

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VOLUME 54

"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

690 Lesson

BOAZ MARRIES RUTH

MEMORY VERSE: “So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son” (Ruth 4:13).

TEXT: Ruth 4:1-22

Events that followed the decision of Ruth, the Moabitess to return with Naomi to Bethlehem Judah have proved that God esteems and rewards consecration, piety and industry. Ruth, as seen in previous lessons in this book, had been torn between going back to her people and gods and choosing to be a proselyte and worshipper of the God of Israel. She opted for the latter and God proved to her that she did not make a mistake. As soon as she returned to Israel, her experience proved that **“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way”** (Psalm 37:23). Upon a series of divinely ordered steps, Ruth met Boaz who turned out not only to be a near kinsman, but her future husband and one who would provide her the rest which she needed. The account of the life of Ruth shows that it pays to be chaste, righteous, diligent and resolute in serving the Lord.

This study focuses on the consummation of Ruth’s relationship with Boaz. The marriage can be said to be according to the will of God going by the events which surrounded it. People involved in the arrangement also followed due process and necessary guidelines for marriage at that time based on the Law of Moses. As the Scripture enjoins us, all things should be done **“decently and in order”** (1 Corinthians 4:40). Believers have a lot to learn from the virtue of patience exhibited by Ruth and pray earnestly for God’s will before going into marriage. They should also strive to follow scriptural procedures as taught by the church.

All along, Ruth was patient knowing that God would work things out in His own time. She was also consistent and faithful in service. Above all, she maintained purity and holiness while waiting for the will of God to be done. These qualities are expected of brothers and sisters seeking God's will in marriage today.

Question 1: What should be the attitude of single brothers and sisters waiting for God's will in marriage?

BOAZ, A KINSMAN-REDEEMER (Ruth 4:1-12; Leviticus 25:25; Deuteronomy 25:5-10; 1 Corinthians 14:40; Matthew 22:24)

According to the Law of Moses, the nearest kinsman of the deceased was to redeem his inheritance, and if he had a wife, perform the duties of a husband (Deuteronomy 25:5; Mark 12:19; Luke 20:28). A nearer kinsman, whose name was not mentioned, had the first right to marry Ruth and inherit the family land (Leviticus 25:25). **"Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! Turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down"** (Ruth 4:1). In the presence of the city elders, Boaz put the proposal concerning the redemption of the inheritance of Naomi to him. He initially agreed, but when he was told that he would also marry Ruth to raise seed for the dead, he rejected the offer. **"...I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar my own inheritance"** (Ruth 4:6).

The nearest kinsman could not redeem her probably because he felt that would spoil his own inheritance. He thought that taking Ruth would be an additional burden to him and his family. In like manner, many refuse the thought to surrender their lives to Christ because they fear it may affect their earthly inheritance.

Boaz became a redeemer in two ways: he married Ruth and preserved the name of Elimelech. Secondly, he redeemed the family land that Naomi had sold and restored it to Elimelech's inheritance. These

benevolent acts make him a type of Christ who redeems the believer: He purchased us by His own blood and thereby saved us from perishing in sin (John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:18,19). Two, He includes us as the redeemed in His eternal inheritance in the new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1-7). Three, we are made joint-heirs with Him which gives us access to the heavenly inheritance (Roman 8:17). Four, as Boaz was a husband to Ruth, Christ is the Bridegroom to the Church.

Question 2: Explain how Boaz became a type of Christ.

BOAZ'S MARRIAGE WITH RUTH (Ruth 4:9-13; 1 Chronicles 2:12; Matthew 1:5; Deuteronomy 7:8-11; 23:3)

Consequent upon the nearest kinsman's inability to redeem Ruth, **"Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day"** (Ruth 4:9,10). The elders witnessed the transaction and blessed Boaz and Ruth. There are vital lessons from this event. One, although he was deeply interested in Ruth, Boaz patiently followed the laid down procedure of the law in handling the case.

Christians should follow due process either in marriage or in resolving issues within and outside the church. Two, he showed preference for others by giving the opportunity first to the other kinsman; **"... in honor preferring one another"** (Romans 12:10). From Boaz, Christians should emulate the qualities of patience, orderliness and selflessness in handling issues. Three, he did not attempt to do anything in secret. The elders of the city gave credence and witness to his proposed marriage. **"And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders said, we are witnesses"** (Ruth 4:11). Believers must watch

against shady deals and every form of deceitful works. Christian bachelors and spinsters should avoid every temptation of planning secret marriages because they often lead to many untold regrets, heartaches and irreparable losses.

Question 3: What qualities of character can we emulate from Boaz in handling issues?

“So, Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife...” (Ruth 4:13). The Law of Moses had prohibited the Moabites from entering the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation. **“An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD forever”** (Deuteronomy 23:3). However, Ruth became an exemption because of her decision to serve the Lord. She had been incorporated into the family of God by marriage having left her own country, people and gods to become a convert to the living God. Thus, Ruth was a witness for God to the gentiles, indicating that God had not utterly forsaken them but that in due time, they should become one with His chosen people and partake of His salvation. It follows therefore, that those who repent and decide to follow Christ will be saved no matter their background or pedigree (Ezekiel 18:4-9; John 6:37; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13).

Ruth left the land of her nativity (Moab) to follow her mother-in-law back to Bethlehem. Her consecration and devotion to serve the living God of Israel paid off in the end. We see in Ruth a striking example of godliness, patience and faithfulness. She was discreet, contented and free from covetousness; **“...in as much as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich”** (Ruth 3:10). Her virtuous life was well known to all the people around her: **“...for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman”**. She sought God and His righteousness before seeking the gift of a new husband. She sought virtue before thinking about the comfort of re- marriage.

Ruth’s life and experience teaches us that we should put priority on seeking God’s kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Two, we must learn

to patiently wait for God's appointed time for our blessings, be it a marriage partner, employment, business or career. Three, we must put absolute trust in God and His promise because **"he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"** (Hebrews 11:6).

The obedience of Boaz and Ruth attracted blessings upon their union. **"The LORD makes the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman..."** (Ruth 4:11,12).

THE BIRTH OF OBED AND GENEALOGY OF DAVID
(Ruth 4:14-22; Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38; 1:58; Romans 12:15)

"So, Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son" (Ruth 4:13). The birth of baby Obed was a further testament to God's plan and program for Ruth, Israel and indeed the world. Aside of the comfort and rest which He promised those who trust Him, the Lord was also preparing the way for the future Messiah through Ruth. As a reward for her faithfulness, God made her to stand out as one of about four women, and the only gentile (besides Rahab) to have a place in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ. **"And Salmon begat Boaz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth..."** (Matthew 1:5).

As the birth of a child is a just cause of rejoicing, the women came around to felicitate with Naomi and Ruth. Believers are equally enjoined to **"rejoice with them that do rejoice..."** (Romans 12:15). The neighbors recommended a name suitable to the circumstances of the case; and the parents and grandmother adopted it. They called his name Obed which means 'serving' because he was to be the nourisher of Naomi in old age (Ruth 4:15).

Our text climaxes with this fascinating account of the genealogy of David, revealing how God rewarded the

consecration and devotion of Ruth, the Moabitess. **“And Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed. And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David”** (Ruth 4:21,22). Ruth had earlier declared: **“...thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God”** (Ruth 1:16); truly she walked her talk and demonstrated that her decision to follow the Lord was real. Declaration of intention alone never endears anyone to God until it is followed by purposeful action. **“Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also...”** (2 Corinthians 8:11).

Question 4: How can a sinner have a place in God’s Book of life?

Sinners can have their names in the Book of life and a place in God’s record if they acknowledge their sinfulness, confess and repent of all their evil deeds, and exercise faith in the vicarious sacrifice of Christ’s atonement (Romans 10:10-13; Revelation 20:11-15).

As we conclude the book of Ruth, there are some pertinent lessons for the heaven-bound believer. One, we should make our choices with God’s eternal values in mind. Two, avoid the temptation of moral shortcuts and living for short-term pleasure. Finally, we should live in faithfulness and obedience to God knowing that the significance of our lives will extend beyond our life time.

Question 5: What lessons do we learn from the book of Ruth?

DAILY BIBLE READING

| | MORNING | | EVENING | |
|------|----------------|-----|----------------|-------|
| MON | Matthew | 1-2 | Zechariah | 3-4 |
| TUE | “ | 3-4 | “ | 5-6 |
| WED | “ | 5 | “ | 7-8 |
| THUR | “ | 6 | “ | 9-10 |
| FRI | “ | 7 | “ | 11-12 |
| SAT | “ | 8-9 | “ | 13-14 |
| SUN | “ | 10 | Malachi | 1-2 |

691 Lesson

HANNAH'S PRAYER AND VOW

MEMORY VERSE: "And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore" (1 Samuel 1:10).

MEMORY VERSE: "And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore" (1 Samuel 1:10).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 1:1-18

This study introduces us to the historical book of First Samuel. The events recorded in the book began as Israel prepared to make the transition of leadership from the rule of the judges to the reign of kings in Israel. The last judge before this time was Samson, who died without achieving total victory over the Philistines. First Samuel opens with the account of the birth of Samuel who was both a prophet and the last judge in Israel before the setting up of the monarchy.

It would be recalled that the period of the judges was characterized with laxity, impunity and anarchy because there was no king in Israel and everyone did that which was right in their eyes (Judges 21:25). The nation was in a state of degeneracy and spiritual destitution (1 Samuel 3:1). That was the background against which the story in our text happened.

In this introduction to the story of Hannah, we observe how believers should respond to life's challenges, the proper attitude towards critical neighbors, and how to handle issues of unexpected delays in answer to prayer. One unchanging truth is this lesson is that prayer changes things; the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous avails much.

DEPARTURE FROM GOD'S PERFECT WILL AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (1 Samuel 1:1-8; Genesis 4:19,23; 29:23-35; 30:1-24; Judges 8:30,31; 9:1-5; 1 Kings 11:1-10; Matthew 19:8; Romans 7:1-3)

Our text opens with the marriage and family life of the parents of Samuel. It was a very religious but polygamous setting because Elkannah had two wives: Hannah and Peninnah. Hannah, though loved by her husband, was barren but Peninnah had sons and daughters. In those days, having children was considered a sign of divine approval, while being childless was an evidence of God's disfavor. A childless woman was despised and this usually brought low self-esteem.

Every year, this family attended the annual feast in Shiloh to worship God. After the normal peace offerings at the festival, the family would gather to eat their portion of the sacrifice. Elkannah, being the head of the family, would divide portions for all the members. He gave Peninnah and her children their portions, but he gave a worthy or double portion to Hannah. Though that kind gesture was intended to assuage her pain of having no children, it made Peninnah jealous and she began to deride Hannah. Consequently, there was family trouble and the festival, which was meant to be a time of joyful celebration, was turned into a period of strife and sorrow.

Question 1: Point out the consequences of polygamy.

Deviation from God's perfect will in marriage has terrible consequences. Though polygamy was a common practice in the Old Testament period, it was not sanctioned by God. It was one of those things He allowed because of the hardness of hearts of the people. Christ affirmed that it was not so from the beginning (Matthew 19:8). God's original and perfect plan in marriage is lifelong monogamy; no divorce and remarriage while the other partner lives (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:2-4,10).

As in all polygamous marriages, Elkannah could not remain impartial towards his two wives. He loved Hannah more and he was not discreet in showing greater affection to her. In reaction, Peninnah became an adversary to Hannah and provoked her to the point she lost appetite and wept. Her grief robbed the family of the joy and excitement of being in God's

presence in Shiloh: and this happened year after year. Like Elkannah, no one can escape the consequences of deviating from God's perfect plan in marriage. His attempt to help Hannah overcome her grief complicated matters and he was helpless over Peninnah's vicious provocation. One can only imagine the fate of children in such home environment! Believers should avoid all forms of deviations in marriage. Polygamy, polyandry, levirate marriage, divorce, remarriage while the lawful spouse lives, swapping of partners, concubinage, homosexual marriage, etc. are contrary to God's will and should be avoided.

Question 2: What virtues can couples learn from the family life of Elkannah?

Despite his shortcoming, Elkannah ensured he led the entire family in the religious pilgrimage to Shiloh year by year. This was in obedience to God's commandment to the Jews. Husbands should learn to assume responsibility for the spiritual development of their family. They must know the way, show the way, and walk the way to properly lead other family members aright. Besides giving Hannah a worthy portion, Elkannah spoke lovingly to her during her grief. Trying to pacify her, he made a comforting statement: **"am not I better to thee than ten sons?"** Couples should not compound their problems when there are challenges in the family. Suspicion, trading blames and accusing each other as the cause of problems will not help in any way; rather, they should unite in faith and pray for divine intervention. They should support each other while navigating the stormy seas of life.

Whereas Elkannah showed some virtues, Peninnah was a bad model. She provoked a godly woman and reproached her because of temporary adversity: and that, right in the place of worship. Believers must be agents of comfort and never an instrument of provocation to others. We should beware lest our words or actions provoke to tears some righteous people who are already laden with cares, either in the church or in the community.

DESPERATE PRAYER AND VOW TO GOD (1 Samuel 1:9-13; 2 Chronicles 33:12,13; Psalm 18:3; 55:16; 116:1-14; 50:15; 86:7; Luke 1:5-13; 22:44; James 5:13)

Hannah was a woman of faith who did not allow her challenge to hinder her from going to Shiloh year after year. She realized that being a devoted worshipper of God does not necessarily exempt one from earthly challenges. Our challenges should not hinder us from serving the Lord with gladness. We live for and do worship God not just for temporary blessings we expect of Him, but because it is our duty to do so. This is the purpose of our creation and redemption (Exodus 8:1; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11). We must not make our problems the central focus of our relationship with God. It is important to continue to serve the Lord for who He is, and determine to worship Him no matter how great the challenges we face.

Question 3: What steps should believers take when they are confronted with life's challenges?

Hannah continued in her devotion to God and took her burden to Him in prayer. She did not allow her physical problem to weaken her prayer life. In fact, it was the challenge that propelled her to pray. She withdrew from the crowd into a place of personal prayer. Whereas others could have turned to some prayer charlatans or occult alternatives, Hannah decided to go to God. Her action revealed she had faith in God as she did not give in to self-pity, discouragement or resentment. The delay in conception sparked holy desperation in prayer for divine intervention. Believers should learn to take their problems to God rather than give up or seek help from man. The Scripture affirms that it is vain to rely on men (Psalm 60:11; 121:1,2; 146:3; Jeremiah 3:23).

From Hannah's prayer, we see qualities of effective praying. Though voiceless, it was genuine, fervent and right on target. First, it was sincere, straight from the heart, not rote or offered with feigned words. Second, it was simple. Like Samson's prayer or the thief on the cross, Hannah prayed to God "**remember me**" (1

Samuel 1:11; Judges 16:28; Luke 23:42). Third, it was specific. Her request was not vague but definite. She asked for a male child for a definite purpose. Fourth, the prayer was selfless. She did not ask for a child just for the sake of it or merely to level up with her rival, but a child that would fill the gap in God's house. She was not contemplating a child she would keep in her custody and brag over, or simply one that would bury her when she died (she knew Nazarites do not bury or go near the dead), but a Nazarite that would serve God all the days of his life. Fifth, Hannah's prayer was scriptural. What she asked agreed with the word of God. Sixth, her request was spiritual in focus. Seventh, the prayer was made with steadfast perseverance. She continued praying until she had assurance of answer (1 Samuel 1:12; Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18). If there is any reproductive, financial, domestic, spiritual or professional barrenness in our lives, we can look up to God and pray earnestly to Him. He will answer and bring fruitfulness.

