanes who believed and taught that the gospel frees Christians from obedience to any law, whether moral, civil or ceremonial. In effect, they held the antinomian belief that a Christian can live anyhow because he is under grace and not under the law. There were also the Ebionites. They were strictly pharisaic and insisted on ceremonial washings and observance of sabbath as evidence of true spirituality. Then the Elkesaites, who rejected the Virgin Birth of Jesus and only regarded Him as a higher or ideal Adam. Apart from the Jewish perversions of the gospel, the Gentiles also paraded the Agnostics and the Gnostics.

Question 3: Mention some ancient and modern perversions of the gospel.

In modern times, there are different versions of perverted gospel. First, there are those who teach justification by faith plus law keeping. They insist that before a person can be saved, he must not only believe in Jesus, but also keep some ceremonial laws or sacraments. Second is the gospel of works without faith. The peddlers base salvation on water baptism (whether infant, by proxy, or sinners' baptism), receiving holy communion, etc. They forget that without faith it is impossible to please God, and the ordinances are only meaningful after a person has been genuinely saved through faith in Christ (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24; Mark 16:16; Colossians 2:12,13).

The third kind of perversion is the gospel of good works only. This is the assertion that we shall be saved once we do good works like giving alms, live morally, do religious duties, pray often, fast, and obey the golden

rule. But the case of Cornelius exposes the error of this notion. There is the need to repent from sin and believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 10:1-6; 11:14; Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:4-7). Fourth is the gospel of faith without works. They believe that once you pray to receive Jesus by faith, respond to invitation of an evangelist or sign a decision card, then you are saved, even when there is no change of lifestyle (James 2:17,20,24,26). Fifth is the perversion of modernism which rejects definite biblical authority and adopts its own concepts of what is right or wrong. They formulate their own ideas concerning worship, marriage, family life, etc., without conformity to the holy Scriptures. Sixth is the gospel peddled by many pseudo-Christian groups and countless commercial prayer houses or mountains that churn out spurious dreams, visions and tales of angelic visitations which contradict the Scriptures.

Question 4: What are the major features of the perverted gospel?

Basically, all perversions of the gospel either adds to or subtracts something from the true gospel, thereby destroying its purity. Perversion may also take the form of overemphasis of some doctrines while undermining others. It has been one chief strategy of Satan to pervert the truth and make people believe a lie. It would be recalled that Eve was deceived in Eden when she believed Satan's lie that contradicted God's word. Therefore, believers must ever be on guard and ensure they maintain the purity of biblical doctrine in the midst of prevalent damnable heresies.

Perverted gospel often appear fascinating because it presents something that either appeals to the flesh or fosters human pride; but in actual fact, it is no good news but heresy and does not help its adherents to experience God in the New Testament sense (Colossians 2:16-23).

Question 5: Point out some conditions that influence a person to pervert or embrace perverted gospel.

From the experience of the Galatians, there are certain factors that predispose a person to pervert the gospel.

One is secret love for sin and absence of genuine love for the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12). Two, absence of a mature, Spirit-filled teacher of the word of God. Three, a state of protracted spiritual infancy. When believers do not grow in knowledge and grace of Jesus but remain babes many years after conversion, they are liable to being tossed about by false teachers (Ephesians 4:14; 1 Corinthians 3:1,2; Hebrews 5:12-14). Four, ignorance of what constitutes the true gospel. When people are merely religious and not well-informed concerning the truth of salvation, they will not be able to distinguish between counterfeit and genuine gospel. Five, a strong attachment to human traditions. Six, a tendency to please men and be popular, or an attempt to gather crowd at all cost. Ironically, this was one of the accusations the Judaizers levelled against Paul. They suggested that he preached against circumcision because he wanted to make salvation cheap for the Gentiles, thereby making himself a hero of a sort among them. But Paul countered their insinuation by saying he was not a menpleaser.

GREAT DAMNATION FOR PERVERTING THE GOSPEL (Galatians 1:8,9; 5:7-12; Mark 9:42; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 16:22; Titus 3:10,11; 2 John 10,11; Revelation 22:18,19)

Those who preach any other gospel apart from that which is anchored on repentance from sin and faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ stand the danger of God's terrible judgment. In our text, Apostle Paul pronounced a curse on perverters of the gospel. "**But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed**" (Galatians 1:8). This strong imprecation literally means "let him come under the curse of God" and it agrees with Christ's teaching that there is fearful judgment awaiting those who cause young believers to stray from the truth (Mark 9:42).

Paul was so confident that the gospel he preached to the Galatians was authentic and anything different from that, regardless of its source, would be a perverted gospel.

Question 6: Point out the punishment awaiting the perverters of the gospel.

Perverters of the gospel place themselves under the same curse as those who never knew or loved the Lord Jesus Christ. **“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha”** (1 Corinthians 16:22). Literally, those who pervert the gospel stand the risk of being excommunicated from Christian fellowship. **“A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself”** (Titus 3:10,11). Also, they would lose their ministry because they should be removed from ministry lest they pollute others in the church. Finally, they would be condemned on the last day if they do not repent. John the apostle said: **“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”** (Revelation 22:18,19).