God does not answer all prayers. Many people pray but they do not receive answers because their prayers are superficial, speculative, shallow, self-centered and self-conscious, sectarian, and sin-tainted. Prayers that are offered with no passion, earnestness, sense of dependency and importunity can rarely change difficult situations. No matter how vocal, prayers that are not rooted in the Scripture or backed up with faith, righteousness and sincerity before God cannot be effective. People who pray with doubt in their hearts should not expect to receive anything from God (James 1:6-8).

Question 4: What is the place of vows in New Testament dispensation?

Hannah manifested her desperation in prayer through her loss of appetite, weeping and the vow she made to God. When we are earnest in prayer, it manifests in several ways. Sometimes we may lose sleep and keep vigil all night in prayer. There may be groaning, loud crying, assuming unusual postures in prayer, fasting and abstinence from other legitimate pleasures (1 Kings 18:42-44; Hebrews 5:7; Romans 8:26; 1

Corinthians 7:5). This is often so because when there is a real burden in the heart, the physical needs of the body become secondary and are pushed to the background.

In the Old Testament dispensation, it was customary for people to make vows to God as part of their devotion in prayer. The first recorded vow in the Scripture was that of Jacob (Genesis 28:20; 31:13). Such vows were usually in the form of promises to do something which they felt would please God in exchange for a benefit they desired from Him. It was not considered a bargain but a solemn promise to do something extra for God because of a feeling of desperation before Him.

In the case of Hannah, she requested for a male child and vowed that he would be a perpetual Nazarite unto God. Samson and John the Baptist were other Nazarites for life in the Bible. There are specific regulations concerning vows in the Old Testament (Leviticus 27:1-34; Numbers 6:1-27; 30:1-16; Psalm 76:11; Ecclesiastes 5:4,5; Malachi 1:14). For Hannah's vow to stand, her husband had to uphold it; otherwise, it would be invalid. Moreover, she would have to both bring up and convince her son to accept the vow she had made on his behalf before conception. Her vow revealed her true motive for asking for a son. She was not primarily in competition with Peninnah or seeking a son to soothe her ego, but she wanted to contribute her quota in fulfilling God's purpose in Israel.

In the New Testament dispensation, vows to God are rarely mentioned. Believers in Christ have better promises and a more definite filial relationship with God. Vows are not necessary where a father-child relationship prevails. Apart from this, a person cannot make vows on things which do not belong to him. If we are totally yielded to Him, how can we call it a vow that which is an obligation we owe our Lord and Savior? In the real sense, we own nothing, we have nothing and we can do nothing that may be properly counted a vow to God. The promises of God cover all our needs and we should simply pray in faith and receive what our Father gives us freely.

However, that does not mean vows are now prohibited. They can be beneficial, provided we do not turn them into a mere religious tradition or employ them as bargaining tools in seeking favor from God. We can use vows to remind ourselves the extra mile we promised to go in our devotion to God; for instance, in the way we use our time, money etc. We can also use vows to bind ourselves to our duties towards fellow men. The marriage vow between a man and his wife is in this latter category. But then, it would be wrong to vow on duties that are obligatory or things upon which the Scripture is very specific. Similarly, it would not be proper to make a vow that will make us incapable of fulfilling our basic responsibilities, such as the care of our family, parents and the like (Mark 7:9-13).

It is better not to vow than to do so and not fulfill it. Making a vow is voluntary but once it is made, it becomes obligatory. God hates empty promises (Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Ecclesiastes 5:4,5; Acts 5:4) Also, we must pray and depend on God for grace to fulfill our vows.

GODLY CHARACTER IN TIMES OF PROVOCATION
(1Samuel 1:6,12-18; 17:26-29; Numbers 32:1-23; Joshua 22:11-34; 1 Peter 4:14-16)

It is not only in Hannah's prayer and selfless vow that we see a demonstration of true piety and beauty of the sanctified life. Her response to the provocation and reproach coming from Peninnah, as well as the sharp and hurtful remark from Eli, the high priest in the place of worship, proved she was truly a godly woman. To Peninnah's taunting, she prayed; to Eli's harsh comment, she exercised restraint and offered necessary explanation.

Question 5: What can believers learn from the wrong rebuke of Hannah by Eli?

As Hannah prayed in the temple, Eli the priest noticed she moved her lips but her voice was inaudible. Then he concluded she must have been drunk with wine and rebuked her sharply. Here was a case of wrong and hasty judgment from which we need to learn

some key lessons (Ecclesiastes 10:5-7). First, we must always endeavor to get proof before reproof. Second, we should avoid judging people by mere outward appearances. The deep-seated condition of the heart cannot be measured by mere outward actions. Third, do not judge everyone by the standard of other people's actions whom we know. Even if others or Eli's sons were known to be drunk in God's house, Hannah was a lily in the mire. Fourth, we should not allow our religious traditions blind us to the broad dimensions of Christian liberty, especially on points where the Scripture is not specific. Hannah's silent prayers must have been strange or contrary to the tradition Eli was used to. But there was no law prohibiting silent praying or compelling loud, audible prayers.

Question 6: How should believers respond to provocations, undeserved criticisms and misunderstandings?

Hannah's response to Eli was calm and humble. Being misunderstood, she offered full but only necessary explanation. There was no self-defense, only putting straight the facts. She called herself Eli's handmaid to prove she recognized and submitted to his spiritual authority despite the error in judgment. She not only claimed she was not drunk, she showed that she abhorred the sin of intoxication by saying "**count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial**". Believers should emulate Hannah when they are wrongly rebuked or criticized. They should be calm and avoid a self-defensive posture. Inability to forbear the shortcomings and offences of our fellow brethren or leaders is an evidence of immaturity and poverty of grace. When we are misunderstood or find ourselves in situations that expose us to wrong interpretations, we should offer full explanations lest our good be evil spoken of.

After Hannah's explanation, Eli shifted ground and pronounced a benediction on her without even asking for the nature of her problem. She believed God and His prophet and her countenance brightened. True leaders are not obstinate in their mistakes but they take correction and guard against a recurrence. Hannah's

godly response turned criticism into a benediction, barrenness into fruitfulness, and sorrow into joy. By the fruit of her lips she reaped life (Proverbs 18:21; Colossians 4:6).

DAILY BIBLE READING

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

692 Lesson

THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL

MEMORY VERSE: “Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD” (1 Samuel 1:20).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 1:19-28

The text opens with the family devotion of the Elkanahs. Over the years, Elkannah had been leading his entire family to Shiloh to worship God. It was on one of those instances that the preceding verses to the text detailed how Hannah was derided by Peninnah, her rival. Rather than fret, she sought the Lord and Source of all blessings in fervent prayer and received assurance of answers from Eli, the high priest. The God of Hannah is still alive and He answers the prayer of those who are destitute of blessings so they can live the abundant and joyful life promised to believers in Christ. Like Hannah, believers must demonstrate Christ-like virtues even in the face of provocation in addition to being prayerful, to always receive answers to their requests.

Following the successful hosting of the Shiloh retreat, the family was prepared to return to Ramah. **“And they rose in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD...”** (1 Samuel 1:19). The congregational worship did not replace their family devotion. This family deemed it necessary to observe their daily devotion to commune with God as well as commit their journey back home into His hand. Our security and safety in every journey is in God’s hands. So, **“Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass”** (Psalm 37:5). We must not yield to any pressure to live and travel without praying to God. Believers obtain grace for daily victory and success from unbroken communion

with the Lord and whole-hearted devotion to Him. Moreover, successful pilgrimage to heaven requires unceasing prayers.

DIVINE RESPONSE TO HANNAH'S FERVENT PRAYER: (1 Samuel 1:19,20; Genesis 30:22,23; Judges 13:3; 2 Kings 4:17; 2 Chronicles 20:12-25; 32:20-23; Psalm 5:3; 34:6- 10,15-19; Luke 1:24,25; 1 John 5:14,15)

Hannah was barren for long after marriage. Perhaps, it was this challenge that constrained her loving husband to take another wife. Besides, Peninnah, her rival, constituted herself into a needless antagonist, thus making life more miserable for her. However, the Lord remembered Hannah. Following her intense supplication, she became pregnant and the Lord miraculously gave her a male child (verses 11,19). Thus, her barrenness turned to blessedness, and sorrow to joy. Hannah's story serves as a beacon of hope for contemporary believers.

Question 1: What can today's Christians learn from Hannah's story?

Though unpleasant experiences are common, and godly people including patriarchs, matriarchs, apostles and distinguished believers down the ages have been caught in various webs of affliction, trials, deprivations and sorrows, the good Lord had always shown interest in alleviating the condition of His people. Turnaround experiences of individuals and nations attest to His faithfulness in this regard. So, contemporary believers who are smarting from physical, emotional or spiritual trauma should rest in the consolation that God is always on hand to attend to their needs (Job 5:6-9; Psalm 118:6-17; Isaiah 41:14; Romans 8:31,32; 1 John 4:4).

God hears as well as acts according to the demands of His righteous people. **"The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles"** (Psalm 34:15,17). The Lord greatly delights in responding to the distress cry of His saints, regardless of gender,

social status or disposition. The Scripture affirms that “...**the LORD remembered her**” (1 Samuel 1:19).

Question 2: How can believers receive answers to their prayers?

Divine response is normally swift if the request is made aright and according to God’s will (Exodus 23:25,26; Deuteronomy 7:13-15; Joshua 10:12,13; Psalm 46:1,5; Isaiah 65:24; Acts 13:11). However, prayers underpinned by covetous tendencies are amiss and do not receive answers. People who reject the call of God to repent or His counsel, doubters and evildoers will not receive answers to their prayers (Job 35:12; Proverbs 1:23-31; Isaiah 1:15,16; 16:12; Jeremiah 11:10,11; Zechariah 7:9-13; James 1:6-8; 4:1-3). Believers should make their petitions with faith based on the promise of God and things that will glorify Him. Recourse to God should not be merely for the gift or benefit we desire, but primarily as proof of our association with and attachment to Him.

If the answer to prayer of the righteous seems long in coming or the Lord seems silent or withdrawn, then the seeker should patiently wait. **“I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD”** (Psalm 27:13,14). God’s unfailing promises, ability, authority and sovereignty should inspire confidence in Christians that He will definitely intervene in any situation for their good at the right time (Psalm 62:5-8; Habakkuk 2:3; Romans 8:25; Hebrews 10:35,36; James 1:3,4). With God, delay is not denial. **“Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD”** (1 Samuel 1:20).

According to a Christian writer, the name “Samuel” perpetuated the memory of mercy. One could not call the boy without recalling the circumstances under which he came to be. Besides, it was to put the child in constant remembrance of his lifelong dedicated

obligation to the Lord. It was not only a grateful remembrance of God's faithfulness and goodness in the past, but also an incentive to faith and service in the future. How parents need to inculcate in their children the kind of God-consciousness the way Hannah did!

DEFERRED RETURN OF HANNAH TO SHILOH
(1 Samuel 1:21-28; Deuteronomy 16:16; 31:10-13; Numbers 30:3-16; Psalm 66:13-20; Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:24,25)

Following the birth of Samuel, Hannah determined to defer her attendance at Shiloh retreat for a period of time. **"But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide forever"** (1 Samuel 1:22).

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| <p>Question 3: Comment on Hannah's decision in respect of the Shiloh feasts and the child.</p> |
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Like many others, Elkannah normally went to Shiloh with his entire family. But, except for the once in seven years solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, attendance at Shiloh was not as compulsory for women as it was for men. So, Hannah's decision did not violate any commandment. She meant that as soon as the child was strong enough, she would not only lead him to Shiloh, but leave him there to grow in the courts of the Lord that he was to serve for the rest of his life. However, her action is not a license for parents to dodge holy convocations at will.

The consent of her husband to her decision is quite commendable, especially because he could have invalidated it (Numbers 30:10-12). He ratified it with a prayer for the accomplishment of God's purpose in granting them the child. **"And Elkannah her husband said unto her, do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the LORD establishes his word. So, the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned**

him” (1 Samuel 1:23). This kind of support is worthy of emulation. It also attracts special attention, privileges and favors (Genesis 18:1-10; 1 Samuel 2:21; 2 Kings 4:8-17; Acts 18:24-28; Hebrews 10:24).

The period of deferral finally ended as soon as the child was weaned. **“And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young”** (1 Samuel 1:24).

Question 4: Explain the change in Hannah’s disposition at her return to Shiloh.

There are lessons for believers here. Hannah made no allusion to Eli’s initial mistaken perception of her in verse 14, but only referred to her supplication, his ratification and God’s favorable response to it. Christians should always be careful to share their testimonies only to praise the Lord and not to demean other people.

The trip to Shiloh, her outlook and presentation there teach believers to be joyful when presenting our valuable gifts to God. Like Hannah, we should perform our vows against all odds. **“Therefore, also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there”** (1 Samuel 1:28).

The words **“give”** (verse 11) and **“lent”** (verse 28) were used to express her unconditional release of the child for divine use. Having accepted her gift, **“the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD”**. A Christian’s commitment and consecration to the Lord will always attract great divine blessings (1 Samuel 2:21; Matthew 19:29).

DEDICATION OF SAMUEL TO GOD (1 Samuel 1:24,28; 2:11; Proverbs 22:6; Ecclesiastes 12:1; Isaiah 28:9,10; Luke 18:15-17; 2 Timothy 3:15)

The story of Hannah challenges New Testament believers on child training. As she brought Samuel to

Eli as soon as she had weaned him (verse 24), so must Christians bring their children and wards to know the Lord early in life.

Question 5: Outline any two reasons to support early encounter of a child with the Lord.

One reason is that depravity begins to manifest very early in life (Proverbs 22:15). Two, the early years set the tone for lifelong values. Habits are formed early in life and children can be very susceptible to demonic, human or Christian influences depending on who makes the most impact on them. Three, the Lord Jesus places a high premium on them. Christ used their innocence and sincerity to teach godly virtues (Matthew 18:3). Four, their natural strength can be channeled to best purposes if they know the Lord early in life. Therefore, parents, children workers and all stakeholders in the household of God must intensify efforts at leading the young ones to an acknowledgment of their sinfulness, God’s graciousness and Christ’s sacrificial love for their salvation with the aim of leading them to repentance and personal faith in the Lord. We must be earnest at this task in gratitude to the Lord for giving them to us, in hope of potential exploits they will be able to do for Him, and in fear of the eternal consequences if we fail.

DAILY BIBLE READING

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

693 Lesson

HANNAH'S SONG OF PRAISE

MEMORYVERSE: "And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation" (1 Samuel 2:1).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 2:1-11

After many years of barrenness and the attendant taunting from her adversary, Hannah was handsomely rewarded with a bouncing baby boy. It was a battle she fought with the weapons of prayer, patience and perseverance. She equally vowed to honor the Lord with the fruit of her womb if her prayer was answered. First, she redeemed her vow by presenting young Samuel to Eli as a gift to the Lord. Thereafter, she composed the song in the text under consideration.