What then should be the attitude of believers towards those who pervert the gospel? Paul the apostle said we should avoid them, and John said we should not bid them God speed (Romans 16:17; 2 John 10,11). That means we should not encourage or support them either overtly or covertly. We should correct them, if possible, but if they refuse, we should expose them and withdraw our fellowship from them.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Gen.	35	Hosea	7-8
TUE	"	36	"	9-10
WED	"	37	"	11-12
THUR	"	38	"	13-14
FRI	"	39-40	Joel	1
SAT	"	41	"	2
SUN	"	42	"	3

END OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF SPECIAL STUDIES

687
Lesson

DAILY CHRISTIAN SERVICE

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

TEXT: Romans 12:1-21

Christian service is a natural consequence of being born again. The fact that we are left here after we had given our lives to Christ until we are called home to glory implies that serving the Lord is a direct result of our salvation. Consecration, submission and service are significant hallmarks of serious Christian calling. Submission entails complete yieldedness to God and church leadership. A consecrated and submissive life finds expression in a daily life of committed Christian service.

We need to remind ourselves of the peculiarity of the age we live in as we consider this topic. This is an age when hoards of people are obsessed and taken up in their own selfish inordinate ambition. People are engrossed in a quest that zeros in on self-attainment, education, prosperity, power, popularity, prominence and pride. People, including so-called believers, are more interested in making money than serving the Lord. They would rather give their best time to acquire mundane physical things than render service that has eternal value to others.

In the face of all these, it therefore becomes essential to examine the only selfless cause which transcends life here and is significant enough to enjoy heaven’s attention and reward on the last day.

Question 1: Why is the subject of daily Christian service important?

THE PATTERN OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE (Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 14:23; 19:10).

The striking peculiarity of Christian service in today's world is its variegated pattern. Our daily life of service as Christians covers divers areas. But broad as it may seem, it can be neatly summed up into four unmistakable areas of service: one, service to God (verses 1,2); two, service to ourselves (verses 3-8); three, service to the brethren or the body of Christ (verses 9-16) and four, service to the world (verses 17-21).

Question 2: Mention the four broad areas in which we may categorize Christian service.

In all its varied shapes and forms, the most compelling of our daily service is the preaching of the gospel, otherwise known as evangelism. Simply put, evangelism is the deliberate, purposeful and prayerful effort of sharing the gospel with another with the intent of winning him or her for the Lord. When we evangelize or witness, we are serving God by helping others make the most important decision of their lives. We are helping them to come out of darkness into light and escape eternal damnation in hell. Through this effort, the soul-winner is helping the sinner get on the path to spending eternity with God in heaven.

A former communist who gave a fanatic devotion to communism, George North, later found Christ and in his new zeal, underscored the significance of regular witnessing: "Picture your town, if every believer gave out gospel tracts every evening, if every weekend they held large open air meetings or indoor rallies; told their workmates everyday about Jesus; gave every spare coin to His cause, and invested every spare minute in prayer. If you cannot preach, give. If you cannot give, distribute tracts. If you cannot distribute tracts, talk to your friends." This is the picturesque expression of our daily life of evangelism. Jesus said: "**Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature**" (Mark 16:15). "**For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost**" (Luke 19:10). "**Go thou and preach the kingdom of God**" (Luke 9:60).

“Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23). Evangelism therefore, is considered as every believer’s daily service.

Question 3: Mention some forms of service we can daily engage in as Christians.

Involvement in the laity work of the church is another form of Christian service in which we can daily exercise ourselves. The church has many areas of work in which we can get involved and utilize our God-given gifts. The wise Creator has bestowed on us different abilities, gifts and talents which the Apostle Paul refers to as **“gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.”** Some have the gift of caring, love and leadership. They love to visit and share their material and spiritual blessings with other people. Some can serve as home caring fellowship leaders, zonal leaders and district pastors. Some have the gift of praying: they can be involved in the prayer warriors team of the church. Some Christians are mature and seasoned by reason of their development and exposure: they may be chosen to be missionaries or ministers. Some others can be chosen to sing or play musical instruments. Some are blessed with natural strong physique and may make good ushers. Some have spare time and they could spend it in the church seeing to the cleanliness of the environment. Some have given themselves to the serious study of God’s word and acquisition of wisdom and they make good counsellors and Bible teachers.

Still, others have been blessed of God with material things – money, mansions, means and connections – so that they can support church projects, Christian workers and the needy. **“Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality”**.

Paul wrote about this multifaceted pattern of Christian service and gifts thus: **“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).

THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN SERVANTS (Romans 12:9-21; Zechariah 3:7; 2 Timothy 2:21; Titus 2:12).

The principle or attitude of Christian servants are worthy of serious consideration. There are conditions we must meet before we can serve. The conditions are as applicable under the New Testament as they were under the Old. In the Old Testament, God said to Zechariah: **“Thus saith the Lord of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by”** (Zechariah 3:7). The word “if” shows the conditional nature of Christian service. It is therefore, a grave distortion of truth to assume that there are no moral or spiritual conditions for Christian servants.

Question 4: What is the first and most important condition Christian servants must fulfil?

The first condition is that we must **“be first partakers of the fruit”** (2 Timothy 2:6). We cannot invite a friend to follow the Saviour we have not fully followed. A Christian who professes and possesses a solid relationship with the Lord must follow Him, do the things He says and walk as He walked.

Secondly, servants of the Lord must live holy, unblamable lives. **“If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work”** (2 Timothy 2:21). God’s perfect plan is that **“we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life”** (Luke 1:74,75). This implies that self must be dead for our service to be acceptable and profitable. There must be a holy and sincere courtesy which pushes self back and prefers others.

Third, we should serve with the attitude of sobriety. A sober disposition cancels the air of self-importance or self-conceitedness. Sobriety discourages an overly good opinion of oneself. Paul, in our text, puts it this way: **“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”; “We should live soberly, righteously, an godly, in this present world”** (Romans 12:3; Titus 2:12).

Fourth, our daily Christian service must be carried out with fervour and zeal. A lukewarm, halfhearted service is as good as idling. Neither a lackadaisical, grudging disposition, nor a lazy attitude in matters of divine service is encouraged, for it is unprofitable. We must at all times remember that this is the Lord’s service and it requires our utmost best. Paul says, **“Not slothful in business; fervent in Spirit; serving the Lord”** (Romans 12:11).

Fifth, our daily Christian service must be backed with the principle of love. Love is the motivating factor that is essential and needful for service. It is the greatest constraining power in the world. Christ came down into the world out of love for lost humanity. **“Greater love hath no man than these, that a man lay down his life for his friends”** (John 15:13). **“God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:8). We must love God, the church and sinners before we can serve them. **“Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good”** (Romans 12:9).

Sixth, we must saturate our service with supplication. Prayer directs and puts profit on our service. Jesus’ service to the world was backed with constant prayer, supplication and communion with God. Our little effort becomes much when it is bathed in prayer. We must be **“continuing instant in prayer”** for effectiveness in whatever area we find ourselves serving.

Finally, our service must be done in the power of the Spirit of God. The secret of unceasing, continual

successful service is rendering service in His power and abiding in Him. **“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in me”** (John 15:4). Much can be done when the Spirit of God has full control of our lives. Jesus knew this and said: **“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”** (Acts 1:8).

Question 5: What principles should be upheld by Christian servants?

PROMISES TO CHRISTIAN SERVANTS (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; Exodus 23:25; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:35; 1 Corinthians 15:58).

The promises to Christian servants are rich and noble. Some of these promises are temporal and others transcend the present into eternity.

Question 6: What are the promises for Christian servants?

There is a promise of reward for servants who do enduring work for the Lord. **“If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward”** (1 Corinthians 3:14). **“And ye shall serve the Lord your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee”** (Exodus 23:25). **“And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life”** (Mark 10:29,30). Second, servants of the Lord have the promise of eternal abode with the Master, Jesus Christ. **“If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour”** (John 12:26). Christ is on the right hand of the Father now; there we shall be with Him if we serve Him faithfully till

the end. This implies that we shall share in the joy, bliss and glory of heaven. If we follow him to the end, we shall be with Him in the end. Third, servants of God shall be honoured by Him. His honour is not like earth’s human honour. It is the true, lasting and highest honour that anyone could have. Though a measure of the honour is received here on earth, the greatest and highest would come when we finally get to heaven. An unquantifiable measure of glory and honour will be heaped on God’s servants in heaven. **“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him”** (1 Corinthians 2:9).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING		
MON	Genesis	43	Hosea	1-2
TUE	“	44	“	3-4
WED	“	45	“	5-6
THUR	“	46	“	7-8
FRI	“	47	“	9
SAT	“	48	Obadiah	1
SUN	“	49	Jonah	1-2

688 Lesson

JESUS' PATTERN OF SOUL-WINNING

MEMORY VERSE: "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord" (Matthew 10:25).

TEXT: Matthew 4:17-25; 9:9-13

As Jesus went about fulfilling His ministry of teaching, preaching and healing, Bible scholars note that He covered about 240 cities and villages. His passion for souls not only drew multitudes of sin-sick minds from the valley of despair, His style of evangelism also presented challenges and a pattern to all His disciples in a hitherto uncharted course.

The call of Peter, Andrew, James, John and Matthew presents a platform from which to look at the Lord's pattern of soul-winning. Here, the authority, greatness, love, compassion of our Chief Shepherd not only shine, the dramatic change of character and conduct of a life exposed to divine love is clearly set forth.

THE PLACE OF PREACHING AND HEALING IN SOUL-WINNING (Luke 4:17-28; 24:25-27; John 2:23; 10:25, 41,42; Acts 19:11,12)

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Matthew 4:23).

The two words, "preaching" and "healing", provide the clue to the outstanding success experienced by Jesus in the business of soul-winning. In preaching and teaching, He demonstrated astonishing authority and mastery of the Scriptures; in healing, miracles, signs and wonders, He manifested awesome power.

Question 1: Why do we need the demonstration of healing, miracles, signs and wonders in the business of soul-winning today?