The song was a spontaneous and unrehearsed prayer of thanksgiving, praise and honor to the Almighty God for His goodness and mercy. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Hannah extolled the omnipotence and omniscience of God, His sovereignty over the universe, and His unparalleled holiness. She paid glowing tributes to the One who possesses all power, strengthens the humble and weak, and undermines the proud and the powerful; He feeds the humble poor but impoverishes the proud rich. God has power to destroy His enemies but can equally sustain His children. He can do and undo. Therefore, His children should take solace in these facts and keep their faith and trust in Him even in the face of seeming discouraging situations. Hannah also ministered in the office of a poet and prophetess through her song.

Question 1: What can we learn from Hannah's song of praise?

When God answers our prayer, and gives us victory and success, we must pay our vow unto Him and

offer thanksgiving and praise. In fact, we must praise Him at all times (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

GOD’S ATTRIBUTES EXTOLLED (1 Samuel 2:1-3; John 4:23,24; Psalms 139:7-9; 147:5; 99:4; Daniel 4:35; Deuteronomy 3:24)

“And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation” (1 Samuel 2:1). It is worthy of note that Hannah did not attribute her praise to the earnestness of her prayer; neither did she worship and praise Eli who pronounced the final blessing on her before she got Samuel. She ascribed all glory and praise to God alone. This is contrary to what we see in some Christian circles today where people who have received blessings from the Lord tend to worship and praise the minister or attribute such miracles to the volume of their prayers instead of giving glory to God who **“doeth great things and unsearchable; marvelous things without number”** (Job 5:9).

Some of the divine attributes Hannah extolled in her song include: God’s holiness. **“There is none holy as the LORD...”** Holiness is one attribute of God that stands out from other attributes. He is the thrice-holy One. The Scripture harps on this unparalleled feature of God as an essential reason He ought to be the object of our worship. When Isaiah had a vision of heaven, he heard an angel crying, **“unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory”** (Isaiah 6:3). The fact that God is holy should greatly influence our approach to the subject of holiness. He commanded the children of Israel several times to be holy because He is holy (Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7,26; Ezekiel 39:7; 1 Peter 1:16). This underscores the place of holiness, **“without which no man shall see the Lord”** (Hebrews 12:14). God has given us His only begotten Son to die on the Cross so that we can be holy (Hebrews 13:12).

Hannah also talked about God as **“the God of knowledge”** who is omniscient – all-knowing. He has perfect knowledge of all that transpires in human

existence. He knows all that has taken place, what is taking place and what will take place in future. There is no problem He cannot solve. It is precious to know that He who can see the end from the beginning knows what is best for us in choice of career, marriage, business etc., and He has promised to guide us. “... **By him actions are weighed**”. God sees beyond the actions of men; He x-rays the motive behind every action – whether secular or spiritual. He weighs everything in the balances of His word. This calls for sober reflection on all we do so that we would not be found wanting on the last day.

**Question 2: Why is holiness an essential Christian experience?
How can a Christian be made holy?**

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY EXHIBITED (1 Samuel 2:4-8; Daniel 4:34,35; Genesis 28:15; Psalm 139:7-10; Luke 1:46-55)

God’s sovereignty is one of the deepest truths in the universe. In her song, Hannah compares His sovereignty to do and undo. What a comfort to know that happenings in the world are not left to chance, but that there is a God in charge of the affairs of men and are closely following His program and decree. The Lord holds a position of absolute authority and exercises His sovereignty in perfect keeping with His nature. In His sovereignty, He gives strength to those who are weak and humble, but frustrates those who think they are strong and do not need Him. He provides food for the poor and hungry that put their trust in Him, but impoverishes the proud rich. God opens the womb of the barren to conceive children, but the proud who disregards His word He reduces to nothing. He is able to elevate the poor from the dust and the beggar from the dunghill to the highest position in society. Little wonder, proud Nebuchadnezzar was reduced to a beast and made to eat grass in the forest. At the end of his humiliation, he exclaimed: **“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his**

hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Daniel 4:35).

God detests pride in all its shades and forms. He condemns it as seen in the Scripture. **"These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look..."** (Proverbs 6:16,17). It is amazing what makes some people proud. Some people are proud because of their tribe and background, their personality, riches and wealth; others because of their position in the society, social status, or educational background. All those who are proud will be humiliated by God here and in eternity if they fail to repent and humble themselves before Him.

However, notice must be taken that the sovereignty of God does not cancel man's free moral nature to decide for or against Him. Despite being in control of the affairs of men and the universe, God still allows men to choose to either live for Him or for self, to do His will or theirs. The Scripture echoes: **"See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil"** (Deuteronomy 30:15). Man's choice determines his destiny and where he will spend eternity. Those who hope to enjoy divine favor here and be with God through eternity are commanded to repent and make their ways right before Him. To do otherwise is to court divine displeasure (Isaiah 1:19). Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 10:13).

Question 3: How does the teaching on the sovereignty of God relate to man's destiny?

GOD'S ABILITY PREDICTED (1 Samuel 2:9-11; Jude 20-24; Revelation 20:1-15)

The closing portion of Hannah's song is prophetic in nature. **"He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail"** (1 Samuel 2:9). This assures the saints of God's keeping power and grace. When they lean on Him, they are confident that the enemy cannot snatch them from His hand, storms

cannot take them away and sin will not overcome them. However, the overconfident ones are warned that by strength, human effort, intelligence, prowess and ability shall no man prevail. Those who make themselves enemies of God and of His people are also warned of impending judgment if they continue to toe the line of rebellion. **“The adversary of the LORD shall be broken into pieces.”** In New Testament language, they shall be grinded to powder if they do not repent (Luke 20:18).

“The LORD shall judge the ends of the earth.” Judgment awaits all who refuse to repent but continue in their sins till they leave this world. They will certainly face God at the Great White Throne Judgment where they will be rewarded according to their works.

“He shall give strength unto his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.” These are messianic prophecies concerning Christ’s millennial reign when He shall rule and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. It is wonderful that Hannah is among the saints like Moses and Mary (Exodus 15:1-27; Luke 1:46-55) who sang in spontaneous response to God’s intervention and deliverance and their songs inspired many generations. This is a challenge to contemporary Christian songwriters and singers to submit themselves to God for songs that will inspire and minister to the people. Besides, believers must be guided in the choice of the music they listen to. Our priority must be to exalt God and extol His virtues, power and providence. Gospel hymns or songs or music should edify believers, call them to sober reflection and remind them of heaven. Anything less than this is unacceptable.

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| <p>Question 4: What lessons do we learn from the songs we study in the Scriptures?</p> |
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“And Elkannah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest” (1 Samuel 2:11). It is worthy of note that Samuel’s parents spent time to prepare him spiritually. Likewise, all parents should take heed to

the spiritual well-being of their children, teach and bring them up in the way of the Lord before sending them out. Neglect of this responsibility is the cause of common waywardness among children and youths in our society.

Besides, Samuel was sent to the house of the Lord to minister under the leadership of Eli, the high priest. Many believers do not take heed to where they send their children, and who mentors them. We must not allow our children’s future to be molded by unbelieving relations, idol worshipers and people of strange religions, where the seed of unrighteousness would be sown in them.

Because of his childhood exposure to the truth, Samuel grew up to become a prophet and a mighty instrument in God’s hand to proclaim His word and establish righteousness. Hannah’s joy would have known no bounds by this outcome and her song of praise would be everlasting. Let those who hope to praise God all their lives dedicate themselves and their families to the service of God.

DAILY BIBLE READING

| MORNING | | | EVENING | |
|----------------|------|-------|----------------|-------|
| MON | Mark | 9 | Genesis | 25-26 |
| TUE | “ | 10 | “ | 27 |
| WED | “ | 11-12 | “ | 28-29 |
| THUR | “ | 13-14 | “ | 30 |
| FRI | “ | 15-16 | “ | 31 |
| SAT | Luke | 1 | “ | 32-33 |
| SUN | “ | 2 | “ | 34-35 |

694 LESSON

THE SINS OF ELI'S SONS

MEMORY VERSE: "Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD" (1 Samuel 2:17).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 2:12-26

In contrast to the good report of Samuel who was brought up by godly parents in the preceding verses, the sons of Eli, the high priest, were described in the text as sons of Belial. This is an indictment on Eli and all present-day leaders who have children that are sinful. Position of leadership should not blind us to this key responsibility of raising godly children who will be beacons of light in their own generation.

Eli was a high priest and judge in Israel for a space of forty years. A descendant of Ithamar, Aaron's youngest son, his ministry signaled the beginning of a new type of leadership in God's chosen nation (1 Samuel 4:18). As a priest, Eli pleased God. He was responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of God's people and the daily administration of worship. The very first mention of Eli was in his encounter with Hannah, and was perceived as a hasty and no-nonsense leader. Unfortunately, he did not rule his children by the same measure; he was rather indulgent and halfhearted in his reproof of sin.

The Scripture demands that a bishop must be "**One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house how shall he take care of the church of God?)**" (1 Timothy 3:4,5). Eli did not live up to his duty and responsibility. His children, in contrast to Samuel, were described "**as sons of Belial**" who "**knew not the LORD**" (1 Samuel 2:12).

Question 1: In what areas did Eli fail in his responsibility?

INEXCUSABLE SINS OF ELI'S SONS (1 Samuel 2:12-17,22; Romans 2:1-3; 1 John 3:6-10; Titus 1:16)

Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas who were also priests – supposed ministers of God. But the Scripture says, **“the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD”** (1 Samuel 2:12). Belial is used in a moral sense in Scripture to mean worthlessness, recklessness, lawlessness and wickedness, and personifies foolishness, evil and Satan (Deuteronomy 13:13; Judges 19:22; 1 Samuel 2:12; 10:27; 25:17,25; 1 Kings 21:10,13; 2 Corinthians 6:15). It is thought-provoking to have sons of Belial officiating as priests in the house of a holy God.

Though they claimed to serve God, **“they knew not the LORD”**. They had awareness and knowledge that God exists but they did not know Him experientially. The Scripture clearly identifies people who know God and those who do not know Him. **“Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him... He that committeth sin is of the devil... Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin... he cannot sin, because he is born of God... whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God...”** (1 John 3:6-10).

These priests **“profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate”** (Titus 1:16). There are many people who claim to be ministers of God today but their conduct in and outside their places of worship show they are sons of Belial. It is by their fruits we shall know them. Believers must be vigilant lest such people infiltrate a holy church and spread their corruption.

Eli's children were described as sons of Belial because of their evil deeds. As priests, they used their position to mislead the people into corruption by engaging in brazen acts of sexual immorality with the women who came to worship God. Sexual immorality is a despicable sin in the sight of God. When such sin is

found among the leadership (the custodians of God's word and standard), it becomes a leading sin that will destroy the entire congregation.

Besides, Hophni and Phinehas exhibited greed by forcefully extorting meat offering brought by the people. The rightful due of the priest was the right shoulder and the breast. The entire offering would be consecrated to the Lord by the burning of the fats upon the altar; thereafter, the priest took his portion (Leviticus 3:5; 7:31,34). But Eli's children held back what belonged to God for their personal use and took away what belonged to the people as their share in the offering. This amounted to robbery.

The growing evil and wicked conduct of these priests had great implication on the spiritual lives of the people. They made men to **"abhor the offering of the LORD"** (1 Samuel 2:17). The consequence of this wicked act was that the people despised the house of God and shunned His worship; even those who came were hindered from fulfilling their religious obligations. Theirs was an infectious sin; for they were not only candidates of hell but made others twice children of hell and made the Lord's people to transgress. They reduced the worship of God to heathen worship by bringing gross sensuality of idol feasts to the tabernacle of the Lord. In them, righteousness, self-control, purity and the fear of God were thrown overboard.

Worse of all, they were recalcitrant when their father queried their corrupt lifestyles. If their evil tendencies were nipped in the bud, it would have been well with them, their father and the entire nation. But it grew to an uncontrollable proportion and became difficult to stop.

Question 2: What sins did Hophni and Phinehas commit?

EXEMPLARY DEVOTION OF ELKANAH'S FAMILY

(1 Samuel 2:18-21,26; Romans 11:35,36; Psalm 92:12,13,15; Luke 2:52)

The piety of Samuel, a child lent to the Lord contrast sharply with the godless practices of Hophni and Phinehas. They all had the privilege of good and godly parentage but lived different lifestyles. The story of Samuel interweaves or punctuates the account of the evil deeds of Eli's sons to impress on believers that lilies can still grow out of the mud. In spite of the filthy lives of the sons of belial, **“Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod”**. The power of God's grace can preserve a child from copying bad examples of siblings in the same family or friends in the same school, community and church. Though he was not a Levite but consecrated or lent to the Lord, he lived up to his calling as a child. Following Elkannah and Hannah's example, Christian parents should bring up their children to fear and serve God.

Question 3: What qualities differentiate Elkanah's family from that of Eli?

To encourage Samuel to abide in his calling and service to God, his parents provided and met his needs. It was not just that they provided to meet his needs for many years, their continual attendance to the things of God also served as good example to Samuel. Elkannah and Hannah his wife made it a habit to bring their offerings to worship God at Shiloh every year. They offered Samuel to the Lord; but they continued to offer yearly sacrifice required by the Lord. They were devoted and encouraged their child, Samuel, to remain devoted to God. This is what the Lord wants from all believers today.

God always blesses those who trust in His goodness and mercy. No one can offer his only child to the Lord like Elkannah and Hannah without faith in the faithfulness and power of God. It was by faith that Abraham also offered his only son, Isaac, to God. And such acts of absolute faith in God attract divine blessings. **“And Eli blessed Elkannah and his wife, and said, The LORD gives thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home. And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three**

sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD” (1 Samuel 2:20,21).

Hannah who was barren later had five other children beside Samuel. The barren believer should understand that God is faithful; that He answers prayer and blesses His children who are patient, abiding and devoted to Him. Like Hannah, give of your best to the Master; throw your fresh glowing ardor into the battle for truth. Soon, He will visit you too. Note that God blesses those who give their best to Him.

With godly example, encouragement and provision, Samuel continued to grow before the Lord. The growth of Samuel was mentioned twice in the text in verses 21 and 26: **“And the child Samuel grew before the LORD... And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with the LORD, and with men”**. His growth was healthy: his spiritual life was balanced with his physical and social life. Our Lord also had a balanced growth experience. **“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man”** (Luke 2:52). The sons of Eli, though born into the priesthood, had defects in their growth especially as regards their spiritual and moral character.

INEFFECTIVE REPROOF OF ELI (1 Samuel 2:22-25; Proverbs 19:13,18,23; 22:6; 2 Timothy 3:15)

“And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings and this people. Nay, my sons; for it is not good report that I hear: ye make the LORD’s people to transgress” (1 Samuel 2:23,24). The sin of Hophni and Phinehas had become common knowledge in Israel and it was so openly discussed or reported that Eli heard about it. Aged Eli called the attention of his children to the report and pointed out the danger they were exposed to at the hand of the invisible Judge. **“If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD, would slay them”** (verse 25). At last, Eli tried to do a father’s duty – remonstrate his children. It was however too

little, too late. It was time for God Himself to exact unsparring discipline in line with the standard of His word (Leviticus 18:6,20,29; 20:10; 21:6,7,17,23). The glory and worship of God had been tampered with. God’s people had been led into lewdness and turned away from true worship. As a judge and high priest, Eli had both civil and spiritual power to redress the situation by stopping them from continuing in their evil deed but he did not. God therefore moved to set things in order in His house. When ministers keep their sinful or backslidden blood relatives in the ministry or rob God and men through the privileges they have in the church, they court His displeasure. God is holy and just; He hates and punishes sin wherever it is found, whether among the priesthood or the people.