Actually, His success in soul-winning was derived from these two sources: vast knowledge of the Scriptures and dynamic power evangelism informed by a consistent prayer life (Mark 1:35; Luke 4:1-14; 6:12; 10:21; 22:39-44; John 17:1-26). Together, they presented a model through which to look at His pattern of soul-winning. In teaching, He taught with authority and wisdom. And He did because He was a man of prayer and a man of the Scriptures. It is doubtful whether anyone who is not given to much prayer and deep study of the Scripture could make much progress. The biblical injunctions, **“men ought always to pray, and not to faint”** (Luke 18:1), **“pray without ceasing”** (1 Thessalonians 5:17), **“study to shew yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”** (2 Timothy 2:15) perhaps hold true in soul-winning than anywhere else. No one hopes to make a success of the job when he is not a student of prayer and the Scriptures; not only prayer but one coupled with fasting (Matthew 17:21).

Jesus shows by His approach that a result-oriented soul-winning venture must of necessity be accompanied by demonstration of the power in healing the diseased, the sick and the demon-oppressed. The society, as presently structured, with rampant outbreak of diseases and demonic afflictions needs that the gospel be presented with demonstration of God’s power.

<p>Question 2: How can a soul-winner acquire the power to minister to the sick, the diseased and the oppressed?</p>
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As demonstrated by the exploits of the Lord in the field of soul-winning, consistent prayer life and holy living are the two cables through which a soul-winning strategy can tap into the vast divine power for miracles, signs and wonders. Here the truth sticks out. With all thine getting, get power. Actually, there is a limit to what we can do without the backing of God’s power. Notice that more souls were won to the Lord through healing, miracles, signs and wonders than through hard-core preaching. For instance, **“In Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did”**

(John 2:23). In another instance, “**many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracles: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there**” (John 10:41,42).

DIVERSE AUDIENCE, DIVERSE APPROACH (Matthew 10:1-7; 13:1-34; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 10:25-37; 15:1-32; John 4:4-30; 8:1-11; Acts 13:13-44; 17:16-34)

The Lord’s approach differed from person to person. Situation and wisdom dictated His method of approach. In Matthew’s case, for instance, He not only ate with him, His disarming comment silenced, even if momentarily, the bitter criticism of religious bigots. In Christ’s time, prejudice evidently truded the land of Palestine. The scribes and Pharisees versus the publicans and the Gentiles. The Sadducees versus Pharisees. The Samaritans versus the Jews. Deep-seated animosities ruled and guided interactions among these sets. These animosities ensured that none paid attention to the inner yearnings of their hearts. Christ’s pattern of soul-winning was to change all that. Wisdom dictates that He varies His approach then, according to the level of His audience’s understanding. He was sensitive to the man-made barrier as He was determined to break the middle wall of partition existing among them. Successful soul-winning demands diverse approach since understanding and temperaments differ from person to person.

Question 3: Why do we need wisdom in soul-winning?

People, place and circumstances determined the slant of Jesus’ message. Parables, conversations, questions, comment on current happenings all came in handy as a means of driving home a point. They were thought-provoking as they were witty. He wielded them like a rapier. With them, feelings were gauged, motives unmasked, thus leaving the sinner with no place to hide from the searching glare of God’s word. But in all, wisdom supervised and guided the appropriateness and preferences of the use of each. Soul-winning opportunity can be lost when wisdom is not allowed to decide the appropriateness of the use of words or method!

For instance, to an ordinary eye, it would appear

that Jesus has some axe to grind when, in a rare expression of holy indignation, He pronounced “woes” on the scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, impenitence and unbelief (Matthew 23:13-33). Yet, in one instance, He honoured a dinner invitation from a Pharisee (Luke 7:36- 50) and in another praised a scribe for his sincerity (Mark 12:28-34). He was not caught in the prejudice that exists between the Pharisees and the Publicans. He related with them equally. His life was ruled by one maxim: charity towards all, malice towards none. He was swayed by neither the hermitism of John the Baptist (Luke 7:33,34), the hospitality of the Pharisees nor the egocentrism of His disciples (Luke 9:55). He related with His audience with understanding and firmness. Successful soul-winning demands that reason be separated from emotion. Nothing erodes confidence as when preconception is allowed to rule and guide interaction between a soul-winner and his subjects.

Commendation or condemnation should come, as occasion demands it. Notice the tactful use of commendation in the conversation between Jesus and the scribe: **“And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God”** (Mark 12:34). Tact is also evident in His conversation with the Samaritan woman. **“Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband”** (John 4:16,17). In dealing with souls, there might be need to commend a kind act done or word said by a seeker. In some cases, this might turn out to be the only means of getting him to accept the gospel.

THE SINNER’S FRIEND (Matthew 9:9-13; John 8:1-11; Luke 7:36-50; Romans 5:8,19; 1 Timothy 1:15).

In associating with Matthew, a certified sinner in the Pharisees’ mind, Jesus showed Himself a true Friend of all spiritual wretch. His condescension that started with His incarnation acquired a new meaning as well as become redefined as He reaches out to sinful men. Criticism, rather than bring about change of behavior in a sinner, will only harden his heart.

Ordinarily, a publican suffered from a poor public image. He was, on account of his activity as a tax-collector, shunned as a stooge of the Roman empire. Besides, the demand of his duty, an intimate relationship with the Gentiles placed him in bad light among the Jews.