Question 4: Why was Eli’s reproof ineffective?

The displeasure of God with Eli’s sons and his entire family reveals His unchanging disposition to all indulgent parents and pastors who keep their children or favorites in the Lord’s service despite receiving reports of their sins and wickedness. God calls everyone in this kind of situation to repentance, restitution and righteous living. Leaders must be courageous to discipline erring and wayward people and uphold holiness in the house and service of God to escape His judgment.

| DAILY BIBLE READING | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|-----|----------------|-------|
| | MORNING | | EVENING | |
| MON | Luke | 3-4 | Genesis | 36-37 |
| TUE | “ | 5 | “ | 38 |
| WED | “ | 6 | “ | 39 |
| THUR | “ | 7 | “ | 40-41 |
| FRI | “ | 8 | “ | 42 |
| SAT | “ | 9 | “ | 43-44 |
| SUN | “ | 10 | “ | 45-46 |

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

695 Lesson

PAUL REHEARSES HIS CALLING

MEMORY VERSE: “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11,12).

TEXT: Galatians 1:11-24

Paul’s epistle to the Galatian churches was aimed at arresting their general slide from the true gospel into a false system. He had been used of God to establish the churches but soon after he left, some Jewish believers in Christ had come from Jerusalem and invaded the church with their doctrine of salvation by observance of the Mosaic Law. Pressure and influence of these false preachers made some of the Galatian believers to slip into this error and many were in danger of being lost altogether.

Question 1: What should be the gospel minister’s response when saving truth is trampled upon?

When eternal truths are being corrupted, a true minister of Christ would hasten to set facts straight. If the Judaizers’ attack was allowed to stand, the pure gospel which Paul preached would have suffered irreparable damage. As such, Paul commenced a passionate defense of his apostolic calling and credentials from the very first words of the epistle. The Judaizers had been touting their claims of superior authority supposedly derived from the ministry of the apostles in Jerusalem. They maintained that Paul was a lesser minister, having never been to the headquarters in Jerusalem. This claim was vehemently refuted by Paul throughout the epistle even as he outlined the essentials of a true gospel ministry. His defense teaches us that we can only validate a gospel ministry after utilizing the

measure of Christ to check out its source, confirm its content and screen its steward.

Question 2: What are the basic yardsticks we should apply in confirming the genuineness or otherwise of a gospel ministry?

THE SOURCE OF AN AUTHORITATIVE MESSAGE:
(Galatians 1:11,12; 1Corinthians 1:1; 11:23; 15:3; Ephesians 3:3-8; 1John 1:1-3; Luke 1:1,2)

An authentic message from heaven, a corresponding anointing, and a true gospel ministry are very often the product of a minister's waiting before the Lord in prayer, obedience and consecration. That was the case with Moses, Joshua, Elijah and all the prophets, Peter and all the apostles. It was certainly the case with Paul. Rather than wait on the Lord to receive the badge of divine approval, some preachers employ the carnal strategy of depreciating other ministers in order to boost their own worth. Gaining cheap popularity by trampling upon another people's reputation is despicable. That was the method of Absalom (2 Samuel 15:2-6). The same dark motivation was behind the Pharisees' perpetual antagonism and hatred for Christ (John 11:45-48).

Like Absalom did to David, the Judaizers of Galatia sought to cast a cloud upon the ministry of Paul in the minds of the Christians. Their goal was to substitute his true gospel message with their false doctrine of salvation by works (Acts 15:1). The church must be careful not to commit anything to the hands of false ministers who through subtle means seek to pervert the gospel and overthrow the faith of many. Doing otherwise will amount to a waste of time, money or resources committed to such ministry.

As he was earlier compelled to do with the Corinthian church, Apostle Paul reiterates his calling and the authority behind his commission to the Galatian church. **"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."** God's transforming truth is not generated from the

mind of a minister; neither does it originate from a mentor or moneybag. Saving grace is not a product of human ideology or mental exertion; it originates from God. Unfortunately, today, some preachers are not convinced of the message they preach as they merely parrot popular preachers to please their financiers. They give time and attention to the highest bidder. It is therefore, no wonder that such mercenary preachers cry up one 'truth' today, and another conflicting 'truth' tomorrow. There is no life in their message, no burning passion in their declarations. Conviction does not ring from the pulpit because the preacher himself has not imbibed the truth. No life is transformed, no persuasion formed and no lasting impact is secured under such a ministry. The calling or commission, the message, and even the ministry will eventually fizzle out. The damage such 'ministers-for-hire' do to the spiritual life of young believers are great.

Question 3: Mention the essential features of a true gospel message.

Christ alone must be the source, theme, and end of a gospel declaration. He is the only Sacrifice, Substitute, and Savior. No minister can justly demand the ear of the church if his message and commission do not bear the stamp of authority from Christ, the Head of the Church. A true gospel message is sound, pure, authoritative, convicting and converting. It is saving truth because it comes from the Savior; redeeming truth because it points the sinner to the Redeemer; sanctifying truth because it proclaims the Sanctifier; anointed truth because it flows from the anointed One; and, it is eternal because it originates from the eternal Christ. Only such a message is worth preaching, worth living and dying for.

THE WONDER OF REDEEMING GRACE (Galatians 1:13-15; 1 Timothy 1:12-15; 1 Corinthians 15:9,10; Titus 3:3-7)

While narrating the divine source of his calling, Paul naturally drifted into one of the sublime doctrines

of the Scripture. Repeatedly in his epistles, the Apostle extolled the wonder of redeeming grace. **“For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it... But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace”** (Galatians 1:13,15). It is impossible to read Paul’s descriptions of the workings of grace in his life and not see his utter humility, deep gratitude, and his corresponding consecration to God.

Therefore, Christian disciples and workers who are quick to boast of their worth, privileges, goodness, talents and usefulness in God’s kingdom have probably not tasted the marvelous grace of Jesus. Some Christians act towards God as if He owes them something. But the opposite is the truth. If anyone of us **“were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God”** (Romans 4:2). We must not forget that we were **“children of wrath, even as others.”** Grace therefore, makes us humble. It makes us look at our sordid past with gratitude, at our present transformation with humble submission to God and at our glorious future with adoration. Whenever a believer is tempted to indulge in pride or foolish vainglory, let him remember his sinful past and meditate on the grace of God.

Question 4: What lessons do we learn on grace from the life and writings of Paul the apostle?

Paul’s life traces the path into an authentic ministry. Before he became a worthy ambassador for Christ, he was converted from being a persecutor of the church to a saint. A sinner cannot simply will himself into a God-approved ministry. To offer acceptable sacrifice unto God, the sinner must be saved and cleansed from outward and inward sins. To be effective and fruitful in the ministry which the Lord has entrusted in our care, we must constantly renew our commitment and consecration to Him. Besides, the need for the Spirit’s infilling and power cannot be overstated.

Question 5: Using Paul as an example, explain how a sinner translates from an enemy to an emissary of God?

THE SUBMISSION OF AN APPROVED MINISTER:
(Galatians 1:18-24; 2:1,2; 2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 8:14,15; 15:1,2; 1 Corinthians 14:32,33)

To qualify as an apostle, Paul had to receive a direct commission from Christ Himself. Apostles are direct emissaries of Jesus. So, he went ahead to fulfill the heavenly vision he received without prior consultation with Peter or any other apostle. He however, practiced what he preached. He sought fellowship with senior apostles to, so to say, cross-check notes with them.

Pride and an independent spirit disqualify anyone from the ministry of Christ. Great gifts or talents notwithstanding, every servant of Christ still needs to set up an accountability system in his life. Absolute independence has ruined many promising ministers. If Samson had been accountable to someone, for example, he might have been pulled back from the precipice before his irreversible ruin. Make yourself accountable to a faithful spouse, a worthy mentor, a Spirit-controlled friend, or anyone empowered to ask you questions. It is a safeguard from earthly and eternal ruin.

DAILY BIBLE READING

| | MORNING | | EVENING | |
|------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|
| MON | Luke | 11 | Genesis | 47 |
| TUE | " | 12 | " | 48-49 |
| WED | " | 13-14 | " | 50 |
| THUR | " | 15-16 | Exodus | 1-2 |
| FRI | " | 17-18 | " | 3 |
| SAT | " | 19-20 | " | 4 |
| SUN | " | 21 | " | 5 |

696 Lesson

THE UNIVERSAL GOSPEL

MEMORYVERSE: “And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain” (Galatians 2:2).

TEXT: Galatians 2:1-10

This chapter showcases Paul the apostle as a faithful minister of the gospel. Like a true stalwart of the faith, he stood firmly against those who were bent on imposing the demands of their corrupted gospel on the believers in Galatia. His was a passionate defender of Christ’s gospel. Though quietness, gentleness and meekness are essential virtues of the Christian life, no true believer remains comfortable and quiet in the face of corruption of the pure gospel. Doing this amounts to unfaithfulness and cowardice.

When “**Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because... he had married an Ethiopian woman**” (Numbers 12:1-3), Moses was meek and quiet. But when Korah and his company revolted against the divine order, he rose to the occasion. Also, Samuel might have claimed “meekness” when Saul spared Agag, the king of Amalek but that would have been terribly unacceptable to God (1 Samuel 15:32,33). Christian workers should therefore beware of misplaced meekness that amounts to sinful compromise.

DETAILS OF THE UNIVERSAL GOSPEL (Galatians 2:1,2; 1Corinthians 15:1-4; Acts 13:32,33,38,39; Romans 10:15)

Paul’s major concern was that the gospel should remain pure and simple, full and free. The gospel of Christ is universal enough in appeal; it is complete, needing neither adornment nor improvement. Though

simple in its content, the gospel is powerful enough to save any sinner that believes, irrespective of his crime or crime (Romans 1:16).

Question 1: Mention some unnecessary additions people have made to the gospel today.

The Judaizers of Galatia had been running down the ministry of Apostle Paul. Their antagonism portended a grave danger to the church because he preached the pure gospel – Jesus alone crucified, risen and coming again. Paul’s truth contrasted and refuted their error. While he preached Jesus as the only Sacrifice, Substitute, Savior and Lord, they exalted Moses and the Law. Paul emphasized salvation by grace through faith, but they preached salvation through observance of laws and ordinances.

Like the Judaizers, modern corrupters of the gospel now preach Jesus plus other means of salvation such as observance of religious ordinances, holy pilgrimages, deeds of charity, observance of dress codes, infant baptism, tithes and offerings and even strict abstinence and extreme vows. None of these is necessary for salvation. When added to the gospel message, they are superfluous and corrupting. Just as a corrupted medicine offers no cure, a corrupted gospel cannot offer anyone genuine salvation.

Question 2: Explain the gospel in your own words.

The gospel is good news; it is “**glad tidings of good things!**” (Romans 10:15). The gospel teaches that although “**all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God**” (Romans 3:23) and “**the wages of sin is death**”, yet the gift of God in Christ is eternal life to all who believe (Romans 6:23). The gospel reveals to us that “**Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures**” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). The question is, of what relevance is Christ’s death and resurrection to a sinner? The vilest sinner who believes this truth and repents of his sins is “**justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses**”

(Acts 13:39).

Question 3: What means of salvation are prescribed in the gospel?

OLD TESTAMENT PICTURES OF THE GOSPEL:
(Genesis 22:9-13; Numbers 21:5-9; Joshua 2:8-21)

The simplicity and universality of the gospel is aptly illustrated and foreshadowed in some Old Testament narratives. It is seen in the events of Abraham's sacrifice, Moses' brazen serpent and Rahab's scarlet line. First, Isaac was just about to die when God stopped Abraham and provided a substitute, "**a ram caught in a thicket by his horns**". The ram pointed to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God – our Sacrifice and Substitute. Secondly, in Numbers 21:5-9, sin brought punishment, but grace brought the remedy. The dying sinner needed to look at the brazen serpent to live. Nothing more was needed; only a look of faith cancelled the poison of sin and brought life. This is the gospel. Although a very simple prescription, all who refused to look at the uplifted serpent of brass perished in their self-will.

Thirdly, Rahab was one of the most repulsive characters in her city. Yet, her simple act of faith in the prescribed remedy saved her and her household from Jericho's destruction. She professed faith in the living God (Joshua 2:11) and then followed her profession with a corresponding action of simple obedience. Mere profession of faith cannot save any sinner if not backed up by obedience.

Question 4: Explain how some Old Testament events foreshadowed the gospel.

DEFENCE OF THE UNIVERSAL GOSPEL (Galatians 2:3-6; Acts 15:1,2,24; Jude 3)

It took the courage and conviction of Paul to reveal the truth about the Judaizers. Although they had hinged their authenticity and relevance in the Galatian churches on the backing and approval of the apostles at Jerusalem, their claims were false. Thus, the apostles wrote to the gentile churches saying, "...

we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment” (Acts 15:24). Members of the body of Christ must not lend attention or support to self-appointed preachers whose aim is to impose themselves on the saints.

There is another key lesson from the stand of Paul here. The decisions of gospel ministers should be ruled by the word and Spirit of God and not the pressures of men. Paul took Titus to the Jerusalem church and refused to circumcise him because that would have amounted to caving in under the pressure of the marauding Judaizers. Instructively, the same Paul took and circumcised Timothy, when the demands of missionary activity kicked in, so he could reach the unsaved Jews of Lystra and beyond (Acts 16:1,3). To be successful in ministry, gospel ministers need courage fed by sound scriptural convictions, tact, wisdom and godly flexibility.

In the course of preaching the gospel, we shall have to confront various shades and characters of falsehood such as: (i) false prophets (Matthew 7:15,16), (ii) false witnesses (Acts 6:13), (iii) false Christ's (Mark 13:22), (iv) false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13), (v) false brethren (Galatians 2:4), (vi) false accusers (Titus 2:3), and, (vii) false teachers (2 Peter 2:1). We must not yield an inch of ground lest they and many others be lost forever. Paul said, **“To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.”**

SPREADING THE UNIVERSAL GOSPEL (Galatians 2:7-10; Philipians 1:27; 1 Corinthians 12:14-22)

A delightful harmony was produced between Paul and the apostles at Jerusalem. Paul had sought an opportunity of a full statement of his views to them in private (Galatians 2:2) and they had been entirely satisfied that God had called him and Barnabas to the work of making known the gospel among the Gentiles. Instead of being jealous at their success, the Jerusalem leadership had rejoiced in it; and instead

of throwing any obstacle in their way, they cordially gave them the right hand of fellowship. Giving the right hand of fellowship to another was the mark of confidence, friendship, and fellowship. It was proof that the church leadership at Jerusalem accepted Paul as an associate in the task of world evangelization. Therefore, there were no harsh contentions, strife or jealousy.

However, the apostles' statement "**that we should remember the poor**" reveals the need for believers to care for the needy. As we preach the gospel and win souls for the Lord, we should also be interested in their spiritual and physical wellbeing.

The conduct of those pillars of the church confirmed the divine answer to the prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17:21, "**That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe...**" Sanctified and made holy in heart and mind, the ministers had no ulterior motive in preaching the gospel; they retained their sanctification experience while laboring for Christ; they possessed the mind of Christ, free from carnal competition or comparisons (Philippians 2:3-5); they harbored no vested interest, vaulting ambition or territorial pursuits in serving the Lord; they retained a servant attitude before the Lord and before one another; they all labored with an eye on the glory of God; and, they remained submissive to the dispensation of the Holy Spirit as to how the task of world evangelization should be accomplished. What a great lesson for contemporary believers!

Question 5: How does the sanctification experience aid the spread of the gospel?

This singular cooperation between these ministers resulted in a rapid and even distribution of the gospel among the Jews and Gentiles. It underscores the value of cooperation and the virtue of humility and mutual submission. It also highlights the vanity of an independent spirit and insubordinate attitude in a minister.

DAILY BIBLE READING

| | MORNING | | EVENING | |
|------|----------------|-----|----------------|-------|
| MON | Luke | 22 | Exodus | 6 |
| TUE | " | 23 | " | 7-8 |
| WED | " | 24 | " | 9 |
| THUR | John | 1 | " | 10 |
| FRI | " | 2-3 | " | 11-12 |
| SAT | " | 4-5 | " | 13-14 |
| SUN | " | 6 | " | 15 |

697 Lesson

JUSTIFICATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH

MEMORY VERSE: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16).

TEXT: Galatians 2:11-21

The clash between religious traditions and saving truth is legendary. Among believers in Galatia, it assumed the dimension of ceremonial law versus grace and justification/righteousness by the works of the law versus righteousness by faith as seen in previous lessons in this book. And the fact that this age-long conflict can infiltrate the laity and leadership of a true church, hinder and destroy the work of God make this lesson all-time relevant.

Adherents of religious tradition among the Jews were strong and violent. They were as valiant for error like their counterpart present-day peddlers of false doctrine. They would not mind crushing anyone who crosses their path. The apostles of Christ knew that the Jews were religious bigots who were ready to defend their positions by whatever means possible. From our text, Peter, a respected apostle and pillar in the early Church felt intimidated by these adherents who uphold circumcision and other ceremonial rites as evidence of salvation in Christ. He then succumbed to the fear of man and became hypocritical in relating with the Gentile Christians.

Paul, who watched the whole scenario that unfolded, did not hesitate to reprove him. The battle for truth in these last days demands no less conviction, courage, zeal, forthrightness and an eye for the glory of God. If instant reproof was meted to an apostle who slipped in an unguarded moment, how much more should

believers resist propagators of false doctrines who pervert the gospel of Christ with barefaced boldness.

Love for God and His truth should transcend any other love in the believer's heart. Defending the glory of God should weigh more than filial, friendly, or even marital considerations in the heart of a true servant of Christ. It is all right to **“honor all men. Love the brotherhood... Honor the king”** (1 Peter 2:17) but not at the expense of more important injunction to **“fear God”**.

Question 1: What is the right way to resolve the conflict that often arises between human tradition and the truth in the Scripture?

CONVENTION VERSUS CONVICTION (Galatians 2:11,12; Jude 3; 1 Kings 22:13,14; John 9:17,24-33)

“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.” There is an age-long clash of truth with tradition. Scriptural revelation is often at variance with societal expectations. The Christian certainly must demonstrate where his true loyalty lies when biblical convictions are at loggerheads with established convention. Consequent upon his encounter with the Lord in the matter of Cornelius (Acts 10:9-48), it was impossible to question Peter's conviction that Gentiles should be partakers of the benefits of the gospel. He knew that Christ had broken down the middle of partition between the Jews and Gentiles. Armed with this truth, he freely mixed with the Gentile brethren in the church at Antioch. Yet, when occasion arose for Peter to stand by his conviction, he allowed convention to supplant conviction because of the fear of disapproval or confrontation from fellow Jews.

Tradition hardly dies; nothing short of the grace of God can withstand its onslaught even in the most spiritual of men. Paul was vehement against the traditionalists at the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15.

Much later in Acts 21:17-26, the same Paul permitted the traditional leaders in Jerusalem to cajole him into proving that he “**walkest orderly, and keepest the law**” by submitting himself to the rites of the Mosaic law that specified “**an offering should be offered for every one of them**”. Were he not momentarily caught in the web of tradition, the quintessential Paul would have protested any attempt to add another offering to “**the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**” (Hebrews 10:1-11,14,18; Acts 13:39; Galatians 2:16,21). It is possible for the Church that once held on to Bible truths to succumb to the pressure of traditionalists and the corrupting influence of age-long conventions.

Question 2: Explain how traditions and societal expectations can supplant biblical truth.

THE POWER OF INFLUENCE (Galatians 2:13; Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; Matthew 5:13-16)

Simon Peter had a strong influence in the early Church but he seemed oblivious of it on this occasion. His sudden withdrawal from the Gentile brethren amounted to hypocrisy, an act which quickly spread to the younger Jewish brethren around. Spiritual leadership is a great responsibility not to be toyed with. Apostle Paul expressed the same concern to the Corinthians, “**For if any man sees thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ**”. Each of us is answerable to God for what we do with people within our circle of influence. We must beware.

The record we have here of Peter’s action validates the divine origin of the Scriptures. Were the Bible of human origin, painstaking effort would have been made to gloss over or even altogether hide Peter’s

fault. The faithfulness with which faults of frontline saints are recorded in the Scriptures attests to its divine origin.

Question 3: What lessons do we learn from the encounter between Peter and Paul in Antioch?

CORRECTION WITHOUT CONTENTION (Galatians 2:14-21; 6:1; Leviticus 19:17; Psalm 141:5; Proverbs 15:10; 25:12; 2 Peter 3:15,16)

We are now introduced to resounding proofs of the early believers' deep spirituality and experience of grace. Simon Peter, though a most respected apostle, had erred in doctrine. Promptly and without delay, Paul pointed out the error in the presence of all who had been affected by it. Giving and receiving correction is an essential feature of the church family. The Spirit's guidance is however required in order to avoid matching the correction with the error. As a rule, a public error must be corrected publicly while private correction is administered where other people are not involved. Church correction or discipline can take the form of verbal rebuke, withdrawal of ministry opportunity or in severe cases, excommunication. The severity of correction or discipline as well as the duration depends on a host of other factors but the goal is always the restoration and recovery of the erring believer.

There was no consideration for Peter's person when Bible truth needed to be upheld. The early believers upheld the glory of God and His truth above ego trips and personality cults. Financial considerations, family ties, friendship tenderness, fear of man, fame-seeking, flattery, and fleshly lusts are the reasons for the prevailing compromise and unfaithfulness in upholding scriptural standards common among contemporary gospel workers and ministers. Paul was as courageous for Christ as Peter was crucified with Christ. Although Paul's verbal rebuke was unsparing, sharp, direct and public, there was no trace of an angry retort or carnal resentment from Peter.

We learn deep spiritual truths about Peter's character

here. One, he was crucified, not carnal. Two, he was committed to gospel truth, not contentious. Even if tempted to veer off for a little while, he yielded to correction. Three, he was a consistent character. What he preached, he practiced. He writes, **“For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?”** (1 Peter 2:20) and now he practiced it. Although Paul was a younger minister, Peter accepted the deserved rebuke with grace and Christ-like humility. That stands in stark contrast to the display of a wounded ego or injured pride often seen in the unsanctified.

Years later, Peter wrote about **“our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.”** These are very instructive words indeed. Peter employed the most affectionate Christian expressions in referring to Paul, their earlier encounter notwithstanding. He obviously harbored nothing of ill-will or jealousy towards a more gifted brother in the Lord. He maintained that Paul’s epistles were sacred Scriptures and should be treated so. He acknowledged that the depth of divine wisdom in Paul sometimes went beyond ordinary understanding. What humility! He announced divine judgment on people who deliberately twisted the writings of Paul to their own carnal advantage.

Question 4: From our passage today, explain the issues you understand on church correction or rebuke.

REAFFIRMATION OF ESSENTIAL TRUTH
(Galatians 2:16; Acts 13:38,39; Romans 3:23-28; Galatians 3:8,11,24; Romans 5:1,2,9; Titus 3:3-7)

Paul’s words of rebuke are a reaffirmation of the gospel truth. God always has a witness. While one minister demurred on the truth of justification of Jews and Gentiles by faith alone, God raised another

to defend it. Nothing is more central to the atonement of Christ at Calvary than the fact that it is the only hope of redemption for lost humanity. There is no other means to securing salvation than the sacrifice of Christ for sin once for all. No works of righteousness, no act of human benevolence or self-mortification can open the gates of heaven to a sinner. It is only Jesus and His sacrificial death that can satisfy the demands of God's righteous judgment. While those who believe this truth will be saved, those who reject it will be lost eternally. By Jesus, **"all that believe are justified from all things"**. Justification is the wonder of God's grace that grants pardon to the guilty sinner when he repents and believes in Jesus. It is an act of God's grace that wipes out the old record of sin such that the forgiven sinner stands before God as though he had never sinned.

Scripture revelation does not place justification in a vacuum. Rather, we are presented with an inseparable connection between justification and faith (Romans 3:23- 28; 4:3-5), justification and forgiveness (Acts 13:38,39), justification and fellowship (Romans 5:1,2), justification and our freedom (Romans 8:1,2), justification and our faithfulness (James 2:21-26) and, justification and our future hope (Titus 3:7). The effect of justification in all who truly believe is a new life and walk in God's righteousness.

RESULT OF EXTRAORDINARY TRANSFORMATION:
(Galatians 2:17-21; James 2:21-26; Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 6:1-22; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

Grace is not idle: it produces the effect of righteousness in all who believe. This truth is succinctly captured in Galatians chapter 2 verse 17: **"But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid"**. How very important it is for every justified soul to realize that God's free grace results in the experience of righteousness. There is a transformation of life in all who repent of sin and believe in Christ. True, we are not saved by good works or our own righteousness, but by grace alone. **"It is the gift of God; not of works, lest any**

man should boast". Christ's imparted righteousness becoming ours by faith. Moreover, we are saved unto good works. **"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works... that we should walk in them"**.

Justified by faith, the believer is dead to the demands of the ceremonial law but alive unto righteousness of God in Christ; there is no intermediate state. Christ died once for sin, and the Christian is dead to sin. Death has no more dominion over Christ, and sin has no more dominion over the saint. As Christ rose from the dead by the glory of the Father, so the believer is risen from spiritual death into newness of life.

Question 5: In your own words, explain the case for and the effect of justification by faith.

DAILY BIBLE READING

| MORNING | | | EVENING | |
|----------------|------|-------|----------------|-------|
| MON | John | 7 | Exodus | 16 |
| TUE | " | 8 | " | 17-18 |
| WED | " | 9 | " | 19 |
| THUR | " | 10 | " | 20 |
| FRI | " | 11 | " | 21 |
| SAT | " | 12-13 | " | 23-23 |
| SUN | " | 14 | " | 24 |

698 Lesson

REBUKE FOR REVERTING TO LEGALISM

MEMORY VERSE: "Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3)

TEXT: Galatians 3:1-29

Paul's epistle to the Galatians was premised on defending the truth and especially the doctrine of justification by faith. Having labored in Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23), and laying a groundwork for the true gospel to thrive among the converts, the Apostle came hard on some unscrupulous elements who had insinuated that people could not be saved except they observed the law of Moses (Acts 15:1). He was particularly disappointed that some Galatian Christians were already carried away by this error. Therefore, he spared no effort in condemning the perpetrators and collaborators with hard words for demeaning the sufficiency of Christ's work at Calvary.

In the chapter under consideration, the Apostle also scolded believers who allowed themselves to be carried away with strange doctrines contrary to the revelation of the New Testament. He frowned at their lack of requisite spiritual backbone to contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints. Moreover, he reaffirmed the truth of justification by faith and juxtaposed it with the faith of father Abraham. To leave no one in doubt, he reminded believers that the law was only given to show us the need to embrace Christ's work of atonement and salvation.

Question 1: Why was Apostle Paul disappointed in the Galatian Christians?

REPROOF FOR REVERTING TO LEGALISM:
(Galatians 3:1-5; Acts 15:5-11,19,20; 16:1-3; 21:20-26; Galatians 1:14; 4:9,10; Luke 24:25; Mark 2:24)

It was obvious that the disciples in Galatia were having recourse to the former sacrifices and purifications

which some false apostles had told them were necessary for 'full' salvation. It was incomprehensible to Paul the Apostle that the people he so labored to establish in the gospel could be so easily swayed by some deceivers and fair-speech preachers. So, he screamed: **"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?"** (Galatians 3:1).

The Apostle could not hold his disgust at this sudden backsliding of the Galatians. With a six-fold query, he exposed their folly and demanded to know what befell them to have regressed and descended to the point of going back to some Old Testament rites that had been abolished on the Cross. He said, **"who hath bewitched you...?"** They had been enchanted to the extent that they lost their understanding of the demands of the New Testament and began to build again the things they once destroyed (Galatians 2:18). Second, he asked: **"receive ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"** The Spirit's power, gifts and graces which they received and manifested were not by the operations of the law but through faith in Christ. They had shifted their focus from the operations of the Spirit to the works of the law and had forgotten so quickly that everything was by the Spirit of grace.

Third, he said, **"Are ye so foolish?"** He wanted to know if they lacked basic understanding to be able to discern between the spiritual and the carnal. Fourth, he asked: **"having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"** That is, it does not make sense to start the Christian race in the Spirit and try to end in the flesh. His fifth poser to them was, **"Have ye suffered so many things in vain?"** He felt that if they had faced grave persecutions because of their stand for the truth, could they not endure to the end to receive their full reward? Finally, he queried, **"He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"** (Galatians 3:5). Truly, it is unwise to turn away from the truth that

transformed our lives, the truth that sanctified and blessed our souls, brought peace into our families, changed the lives of our wayward children, healed our sick bodies, and given us hope of eternal life. It is illogical to forsake the assembly where the Lord had taught us what it means to be born again, how to know the will of God in marriage, how to pray and receive answers, and how to overcome the enemy of our souls. It is unwise to abandon the truth that has set us free from bondage simply because a new wind of doctrine is sweeping across Christendom. Believers should demonstrate enough spiritual stamina and be diligent to search the Scriptures and **“hold fast that which is good”** (1 Thessalonians 5:21). This is the only way they can escape falsehood and its perpetrators. But the Galatian Christians failed this crucial test.

Employing the word ‘foolish’ to rebuke the Galatians sounded uncouth, but this only showed the gravity and imprudence of backsliding. The word describes someone who lacks understanding and stability of character and inability to stand for what is right. Galatian Christians fell so sheepishly for error. Likewise, believers are not expected to lack understanding of the truth that sets free but be so grounded in it so that they would not be **“tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive”** (Ephesians 4:14). Christ Himself used the same word to rebuke his disciples for their failure to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:25).

There had always been the tendency among men to revert to legalism – righteousness through observances without the grace of God. The Galatian believers were sliding into a very dangerous realm of trying to justify their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ through physical observances. Our call in the Lord is a call of faith, and it will be futile and dangerous to lean on our works for justification. All believers must prayerfully avoid this pitfall of unconsciously deviating from the path of faith. The scriptures states expressly that: **“The just shall live by faith”** (Galatians 3:11).

Apostle Paul was not a stranger to controversies concerning the gospel. Earlier, he had been confronted by **“certain men which came down from Judaea [who] taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved”** (Acts 15:1). He contended with them earnestly and took the matter to the council at Jerusalem for final resolution. In like manner, believers and Christian ministers should not give in to false teaching in any form no matter who is involved.