Question 4: Why were the publicans so despised in the eyes of the Pharisees?

By interacting with Publicans widely regarded as the sinners and scorn of the society, Jesus set his divine mission on a collision course with the prejudice of His time. It was no wonder therefore that the Pharisees took His disciple to task: **“Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?”**

In asking this question however, the Pharisees betrayed their ignorance of the Messiah’s mission on earth: **“I am not come to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance”** (Matthew 9:13). It is instructive that Jesus answered them out of their own scripture. Christ’s answer must have sounded like a new note in the tradition and religious practice of the day.

The religious people who regarded Jesus’ association with men of “questionable occupation and character” as scandalous, undoubtedly have a wrong assumption of what constitutes acceptable service to God. While they were very particular about religious formality, they neglected the very essence of the Law. The much-despised Publican and the sinner are probably nearer the kingdom of heaven than the self-righteous Pharisee. **“Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you”** (Matthew 21:31).

Question 5: What do you learn from Jesus’ association with the publicans and sinners of His day?

Meanwhile, we should not forget the lesson being driven at here: to be a successful soul-winner you will need to show yourself friendly to people whose souls you aim to win for Christ. Your disposition is as important as your message, if not more. In fact, in some cases, it has

sometimes turned out to be the entire message a sinner needs to surrender his life to Christ.

One of the interesting features of Christ's passion for souls is His practice of taking the gospel to the seekers' abodes. Homes, towns, cities, streets, roads, seashores, desert, and synagogues – none proved a no-go-area in pursuance of this objective. He condescended to the level of His audience. He identified with their agonies and pains. Doubtless, in the offices, neighbourhood, schools, small circle of acquaintance and relations, larger society, are people who don't care about the salvation of their souls, about the life hereafter; sometimes they are self-contented and probably snobbish. But any soul-winner who hopes to be like his Master must look beyond the demeanour and character of people. He will need to warm up to the snobbish and cheer up the downcast.

Christ's passion for souls is not one without some highlights. One, He is as much grieved over the spiritual state of multitude as He was "over one sinner". Before His encounter with Matthew, He had preached the gospel in Galilee, Capernaum, Nazareth, Bethsaida, Jericho. Yet, He was as excited with one seeker as with a crowd. With both He exuded the same warmth, love, kindness and compassion.

Two, His passion for souls recognised neither place nor time. Every place or time was just alright insofar as people were willing to give audience to His message. People's homes, places of work, deserts, synagogues, seashores, wilderness all provided a cozy place to address men on the subject of repentance and faith towards God. Three, every situation, circumstance and contact with people became an opportunity not only to experience the wonderful power of God in bodily healing but also the marvellous grace of God in repentance, redemption, and regeneration of life.

Four, only one theme ran through His messages: repentance from sin and faith toward God. Little wonder this evangelistic fervour, tenacity and zeal passed on to His disciples who constitute the nucleus of the early

Church. Later, Peter was to reiterate, “**we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard**” (Acts 4:20) while the early disciples “**scattered abroad**” by intense persecution went “**every where preaching the word**” (Acts 8:4). And through it all, one theme stood out: “**repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ**” (Acts 20:21).

CONVERSION AND COMMITMENT TO EVANGELISM
(Matthew 9:9,19; 10:1-3,5,6; John 4:28,30,39-42; Acts 2:47; 8:1-4; 2 Timothy 2:8,9; 4:1,2)

Matthew honoured the Lord and His disciples not only to commemorate his spiritual rebirth but also to create opportunity for seekers to meet with the Saviour. Of course, being young in the faith, he could not preach to the people. He left the job for Jesus. Therein lies an unforgettable lesson for new converts: you can share your testimonies with and invite your acquaintances and intimate friends to fellowship and church services. You can organise a forum where a minister of God or a more experienced church leader can minister to them. This was the same principle applied in the disciples meeting with “certain Greeks” who came to Jerusalem to worship at the feast of the Passover (John 12:20-22).

Question 6: In fishing for souls, how may we employ Matthew's method?

An unfamiliar face sitting by our side during worship or fellowship session could be a visitor waiting to be won for Christ. Striking up conversation with the person after service might prove to be the ideal thing to do. Every believer is called to be a soul-winner. What an excellent pattern the Lord has left for us to follow!

One, avoid popularity-seeking and see in every man or woman you meet a unique creature whose soul is as important as any other in the sight of God. Two, let seekers see in you the love, compassion and understanding which the society around them seemed to have denied them: let them know through your conduct and character that he that comes to God, He will, in no wise cast out. Three, give no respite to your passion for soul-winning but recognise in every contact

with people an opportunity to reach out to them with the gospel; to suffer some inconveniences and to share in their pains and agony if need be. Lastly, keep to the message that can save the soul from eternal damnation: repentance from sin and faith toward Christ.

Our willingness to be commissioned into the task of soul-winning is the true test of our conversion, either by deeds or by words. Conversion and evangelism go together. Where there is real conversion, there must arise, of necessity, zeal to take the gospel to the unreached by all possible means.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Genesis	50	Jonah	3-4
TUE	Exodus	1-2	Micah	1-2
WED	“	3	“	3-4
THUR	“	4	“	5-6
FRI	“	5	“	7
SAT	“	6	Nahum	1-2
SUN	“	7-8	“	3

689 Lesson

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE OF CHRISTIANS

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

TEXT: Matthew 19:3-12; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 5:22-33.