Question 2: Mention some forms of legalism that are prevalent today.

Acts that tend towards legalism are still found in various denominations all over the world. They seem to portray piety, zeal for righteous living, and commitment to the course of God, but are actual manifestations of will worship. **“But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years”** (Galatians 4:9,10). Some of these are: Period of Lent during which fasting is observed for 40 days and some foods are not eaten to identify with the sufferings of Christ. Worse still, several unsaved souls get entrenched in this ritual, thinking they are righteous. During such prolonged fasts, their focus is not on Christ as their merit; rather, it is on the ability of the flesh to endure prolonged abstinence to please the Lord. Two, Ash Wednesday. This is usually the first day to herald the period of Lent. On this day, the observers abstain from eating meat. According to them, this abstinence is to help them not to eat the body of the Lord Jesus Christ which was crucified for mankind. The observers also smear ashes on their foreheads as a mark of their mourning for the death of the Lord. Three, some Christian assemblies prohibit climbing unto the altar with any form of footwear. They have forgotten the word of God which says, **“rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God...”** (Joel 2:13). Four, it is a taboo in some churches for males and females to sit on the

same pew for worship. They have forgotten that the pew does not transmit immoral waves; it is the human heart that brews pollution (Matthew 15:19,20).

As New Testament believers, we are expected to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. External observances and rules – touch not, eat not, etc. are no longer acceptable in worship. We are to walk before the Lord in the attitude of the liberty which His Holy Spirit gives to us. Those who revert to the Old Testament ceremonial laws bring upon themselves swift condemnation because **“as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”** (Galatians 3:10).

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| <p>Question 3: What should be the attitude of true Christians to these ordinances?</p> |
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PROMISE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (Galatians 3:6-18; Genesis 15:6; Acts 13:39; Romans 3:28; 5:1; 1Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 3:24)

The emphasis of the New Testament is that salvation comes by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Believing in His finished work at Calvary is accounted to us for the righteousness that is acceptable to God. **“Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness”** (Galatians 3:6). We come to God through faith in Christ and our continuity in Him must be by faith. Our righteousness should not be based on human acts of piety – trying to be righteous through observance of set human rules. The Apostle points all men to Christ as our Merit and worthy Redeemer.

It is pertinent to note that the Lord Jesus came into the realm of mankind that through Him we may attain unto the righteous standard of God. Through mere adherence to the law, no man could fully satisfy the righteous demand of God. **“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed**

in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16). What differentiates a New Testament saint from a diehard legalist and adherent of other religions is our faith in Christ which enables us to be justified through His sacrifice. Whereas others struggle to attain so-called salvation, believers in Christ are given **"power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name"** (John 1:12). Works of men are often devoid of the grace of God. Yet, salvation is by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8,9). It is not by works so that the element of boasting can be eliminated. The glad tidings to all who believe in Jesus and have been made free from sin by Him is that we are no longer under the law. The burden of righteousness through the works of the law is done away with in Christ. As we walk daily with Him, we constantly enjoy the liberty which comes through His redemptive power. In our walk with the Lord, there is no place for boasting, the flesh is not to be given a place of exaltation.

Question 4: What should be our emphasis in our walk with the Lord?

The believer is called into the family of God by faith and he is expected to live out his new life in Christ by faith. There must be strong emphasis and dependence on faith for a successful walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are made holy and have put on the robe of righteousness, yet if we neglect to hold on the shield of faith, we would soon fall under the barrage of Satan's fiery darts. When we possess the faith of Abraham, we are made partakers of the inheritance of saints in Christ. As Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness, so also are we. Besides, the blessings of Abraham abound to children of God who believe according to the faith of Abraham. **"So, then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham"** (Galatians 3:9).

Question 5: What is the attitude that the Lord demands from those that worship Him?

The New Testament explains that old covenant practices have been jettisoned to pave way for the new (2 Corinthians 3:14). To what purpose then was the law given? It was to prepare the way for the manifestation of Christ.

PURPOSE OF THE LAW EXPLAINED (Galatians 3:19-29; Romans 3:20; 5:20; 1 Timothy 1:9)

As the Apostle strived to establish the promise and blessedness of justification through faith in Christ, he also revealed reasons why the law was given. This is to balance his argument in support of the dispensation of faith *vis-à-vis* the position of the law. **“Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator”** (Galatians 3:19). Lest readers of that epistle or any other should think that the advent of grace and justification have cancelled out the law and rendered its promise ineffective, he was quick to outline its purpose. One, the law was given to *create* the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20). Men would have been guiltless without heaven’s charter which properly condemns their evil deeds. Therefore, the law was given **“that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful”** (Romans 7:13). **“...Except the law had said, thou shalt not covet”** (Romans 7:7), humans would have been free to do whatever they liked without an inkling of guilt. Two, it was given to *convince* us of the need for a Savior. The law persuades men of the need for someone to save them. Three, it was given to *convict* the world of sin. The law brings the weight of sin to bear on the conscience of the sinner. Four, it was given to *check* and *curtail* the excesses of the human nature. Finally, it was to serve as a *compass* to lead and direct men to the way of salvation. The law therefore, became a school master to whip us into line pending the manifestation of the true Savior.

However, we need to understand that only the ceremonial aspects of the law – sacrifices, purifications, incensing, rites – were abolished. The moral laws of righteousness, holiness, love, gentleness, meekness,

etc. – remain the cardinal teachings which must be obeyed to see God on the last day. “...**Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God**” (1 Corinthians 6:9,10).

Question 6: What are some reasons why we should walk by faith?

When we walk by faith, we place our focus solely on the Lord who saved us. Faith walk keeps the believer from all unnecessary spiritual distractions; we are not given to sudden fears and doubts which assail the souls of mortal man. Walking by faith excludes all forms of boasting. Walking by faith makes us to avoid all forms of legalism, and to purely lean on the grace of God. The Apostle Paul was a man brought up and tutored in legalism, but when he found Christ, he began to walk by faith. His refrain was, “**I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me**” (Galatians 2:20). This can also be our experience as we surrender and consecrate our lives to Christ.

DAILY BIBLE READING

| | MORNING | | EVENING | |
|------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|
| MON | John | 15-16 | Exodus | 25 |
| TUE | “ | 17-18 | “ | 26-27 |
| WED | “ | 19 | “ | 28 |
| THUR | “ | 20-21 | “ | 29 |
| FRI | Acts | 1-2 | “ | 30 |
| SAT | “ | 3-4 | “ | 31-32 |
| SUN | “ | 5 | “ | 33 |

699 Lesson

ADOPTION AND SONSHIP THROUGH CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6).

TEXT: Galatians 4:1-11

Paul concluded the previous chapter by proving that Christians, Jews and Gentiles, are heirs of the Abrahamic covenant by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:26,29).

In this lesson, he continued his discourse on the superiority of the gospel of grace to the perverted gospel of works. He affirmed that those under the law were still babes or servants with limited freedom and privileges; that the power of God’s grace brings us into maturity in Christ and places us in our true position as adopted sons of God with full benefits of the gospel.

EXPLANATION OF THE CONCEPT OF SCRIPTURAL ADOPTION (Galatians 4:1-5; Romans 8:15-23; 9:4; Ephesians 1:4,5)

Having established the fact that believers are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, Paul the apostle went on to deal with the various stages of sonship in the context of the cultural setting of his primary audience. He also touched on the principle of adoption of sons which is quite different from civil adoption of orphans by benevolent people or childless couples, as it is being practiced in many societies today.

Question 1: How is adoption in the physical different from the spiritual?

The scriptural adoption is the Father’s act of giving full rights and privileges to His redeemed children, conferring on them the power of attorney to carry out

responsibilities on behalf of the family. Believers have been adopted by God as His children with the aforementioned status conferred on them by God, the Father. The adoption of believers has reference to the native custom of people in Bible days. It is applied to denote a son who has come to maturity and ready to assume his true position of full responsibilities and privileges as an adult.

Adoption ushers him into the full liberty of sons, whereas he had been under 'bondage' before. Although he has been a son to his father since he was born, he was not allowed to exercise the full rights of sonship until after his adoption. This is the point the Apostle emphasized in our text. As long as the heir is a child, he is not different from a servant (in terms of privileges enjoyed), though he owns his father's entire estate. Being in a state of immaturity would not allow an heir apparent to enjoy the full rights of his inheritance (because he is still a minor).

Question 2: Explain the uniqueness of spiritual adoption of New Testament believers.

There is another truth that makes spiritual adoption unique. In civil adoption, the adopted child has the rights and privileges of a biological son, but he does not have the nature of the father who adopted him. Usually, the reason for this kind of adoption is the need for comfort either for the child or the adopting parent or both. In the spiritual, God adopts those who have already become His sons through faith in Christ and they have His nature imparted to them by regeneration through the Holy Spirit. And the reason for adoption is the eternal purpose of God who seeks to save the lost and preserve them unto His Heavenly Kingdom. As a requirement for this lifelong relationship, those who are redeemed must maintain a filial relationship with God, the Father. So, it is not because the children are fatherless or the Father adopting them is childless.

Question 3: What are the benefits of spiritual adoption of believers in Christ?

There are great benefits attached to the adoption of believers. First, it confers on them the power of attorney, legal authority, to act as sons of God. They can transact Kingdom business on behalf of the Father. Also, it frees them from bondage to “**tutors and governors**” of the old covenant. They can enjoy the privileges of the new covenant. Adoption empowers a true believer to enter his inheritance. It ushers him into a new realm of intimacy with the triune God and allows him to take his rightful place in the family. That intimacy is expressed in the affectionate and filial expression, “**Abba**”. That means, Father or more literally, ‘Daddy’. In practical terms, the adopted son can fully appreciate and enjoy the benefits that are linked with his Father’s name. Such benefits include power, love, supply, attention, protection, care and favor. Moreover, the Father can now share with him some deep family secrets and count on him to act responsibly on behalf of the entire household. What a great privilege to be adopted into God’s family!

THE SONSHIP OF BELIEVERS THROUGH CHRIST:
(Galatians 4:6,7; 3:26; John 1:12; Romans 8:14; 2Corinthians 6:17,18; 2 Peter 1:3,4; 1 John 3:1)

Paul the apostle earlier affirmed that Jesus Christ is the true Seed that God promised Abraham (Galatians 3:16). Through Him, He promised to bless all inhabitants of the earth. This blessing primarily concerns salvation and its accompanying benefits. When Christ eventually came, He died for the sins of humanity and rose again for our justification.

Question 4: How can sinners receive adoption into God’s family and become sons?

Paul had already proved that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:9,23). Through the fall of Adam, all men became sinners in nature and by practice. All sinners are children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2; 5:6; Colossians 3:6); children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3; 5:6); children of transgression and iniquity (Isaiah 57:4; Hosea 10:9); and children of Satan, the wicked one (Matthew 13:38, John 8:44; 1 John 3:10). But conversion to Christ

gives the erstwhile sinner a new nature, the very nature of God. He thus becomes a child of God. It is only through the new birth that a sinner can become a son or daughter of God. **“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name”** (John 1:12).

The sonship of believers is more than legal adoption of children. In human practice, adopted children do not have the same genetic composition as the family members of their benefactor. But in the case of believers, not only are they adopted into the family of God, they receive the Father’s nature so they can bear the image of the only begotten Son (Romans 8:28,29).

Question 5: In what significant way is sonship in Christ superior to that of Old Testament saints?

Besides, the Israelites were also described as sons of God in the Old Testament (Exodus 4:22,23; Deuteronomy 14:1; Jeremiah 31:9; Hosea 11:1). The position of sonship of believers in the New Testament is higher than theirs. It was customary for a father in those times to place his immature son under tutors and governors (caretakers or child-minders) until he grows to maturity and would be able to assume his privileged position in the family. Apostle Paul describes this condition of being under caretakers as being under ‘bondage’ (not satanic bondage), a condition where liberty is curtailed and necessary restrictions are placed. This presents a clear description of sonship under the Old Testament dispensation. They were placed under legal restrictions of many ceremonial laws which were, so to say, the tutors and governors, to lead them to Jesus Christ, in whom they would enter their proper place as mature sons.

So, the Israelites were sons but they **“differed nothing from a servant”**. The full consciousness of their sonship and its implications could only be imparted when they received **“the Spirit of his Son”** in their hearts. This is the point where sonship in the New Testament sense supersedes the Old Testament

condition. Believers in Christ, right from the moment of their salvation are adopted sons. They are considered fully grown, in terms of privileges, and do not need tutors and governors of legalism. Though, new believers in Christ, being inexperienced, need to be taught and mature in faith, they are far ahead of Old Testament saints by their adoption. Jesus said he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist (Luke 7:28), the last of the Old Testament ministers.

Paul asserted that sliding back into legalism would bring forfeiture of this privilege and benefits of sonship of God. In fact, legalism would rubbish all gospel efforts that had been expended on such turncoats. This was the great evil that some Galatian believers were ignorantly committing by their relapse to legalism.

APPEAL AGAINST RELAPSING INTO LEGALISM:
(Galatians 4:8-11; 3:3; Romans 8:3; Colossians 2:20-23; Hebrews 7:18; 10:38,39)

Having pointed out the true relationship and position of believers in Christ, Paul appealed to the Galatians neither to relinquish their position of adoption nor forfeit their relationship of sonship by relapsing to legalism. Relapsing to legalism would be tantamount to outright backsliding.

Question 6: On what basis did Paul appeal to the Galatians not to backslide?

Paul based his appeal on their former state of ignorance when they did not know God. Before conversion, they worshipped idols which were not really gods and they were held in bondage. Why would they want to relapse into another form of bondage? Two, the awareness of their new relationship and position in Christ demands that they detest the former days of bondage. Following their conversion, they knew God. How would they exchange this for something less? Three, it would amount to inconsistency to get entangled to “**weak and beggarly elements**”. Paul used the expression to denote the rituals or legal rites of the Old Testament dispensation.

Though they were instituted by God, they had become obsolete, having fulfilled their purpose. They were weak because they could not save the soul; and they were beggarly because they could not impart the unsearchable riches of Christ. So, a relapse to observance of days, months, times, and years was an evidence of going back into legalism which would rubbish all the labors bestowed in bringing up a believer. So, present-day believers should avoid being lured and led into a legalistic gospel.

In many cases, there is a thin line between legalism and a sheer determination to adhere to strict scriptural practices. But in such cases, the Holy Spirit clarifies all doubts and questions. **“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”** (Romans 8:14). Paul used this powerful illustration about the dependence of children compared to the freedom of adult sons in showing the contrast between being under the law and under grace. Children, though they are heirs of their parents, are not given full access to the inheritance while they are still subordinate minors. Rather, they are given limited freedom and placed under guardians. This position of being in “bondage” would be maintained until such a child matures into adulthood. Example was Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahaziah, though of royal birth, was under tutorship until he was crowned king.

In our culture, what obtains in the school environment may be used to illustrate the need for transition from legalism to the liberty of the sons of God. Those who are under the law are typified as underage children who are yet under the schoolmaster that was appointed to teach and prepare them for their proper place in adulthood. Just as no one wants to remain and live in school for ever, it was not God’s design to keep people perpetually under the Old Testament dispensation which was only designed as a temporary means of bringing the people to Christ. The main thrust of Paul’s argument here is that: being under a schoolmaster is an acknowledgment that one is not ready for the proper position prepared by the Father. The Old Testament ceremonies and legal

system, though put in place by God, were established to teach the alphabets of the redemptive plan. And that arrangement was to remain until “**the fullness of time**” (time appointed by the Father).

Now, the fullness of time has come. God has sent His Son, Jesus to redeemed us so we can be adopted into His family by faith. Those who repent of their sin, forsake religious rituals, exercise faith in Christ will be saved and adopted into the family of God as His sons and daughters.

DAILY BIBLE READING

| MORNING | | EVENING | |
|----------------|------|----------------|---------------|
| MON | Acts | 6-7 | Exodus 34 |
| TUE | “ | 8 | “ 35 |
| WED | “ | 9 | “ 36 |
| THUR | “ | 10-11 | “ 37-38 |
| FRI | “ | 12 | “ 39 |
| SAT | “ | 13 | “ 49 |
| SUN | “ | 14 | Leviticus 1-2 |

END OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF SPECIAL STUDIES

700 Lesson

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

MEMORY VERSE: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).

TEXT: Matthew 1:21; Romans 10:8-13; Ephesians 2:8,9

Salvation is so vital that the whole Bible is full of plain teachings on the subject. Events recorded in the Bible all point to the very fact of salvation through the grace of God. The Jewish history shows God’s plan of salvation. The prophets in the Old Testament had the same truth to emphasize and to remind the children of Israel. Jesus Christ, the Son of God during His ministry, explained and taught, both in plain language and in parables, salvation through grace. The epistles are taken up with the same theme. If salvation is so important that it occupies almost every page of the sacred writings, it becomes necessary to study the subject in-depth to know what to do to have the plan of God fulfilled in our lives.

Question 1: Why is salvation such an all-important subject?

Salvation is so basic and so profound an experience that without it, all religious activities will be eternally worthless. But while some have unshakable assurance of salvation, there are others who are not so sure they are saved from sin. They are troubled with doubts concerning the experience, hence the need to look at the scriptural basis for the assurance of salvation. It is important to study the Scripture with the help of the Spirit of God so that we can settle it beyond any shadow of doubt that we have real conviction concerning our salvation.

The scripture is so clear about the meaning, significance and assurance of salvation that no

one needs remain in darkness or confusion. False assurance is deceptive and will eventually damn the soul whereas true witness of the Spirit of God and of the scripture will produce an abiding assurance in the soul. How can one know whether he is saved from sin or not? Can we confirm the assurance from the scriptures? If a person doubts whether he is saved or not, how can we help him? How can one overcome the attempt by the devil to confuse him? If, on the other hand, a person has false assurance, how can we help him from the word of God?

THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCES
(1Corinthians 3:11; Psalm 62:7; Acts 4:12; Hebrews 6:1,2; 2 Timothy 2:19)

Salvation is the foundation of all other Christian experiences. It is the first experience one must have to be called a Christian. Whatever we have, whatever we do and whatever we receive from God, if we do not have salvation, we are of all men the most miserable. The churchgoer, religious person must not be satisfied until he understands, appropriates and claims salvation through grace. To be healed and not be saved is to go to hell eventually. To have dreams that are continually being fulfilled, to have special revelations that come to pass without salvation is to live on earth with no tangible purpose. To read the Bible and to memorize its verses without the experience of salvation through grace is to live on earth as if one never really read the Bible.

If God counts salvation so important, then preachers ought to spend more time examining the word of God to be able to preach the message of salvation clearly. The very reason the Lord preserved the events recorded in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is to make us understand that we can only be saved through grace. It is not enough to understand how to cast out devils, deliver the oppressed, heal the sick or bring fire from heaven, if we do not understand salvation. Salvation is the foundation and the pillar of Christian teaching.

Salvation from sin is made possible through the grace

and love of God. We cannot get saved from sin through our works but by exercising faith in what Christ has done to redeem us. The thief on the cross could not do anything except to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Question 2: How is salvation compared to deliverance, divine healing, prosperity, promotion and miracles?

THE MEANING OF SALVATION (Luke 1:71, 77; 19:9; Philippians 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:8,9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15; Romans 1:16; Acts 15:6-11; Matthew 24:12,13; Romans 10:1,9; Matthew 1:21; Titus 2:11-14; Acts 4:12)

Salvation can be defined as forgiveness of sin, deliverance from sin and reconciliation with God which comes because of repentance from sin and faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice on the Cross.

Salvation is different from healing, joining a church, renouncing idol worship or changing name. Salvation from sin is so essential that one must be sure to have it to avoid being disappointed on the last day. We are not saved by feeling but by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Outward moral change alone cannot substitute for salvation. Salvation includes freedom from the guilt of sin, the power of sin and the consequence of sin.

Salvation is aimed not to make us turn a new leaf but to make us live a new life. The grace of God teaches us to deny all ungodly acts or behavior and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2:11). Salvation makes it possible to live a godly life in the face of temptation, corruption and evil.

Some religious people try to preach salvation through human merits like prolonged fasting, animal sacrifices, religious festivities and pilgrimages, alms giving to the less-privileged. They try to work their way through to salvation. But there is no salvation in any other except Christ (Acts 4:12).

Question 3: What is the difference between genuine salvation and other religious experiences?

FAITH'S INDISPENSABILITY TO SALVATION:

(Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 10:13; Revelation 22:17; James 4:6; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Acts 4:33; 1 Peter 4:10; 2Corinthians 4:15; 9:14)

Salvation is not dependent upon regular attendance to church or doing the best we can. **“By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”** (Ephesians 2:8,9).

God’s offer of salvation is by grace. Faith is the spiritual mechanism through which man receives salvation. Through faith, we access the grace of God that brings salvation. Grace means the favor of God which we receive without any merit or work. It is the provision of God for mankind. Someone said, grace is *God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense*. Right attitude to the grace of God makes us receive the salvation He provides. In other words, salvation is the object of grace.

We do not have to feel good or better to receive salvation. No one earns forgiveness and remission of sins by anything he does, any rule he keeps or by belonging to a religious assembly. This is one of the major differences between Christianity and other religions. Salvation is not obtained by keeping the Law of Moses. Someone rightly said, ‘grace is the provision of God for mankind who are so fallen that they cannot help themselves, so corrupt that they cannot change their nature, so averse to God that they cannot turn to Him, so blind that they cannot see Him, so deaf that they cannot hear Him, so dead that He Himself must open their graves and bring them to life.’

There are physical traits we inherited from our parents such as height, facial appearance, complexion, color of the eyes, etc., but salvation does not flow in the blood. We do not become saved because we are the son or daughter of a pastor or because our father is born again or our mother is the leader of the women fellowship in the church. It cannot be passed from husband to wife, from wife to husband, from parents to children or from children to their parents.

To benefit experientially from what Christ has done for us on the cross at Calvary, we need to acknowledge and repent of our sin; two, renounce Satan and all his activities; three, receive Christ as Savior and put our faith in His atoning work, not our good morals or works; four, rely on God to live a victorious life. It is only Christ that can make one a new creature. This brings the inward assurance that a transformation has taken place. Then there is a change of character and conduct.

Question 4: Of what significance is faith in the experience of salvation and how can we benefit from the atoning sacrifice of Christ at Calvary?

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION (John 5:24,39; 3:15-19, 36; 6:47; Acts 10:43; 13:39; Romans 10:9,10; 1 John 1:9; 2:1-5; 3:10,14; 4:15; 5:1,10-13)

Many people unfortunately have not been able to enjoy the Christian life because they lack assurance of salvation. Many struggles with the flesh and sin, rising and falling and are unable to live the victorious life because of their inability to appropriate grace to conquer through faith. **“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith”** (1 John 5:4).

Assurance of salvation basically means a firm and confident understanding that one’s sins are forgiven. It means to be sure that one is born again and is a child of God. Christ came into the world and died to save sinners, but many are not able to have the joy of salvation because they lack the assurance that their sins are forgiven and their names written in the Book of Life. Anyone that lacks this assurance cannot overcome sin, Satan, the world and temptations. Assurance of salvation is like a title deed. A man who does not have a title deed to a property cannot make a sure claim to the property.

The reason many people confess sin every day is because they lack assurance of salvation. Others form the habit of answering the altar call every time

because they are not very sure that their sins have been forgiven. To them, the Christian life becomes difficult and laborious.

The problem with people who lack assurance of salvation is that they place their confidence on feeling rather than on faith. Many think, to be sure, one must have a certain kind of feeling. Others feel they must be happy always. Others believe in working their way to salvation through human self-effort like shedding of tears or a great deal of prayer. While genuine salvation experience could produce some of these experiences, they are only the outcomes, not the basis or condition. Salvation is not by feeling but by faith in the atoning work of Christ. It is based on genuine repentance. John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles and even the Old Testament prophets all preached it. Salvation becomes ours when we repent of our sins and receive pardon, power and grace that Christ gives to those who believe in Him (John 1:12). We must believe that He is the Son of God sent to die for our sins. We must confess with our mouth what we believe in our hearts. If we do, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

It is noteworthy that the Bible does not base that forgiveness and cleansing from unrighteousness on crying, rolling on the ground or feeling happy. There must be express faith in the word of God (John 5:24; Romans 8:1; 1 John 5:11,12). By way of analogy, the evidence of the ownership of a property is not one who feels he is but one that has the title deeds, written and sealed with the seal of authority. So is faith regarding the assurance of salvation. But it is not a dormant, inactive faith but a dynamic faith which produces not only assurance of salvation in our hearts but also fruits of righteousness in our lives.

Question 5: What is assurance of salvation and how can one have it?

FRUITS OF SALVATION (Matthew 3:8; Philippians 1:11; 2 Timothy 2:6; Galatians 5:22,23; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1John 3:9; Ephesians 4:17)

The first fruit expected of a truly born-again Christian is the fruit of repentance. **“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”** We show that we have been saved from sin by dispensing with ungodly habits. The places of sin we used to visit, we do not go there anymore; the dresses that expose our nakedness which we used to wear, we get rid of them; the indecent and obscene words we used to speak no longer come out from our mouth. We begin to bear the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance (self-control) (Galatians 5:22,23). There is also the fruit of righteousness and holiness. A real child of God will not continue to live in sin.

Just as you cannot see the root of a tree because it is buried beneath the surface of the earth, so also your experience may be hidden beneath the soil of time and date. People will eventually come to know it through the fruits of your salvation.

Question 6: How can a believer bear the fruit of righteousness?

THE TRAGEDY OF NEGLECTING SO-GREAT SALVATION (Hebrews 2:2,3; 10:28,29; 1 Corinthians 10:3-12; Jude 5; Hebrews 4:1,11; 1 Timothy 4:14)

There is great danger in sinners neglecting so-great salvation. The believer is, likewise in great danger if he neglects to give diligent heed to make his calling and election sure. Our loss will be incalculable and unbearable if we neglect the message of full salvation preached by Christ and by those who received it directly from Him. One can know all there is to know about Jesus Christ and still go to hell if they do not receive Him as Savior and experience the moral transformation that faith in Him brings.

We should guard against letting God’s word slip from us whether in times of suffering, deprivations, poverty, sickness, oppression and persecution or joy, progress, prosperity and sound health. If we allow our souls to be driven by circumstances, we will not be able to stay on course.

To reject Christ is to reject salvation and, to reject salvation is to reject everlasting fellowship with God in eternity. We need to be careful that we do not allow anything to hinder us from believing the totality of the word of God. To neglect to watch and pray is to stand in danger of losing those things we have got from the Lord. There are some who claim to be saved but who neglect the warnings of the Scripture to watch, pray, resist temptation, and keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Others forsake the **“assembling of ourselves together”** while some neglect God’s provisions for Christian growth and maturity. Through neglect, our souls can be lost and there can be serious cracks in our spiritual walls. We may become weak and even backslide. We need to watch.

Fierce punishment and judgment await the unsaved and backslidden. Sinners and backsliders who die neglecting the blazing light of the gospel will suffer greatly in hell. Hell belongs to those who have rejected the gift of eternal life.

Question 7: State the consequences of neglecting the great salvation of God offered through Christ.

DAILY BIBLE READING

| | MORNING | | EVENING | |
|------|----------------|----|----------------|------|
| MON | Acts | 15 | Leviticus | 3 |
| TUE | “ | 16 | “ | 4 |
| WED | “ | 17 | “ | 5-6 |
| THUR | “ | 18 | “ | 7 |
| FRI | “ | 19 | “ | 8 |
| SAT | “ | 20 | “ | 9-10 |
| SUN | “ | 21 | “ | 11 |

701 Lesson

THE SERVICE OF CONSECRATED SAINTS

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 12:3-8

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

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

This subject of believers’ usefulness is pivotal to the advancement of God’s kingdom. The Lord’s Prayer, **“Thy kingdom come”** would be a mere liturgy to be recited without any practical implication or fulfillment of it if the believer were to remain indolent and idle. But the truth is that every blessing the believer receives from God carries a responsibility with it. In the parable of the talents in particular, the slothful servant who gave excuses for not being profitable was condemned and judged. It is not out of place then for Apostle Paul to harp on the noble responsibility of the believer in advancing the kingdom of God. That service can be profitable and rewarding or unprofitable and unrewarding is revealed in the life and attitude of Christian servants. Apostle Paul here gives practical directions and discourse on how the consecrated believer should use his gifts fruitfully in the church of the living God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The believer must realize that his salvation, gifts or talents are by grace. This knowledge will shut out pride from him. If we must be useful vessels in Christ’s hand, we must be cleansed from pride, vainglory and boasting. Pride makes the believer and all his talents, like those of Lucifer, to be useless and worthless. Those intoxicated with pride are running on a slippery precipice. **“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud”** (Proverbs 16:18, 19). Absalom fell because of his pomposity and haughtiness. Lucifer, having tasted of the glory of heaven where believers are still seeking earnestly to go, was cast out of it because of his thoughts and actions of pride. Incidentally, God has incisive and penetrating eyes that decode this hideous monster. Believers must understand that there is a spiritual gravity that pulls the proud down and lifts the humble up. That is why the apostle himself attributed whatever he was to the grace of God. In exhorting the believer, he did not appeal to his office as an apostle or to the authority he had. On the basis of his humility he exhorts all men to be humble. His exhortation is for everyone.

Note the triple mention of the word, **“think.”** Why was the apostle so much concerned with thought? This is because the thought produces the action. Our action and reactions originate from our thought. When a man takes care of his thought pattern, he will be able to control himself.

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

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

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

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|---|
| <p>Question 4: What is the danger of inferiority complex among believers? And how can we overcome the problem?</p> |
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Every believer in Christ is potentially endowed to serve God according to the proportion of God’s grace in his life. Just as there are no useless members in the body, no believer in Christ is useless except by

choice. Just as God condemns superiority complex among members of the body, He equally does not tolerate inferiority complex in any believer. Inferiority complex – the feeling that one is worthless – is not needed in the service of God. It paralyzes and makes people hide their God-given talents. All the members of the body, seen or hidden, with different but determined places of operation and functions, are mutually dependent in the same body. They fulfill their purpose each by working with other members of the body. **“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith”** (Romans 12:4-6).

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

The body of Christ consists of many members with different ministry gifts. **“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit... For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ”** (1 Corinthians 12:4,12). While believers are members one of another, we are not reduced to a dead level of uniformity. So also are the operation of the gifts of believers in the body of Christ. Leaders and believers should identify their gifts and also encourage others to identify theirs so they (gifts) can be put to profitable use in the house of God. Christian leaders should also give opportunities to other members of the church to minister so the body of Christ can be edified and Christ glorified.