Marriage is one of the most sacred institutions in life. Otherwise referred to as the joining together of a man and a woman in holy matrimony, it signals or flags off the family life. In response to a question from the Pharisees, Jesus “**answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?**” (Matthew 19:4,5).

Christian teaching on marriage is expected to be accepted and practiced like other doctrines or teachings of the Bible. Our marriages must be directed and guided by God’s word so as to achieve the purpose for which the wise God set it up. Wherever the teaching of God’s word on marriage is neglected or rejected, much trouble results. It is sad that the guiding scriptural principles on marriage are deliberately being ignored by many so-called Christians today, resulting in incalculable spiritual loss, frustration, disappointment, unfaithfulness, sorrow and, at times, painful separation for couples that were joined together in a Bible-believing Church.

Though it is not unexpected to see unbelievers abuse this sacred institution, heaven is very sad at the sight of multitude of Christians going contrary to the will, purpose and plan of God in their choice of life partners. Life goals have been aborted, ministries cut short, joy ruined and life destroyed because people turned aside from God’s command on marriage and family life. Scores

of young men and women who should be on fire for God groan under the painful consequences of wrong choice in marriage. This is why a clear teaching on marriage and family life is very significant to enhance the health and spiritual wholeness of the Church today.

Question 1: Give scriptural reasons why God instituted marriage and family life.

We establish from the Scripture that marriage is, first, God's plan and program from the beginning (Genesis 2:18,20,22-24; Ephesians 5:31). Second, it is a divinely ordained necessity (Genesis 2:18; Psalm 68:6). Third, it makes for preservation of purity and holiness in the church and society (1 Corinthians 7:2,9-11; 1 Timothy 5:9-15). Fourth, it works for the completeness and fulfillment of true living (Ecclesiastes 4:9-11). It provides needed fellowship, comfort, companionship and partnership. Finally, marriage complements God's work of procreation (Genesis 1:27,28; Psalm 128:3). With very few exceptions, most people should marry. These few exceptions should be guided by God (Matthew 19:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7:7,8,32,34) and must not be the product of selfish, immature decisions, misguided imitation, faithless conclusion or religious compulsion. And, as the believer takes the journey into marriage, he or she should pray, study and meditate on God's word sufficiently in order to avoid being misled by 'concerned' counsellors (in or outside the church), friends, family members and family planning clinics in the world.

Question 2: Mention some wrong motivations that compel some people not to marry.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE JOURNEY OF MARRIAGE
(Ecclesiastes 3:1,11; Psalm 32:8,9; Joshua 3:4; Isaiah 30:18-21)

Marriage journey begins with a desire or a sense of need in an individual for a life partner with whom to share life in an intimate way. God has created every man with this innate feeling and it manifests naturally through maturity, inner urge or a compelling feeling for a life partner when the time comes. A believer's response to

this urge is to approach God in prayer for guidance. As we pray earnestly and sincerely, God communicates with our hearts in a way as to lead us to His perfect choice of partner. It may be through a still small voice in the heart (Proverbs 20:27; John 10:4,5,27; Acts 10:17-21) or a strong mind-dominating affection for a particular person. Such affection is God-given and it cannot be quenched by temporary or contrary circumstances (Song of Solomon 8:6,7). Still, in other cases, it may be through dreams or a definite impression in the heart. For others, God can speak through His Word or make a definite impression in the heart in the course of listening to a message or sermon. Whatever channel He chooses to use – revelation, dream, vision or impression – God will not contradict His written word. If any revelation we receive contradicts the Scripture, it must be rejected. It should also be subjected to peace test, contrary to fear and hurry.

Question 3: Mention some ways through which God reveals His will in marriage to us.

COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID (1 Corinthians 10:6-12; Proverbs 31:30; Judges 14:1-3; Ezekiel 14:1-6)

The path to the married life is strewn with dangers which the believer must avoid in order to remain in the will of God and enjoy a healthy relationship.

Question 4: Mention some pitfalls to avoid in the choice of a life partner.

As we seek to know the will of God, we should not walk by sight. To determine the suitability of an intending partner through his or her material possession and secular position is to walk by sight. The possession of a good brain and a good hand to make money does not guarantee the possession of a good heart which makes a good home. Second, we should not preempt God. In other words, a heavy dependence, for example, on dreams and dreams alone makes it easier to be deceived. Rather, the sincere seeker should be open to whatever channel God decides to use to speak. Preempting God leads to confusion.

Third, every 'idol' should be removed from the heart. That is to say that we should not pre-fix our minds on a particular person asking only that God should rubber-stamp him or her for us. That idol may not be God's will. He or she may not even be a child of God. We should remember that only God knows the heart of men. Some who appear like Christians outwardly may be something else within. Samson made his choice by sight and suffered greatly for it. Several others are still ensnared in this trap today.

Fourth, under no circumstance should a true believer marry a nonbeliever. It does not matter whether the person attends church or not. God prohibits unequal yoke in marriage (2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 6:15,16; Deuteronomy 7:1-4).

Fifth, we should avoid the carnal practice of allowing others to pick partners for us. God is still our perfect Matchmaker. Some people run back to the village to get married to people they know little about. Others resort to dating sites and social media. In doing so, they feel that they are smart and cutting short what they consider to be a long procedure by the church. They avoid serious praying and close scrutiny of spiritual leaders whom God has set over them. In time, they reap the bitter fruits of unhappy and burdensome marriage.

CHRISTIAN COURTSHIP (Genesis 24:49-52; Proverbs 24:27; Luke 14:28-32; 1:26,27; Matthew 1:18; 1 Corinthians 10:31)

After knowing the will of God, the intending brother or sister, as the case may be, is expected to inform the pastor of the church or appointed leaders who carry out the oversight function of guiding young believers in marriage. The pastor or committee then counsels them on simple but basic regulatory procedures to follow. The first is to secure their parents' consent. Parental consent gives the church authority to allow the intending couple to begin courtship.

The period between knowing the will of God in marriage and the wedding is known as courtship. It is a period of learning and getting to know one another through regular praying and discussions tailored towards the

future of their dream home. This period also affords them the opportunity to talk about important issues like money management in the home, career after marriage, bearing and rearing children, type of accommodation, and so on.

Some virtues are essential during courtship. One, openness must be made a mutual principle. Truth about one another's past and present that have the potential to affect them in future should be discussed. Second, holiness should be central as the intending couples are not expected to engage in actions that are meant only for married people. Third, prayer should not be relegated to the background. Problems are solved, doubts dissolved, mountains moved and oppositions are turned to opportunities through prayers. Prayer brings down heaven's provisions. Fourth, neither of the two should impose his or her ideas on the other. Fifth, if they are unable to resolve a particular issue, such should be brought to the attention of the supervising committee or the pastor. Should there be some grave or shocking discoveries, for example, that either of the party is a sinner, has demonic problems, irreconcilable conviction on Christian marriage, doubts over doctrines, etc. recourse must be made to the marriage committee. We should always remember that a broken courtship is better than a broken marriage.

Question 5: Mention some helpful guiding principles during courtship.

CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT AND WEDDING (John 2:1-3; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 4:5; 1 Timothy 4:12,16)

Both engagement and wedding are common to the world and the church. These two occasions should be done bearing scriptural injunctions in mind. Neither should there be a forum to feed the flesh, display carnality and worldliness nor water down sound conviction that had been upheld for years.

During engagement especially, all forms of deception should be discouraged. Deceits couched in jokes in the name of tradition should be avoided. Believers must

steer clear of all such jokes and feigned lies. We must also avoid compromise in the areas of what we do or give as part of the engagement requirement. Anything that has to do with idolatry, alcoholic beverages, cowries, kola nuts, etc. must be avoided. Generally, engagement and wedding become problematic when an intending couple live inconsistent lives. Costly provisions for the pride of life should be left out. Worldly adornments, practices and dressing should be avoided. The following questions could provide a gauge for engagements and weddings: how godly or worldly is my dressing and spending? How watchful or wasteful am I? Who will be glorified at my wedding – Christ, self or the flesh? Will I be sad or happy should Christ come on my wedding day?

Question 6: What should be the focus of a Christian during the engagement and marriage ceremonies?

CHRISTIAN FAMILY LIFE (Psalm 128:1-4; Proverbs 5:15-23; 31:10-31; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5,10; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-8)

Family life after wedding is a learning experience that can only be terminated by death. The bottom-line is the need to carefully but excitedly study one another. There is always the need for adjustments by both husband and wife. The areas of adjustments are numerous. These initial adjustments will work well only in an environment of humility, love, patience and temperance.

Question 7: What causes problems in Christian families and what are the solutions?

As the couple relate together from day to day, offences will certainly come. These offences have some of their causes rooted in finance, food pattern, time management, work life, non-availability of one of the partners, house helps, sharp differences in tribal practices, exaggerated expectations, wrong notions, interference from extended families and so on. The magnitude and nature of the problems differ from family to family. Proper attitude in handling these problems is a vital issue. When problems are poorly-handled, they snowball into bigger,

more complex proportions and, at times, result in separation. There are homes where, though the couples live together, they are indeed separated at heart.

Divorce, separation, strained, stressful or dead relationship amongst couples is not the will of God. The word of God has solutions to all family problems. God instituted marriage and He has adequately provided for happiness in our families.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN THE HOME (1 Samuel 8:4,5,7; John 15:12-14; Genesis 25:20-23; Ephesians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-7)

Problems in Christian families begin when the couple gives the devil a place in their hearts. This is done unwittingly as one or both partners entertain insinuation of in-laws, gossips of maids and neighbours or suspicion. This has caused much harm (Philippians 4:8; 1 John 4:1). Another source of problem is the failure of either of the partners to “leave and cleave” (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6- 9; Genesis 2:24). God expects the man to leave (though not to abandon) his parents and cleave to his wife.

The third cause of problems in the family is worldliness, extravagance and carnal comparison of one’s family or spouse with others (1 Samuel 8:4,5,7). Comparing one’s family with others is unwise (2 Corinthians 10:12). Instead, we should endeavour to live by God’s standard. Fourth, lack of love and affection for one another (Titus 2:4; John 15:12-14). Both spouses must have the will to love. Impatience, strife, malice, nagging, and bitterness should not be named in Christian families. A real sanctification experience in the lives of the couple keeps all these vices out of the family and keeps the family in unity, harmony and love. Fifth, pride. The wife need not challenge the husband’s headship and authority but respond in godly submission. When she feels marginalized or trampled under, the husband should apologize. Inability to apologize and failure to always go to the Lord in prayer strain relationships, create communication gaps, and reduce mutual trust and respect for one another.

Sixth, problems of childlessness may bring emotional

stress and conflict in the family. Where this occurs, the couple should take it to the Lord in prayer (Genesis 25:20- 23). The Lord can make **“the barren to be mother of seven”** (1 Samuel 2:5). Any decision suggested by unbelief is wrong and sinful because **“whatever is not of faith is sin”** (Romans 14:23).

Seventh, lack of submission on the part of the wife. The Bible commands the wife to be submissive to her husband (Ephesians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-7). The wife’s submission provokes the husband to much love. He will labour to provide the needs of the family. He will cherish her as the Lord does the Church. On the other hand, lack of love from the husband can affect the wife negatively.

While each partner tries to meet the needs of one another at home, there might be noticeable shortcomings. No matter how pronounced these might be, there must be mutual appreciation of one another’s effort. Lack of appreciation creates conflicts.

Eight, conflicts also come through money management, business and spending habits (Luke 16:10 -12). Secretiveness in financial matters or projects makes room for suspicion and tension. Ninth, conflicts may also come through demonic infiltration through house helps, third parties or relations. Tenth, where infidelity or unfaithfulness creeps in, confusion will surely ensue. Immorality destroys the fabrics of the family and should be avoided by all means. Sin should not once be seen among Christians.

God’s will for every family is that they live the days of heaven here on earth (Deuteronomy 11:21). This is attainable if we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and prayerfully build the walls of our home with our commitment to work towards a happy, healthy and holy home.

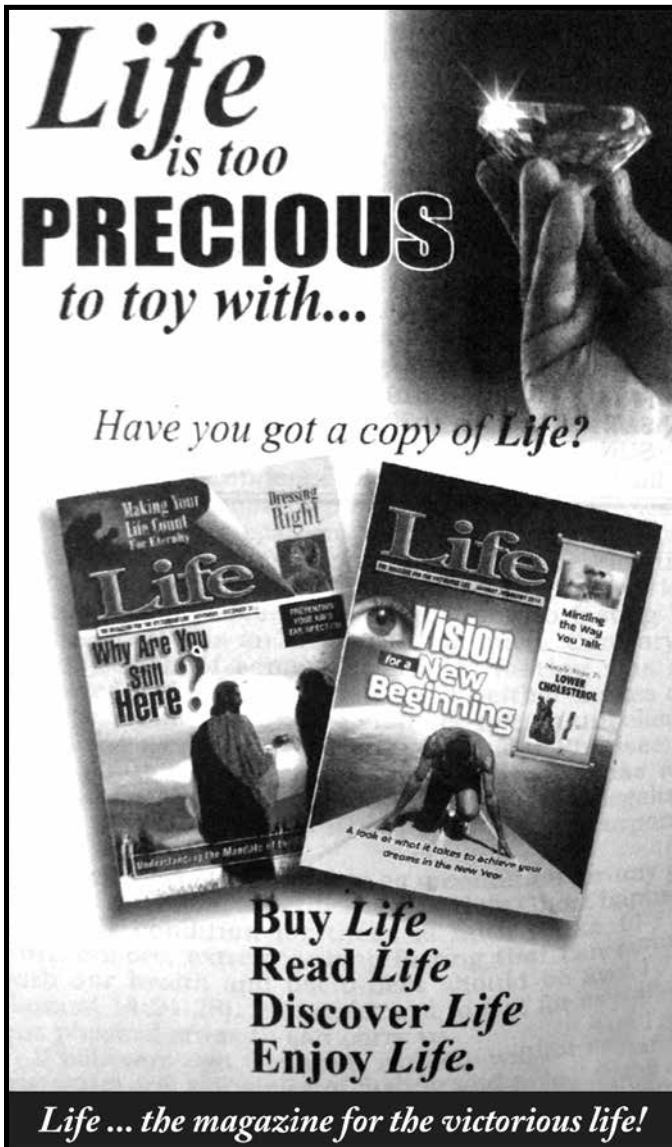
DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Exodus	9	Hab.	1-2
TUE	"	10	"	3
WED	"	11-12	Zeph.	1-2
THUR	"	13	"	3
FRI	"	14	Haggai	1
SAT	"	15	"	2
SUN	"	16	Zech.	1-2

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

DISTRICT CHURCHES DIRECTORY

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

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

MONDAY BIBLE STUDY

Rockland County	7:00 PM
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TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY

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

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

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

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

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

Pastor W.F. Kumuyi – General Superintendent
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