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

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

Fifth, there must be unity in diversity. There is room for diversity in the Church of Christ. In the local church, there is room for varied gifts and activities. But this diversity must lead only to one thing – unity. Without biblical unity there will be division and confusion. And God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). Sixth, disunity delays progress. It defeats purposes, destroys life, decreases usefulness, and deprives us of our rights. We need to know that some members are conspicuous; they are easily seen. Others are less conspicuous, but this does not diminish their importance in the body. That is how the Lord designed the body and expects the church to learn from this super-structure. **“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:30).

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

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that

sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:6-8). Clinched in these verses are certain conditions which must be fulfilled to guarantee our usefulness in the body of Christ.

Question 6: Mention five conditions the believer must fulfil to guarantee his usefulness in the body of Christ.

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

Second, we must wait and develop our ministry. The more our faith grows, the more our proclamation of the gospel. We must develop our faith as we wait on our ministry. A gifted teacher should remain in it. Teaching molds immortal souls and inspires the old and the young.

"He that exhorteth" must wait on exhortation. Believers must not be known to be jack of all trades and master of none. Those with the ministry of giving should do it with cheerfulness; not with complaints and murmuring. Believers whom the Lord has endowed with the ability to rule should be diligent in ruling. We should count our service for the Lord more important than any other thing. Be cheerful as you show mercy.

Third, we should not minister above that which we have received. **"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen"** (1 Peter 4:10,11). The consecrated servant of Christ should minister according to the ability that God has given him. His goal should be to glorify God and not to make

a show of his gifts. This is because he who boasts of a false gift is like cloud without rain. Fourth, there should be the supreme love of God in our hearts. Our service must be wrapped in love. Any service without love will not attract any reward (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

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

That our text deals with ministry gifts should not make believers to excuse themselves from discharging their general responsibilities towards their neighbors. Giving, for instance, to meet others’ needs is the responsibility of all believers. But the point is that some are excellent in these areas. Other areas of Christian service where believers can use their talents or gifts for God include ushering, choir, security, etc. For our service to be fruitful and God-glorifying, it requires entire consecration. Self-abandonment and complete yieldedness to God makes for excellence in Christian service and ministry. If we carefully cultivate the highlighted qualities of Christian character and spice them with service, they will be life-giving, edifying, refreshing and much sought after. Thus, souls will be saved and believers will be edified thereby crediting our accounts of rich rewards and crowns in heaven. Though there are all-encompassing bountiful blessings we enjoy as we serve God on earth, we must grow in consecration and endeavor to get to heaven to be able to receive our rewards.

DAILY BIBLE READING

| | MORNING | | EVENING | |
|------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|
| MON | Acts | 22-23 | Leviticus | 12 |
| TUE | " | 24-25 | " | 13 |
| WED | " | 26 | " | 14 |
| THUR | " | 27 | " | 15 |
| FRI | " | 28 | " | 16 |
| SAT | Romans | 1 | " | 17-18 |
| SUN | " | 2-3 | " | 19 |

702 Lesson

THE RAPTURE

MEMORY VERSE: “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:51-55; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The rapture of the saints which is heralded by Christ’s appearance in the air at the trumpet of God, is the first phase of Christ’s Second coming. Though the rapture is also generally referred to as the Second Coming of Christ, it is actually an initial phase, since He merely appears in the air and raptures the saints who are ready.

The rapture is the greatest event of all ages that the Church is waiting for. It is the catching away of all true believers in Christ to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Christ, at the end of His first advent, was taken up in the air to go and prepare a place for His own. His parting promise to His disciples was that He would return in like manner to receive His ‘Bride’ to be with Him forever (Acts 1:9-11; John 14:1-3).

Question 1: What do you understand by the term ‘rapture’?

At rapture, Christ will appear in the air. He will not be visible to the inhabitants of the earth. His mission then will be to resurrect all dead saints, who, along with the living believers, will put on immortality and shall be caught up to be with the Lord. This event will take place in the twinkling of an ‘eye’ before the great and terrible day of the Lord when the wrath of God will be poured down from His cup of indignation without mixture – an event fitly called the Great Tribulation (1 Corinthians 15:52).

The time of the rapture is unknown, even by the angels (Matthew 24:36; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5). It will be heralded by the voice of the archangel and the blowing of trumpets signaling the end of the Church age (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15).

THE CERTAINTY OF THE RAPTURE (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:10,11; Daniel 7:13,14)

Jesus himself assured His disciples of his coming. He comforted His troubled and sorrowful disciples with the message of His personal return to take them to the Father's abode. **"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"** (John 14:1-3).

God had underlined this great event in two different ways in the Scripture to assure us of its certainty. First, it was illustrated in Enoch and Elijah, the two living saints who did not taste death but were translated in a moment of time and caught up in the air (Genesis 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11,12).

Second, it was illustrated in Christ in the New Testament. He died, was buried and resurrected. While He talked with His disciples on Mount Olive, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight (Acts 1:9-11).

Question 2: Cite scriptural proofs of the certainty of the rapture.

The rapture which was a mystery to the Old Testament prophets marks the end of the Church Age, also referred to as the time of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). This truth was veiled to the saints of old. However, known unto God are all His works from the foundation of the earth. In His mercy, He interrupted His program for Israel with the interpolation of Church Age. Christ the Messiah came for His people but they rejected Him (John 1:11), and God turned to the Gentiles to take a people for Himself. The rapture will mark the

end of this special period of grace. Does this mean that God has forsaken His people Israel forever? Far from it. He will resume His program with Israel immediately after the rapture, thus ushering in the beginning of the Seventieth week in Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27). The rapture is the present expectation of the saints.

It is the next event in the program of God for the Church. Any moment from now, the trumpet shall sound and He that shall come will come and will not tarry. It is very certain that Christ is coming back again. He assured the Church of the certainty of His coming (John 14:1- 3). Angels proclaimed it; apostles and saints throughout the ages preached it. All the signs of His coming are daily being fulfilled.

SIGNS HERALDING THE RAPTURE OF SAINTS:
(Matthew 24:3-14; Luke 21:24-36; 2 Timothy 3:1-5,7)

While we do not know and cannot tell the exact time of the rapture of the saints, we certainly do know the season for the Lord's coming will be heralded with signs. Since Christ knows more about His coming than anyone else, we draw considerable knowledge from His words relating to the signs of His coming in the period that precedes the rapture and the Great Tribulation in what is generally referred to as the last days or latter times. Our Lord did not leave us in the dark concerning His coming. "Long prophetic discourses of Christ are recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke and the new details added by each indicate that the original discourses was longer than any of the accounts we have in the gospel", writes a Christian author.

Christ, answering a pertinent question asked by His disciples on "**...What shall be the sign of thy coming...**"(Matthew 24:3), gave in detail what would be happening on earth shortly before His coming (Matthew 24:5-12,30- 39). He highlighted the following as what to expect: (i) many false Christ's will arise to deceive many unsuspecting believers; (ii) there will be wars and rumors of war; (iii) there will be international wars; (iv) there will be famines (global

economic recession); (v) pestilences; (vi) earthquakes in divers places; (vii) there will be persecution of Christ's followers and some cases of martyrdom; (viii) the emergence of many false prophets; (ix) backsliding from the faith will be on the increase; and (x) more people will be given to pleasure and merrymaking than those seeking the Lord.

Question 3: How do we know the coming of the Lord is at hand?

The Scripture also predicts the conditions, characterized by a system of denials, which will be prevalent within the visible Church, shortly before Christ's return. There will be a denial of God (2 Timothy 3:1-5), a denial of Christ (1 John 2:18; 4:3), a denial of Christ's return (2 Peter 3:3,4), a denial of the faith of Christian living (Jude 18) and a denial of authority. All these signs are being fulfilled before our very eyes.

THE SUDDENNESS OF THE RAPTURE (Matthew 24:27,36; Luke 12:40; 1Corinthians 15:52; 1Thessalonians 5:1-3)

The Spirit's choice of words on the subject of the rapture shows us the uncertainty of the time of His coming. "**For yourselves know perfectly that the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night**", says the Holy Ghost through Paul. His coming is likened to the attack of a thief in the night. Thus, as thieves usually come in the dead of the night when they are least expected, such will be the coming of the Lord.

Question 4: What does the Bible say concerning the time of the Lord's return and what lesson can believers learn from it?

To assure the Church of the imminence, suddenness and unpredictability of the time of the Lord's coming, Paul gives an analogy of a woman in travail. "**For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape**" (1 Thessalonians 5:3). A pregnant woman knows she must travail to give birth but knows not the day or

the hour it will happen; so it is with the time of the coming of the Lord. We know the times and seasons of His coming but the very moment, the day, or the hour is known only to God.

READINESS FOR THE RAPTURE (1 Thessalonians 5:4-8; Matthew 24:44; Mark 13:35; Luke 19:13; 1 John 3:3; 1 Timothy 6:14)

Nothing should be of greater importance to the true believer than the knowledge of the kind of character, life and conduct that will make and keep him ready for the rapture. In almost all the areas in the Bible where the rapture is mentioned, there are accompanying warnings and instructions that border on readiness and necessary preparation. Actually, there is the ever-present need of watchfulness. Failure to be vigilant and consecrated to Christ is dangerous.

Question 5: How are sinners and believers to prepare for the rapture?

Great stress and emphasis has always been laid on watchfulness as part of the 'saints' preparation for the rapture. As saints prepare for the coming of the Lord, they must be sober and watchful. Watchfulness and sobriety are most suitable to Christian character and privilege, as being "**children of the day**" because "**they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night**" (1 Thessalonians 5:5,7).

The apostles repeated the commandment of our Lord on the subject of watchfulness. Peter admonished Christians: "**be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer**" (1 Peter 4:7). John wrote: "**Blessed is he that watcheth**" (Revelation 16:15) and Paul exhorted: "**watch ye, stand fast in the faith, be strong**" (1 Corinthians 16:13). The duty of watching is of paramount obligation; for the night is far spent, the day is at hand. A true believer must not slumber or please himself with the shadowy dreams of earthly glories; for he must keep vigil, watching always. The warning to watch is for all men and for all times: "**What I say unto you I say unto all, watch**" (Mark 13:37).

Toiling or laboring is also part of the saints' preparation for the coming of Christ. His command is: "**Occupy till I come**". Working and watching go together; for we are to comport ourselves like the Jews of Nehemiah's day who built the walls of Jerusalem whilst they were armed and on their guard against the foes. Our Master has left us in the midst of dangers, not to depress our courage but to quicken our vigilance. We must work and watch so that at the Lord's return, He will find us faithful.

We must also be sober. Christian sobriety is neither sadness nor gloom. As believers, we are expected to be serious and happy, sober and cheerful. Peter wrote: "**But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer**" (1 Peter 4:7). The purpose of our preparation is that we will be found fit when He comes for His saints (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17).

There is a lifestyle peculiar to the saints who will be caught up at the coming of Christ. Those who are waiting for Him are the surrendered, serving and sincere saints. The Lord will not catch away fake Christians or loud, halfhearted, cold, filthy and fearful churchgoers. Only true saints will be caught away. Remember that the Lord is coming soon. "**And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure**" (1 John 3:3).

In a nutshell, to qualify to partake in the rapture, one must be born again, live a transparent holy life, walk daily in the light, do service for God, watch daily, pray always with all prayer, and maintain these experiences at the time of the rapture or at the time of death as the case may be (John 3:3; Hebrews 12:14; John 4:35-38; 9:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17).

Backsliders will not be able to go at the rapture, though saved before and baptized in water. Careless and compromising preachers will miss the rapture; it does not matter what Christian work they might have done in the past. All sinners in and outside the church will be left behind to face the Great Tribulation.

Knowing that these things shall be, that the rapture

will occur unannounced, and it is very imminent, what manner of persons ought believers to be? Sinners are to make haste to repent and embrace Christ as their Savior. The saints of God are to watch and pray lest that day come upon them unprepared (Matthew 24:42- 44).

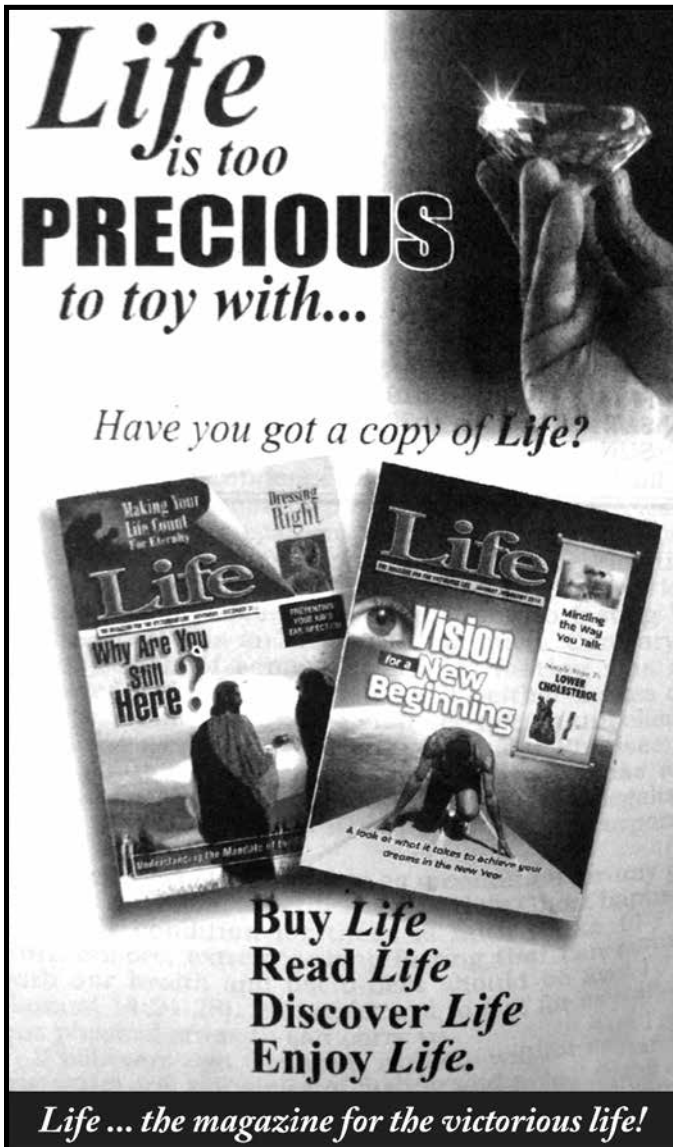
DAILY BIBLE READING

| MORNING | | | EVENING | |
|----------------|--------|-------|----------------|-------|
| MON | Romans | 4-5 | Leviticus | 20-21 |
| TUE | “ | 6-7 | “ | 22-23 |
| WED | “ | 8-9 | “ | 24-25 |
| THUR | “ | 10-11 | “ | 26-27 |
| FRI | “ | 12-13 | Numbers | 1 |
| SAT | “ | 14-15 | “ | 2-3 |
| SUN | “ | 16 | “ | 4 |

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

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| 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 |
|-----------------|---------|

TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY

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

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY

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

| | |
|-----------------|---------|
| Rockland County | 7:00 PM |
|-----------------|---------|

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| | |
|---|---------|
| All the Church Locations except Rockland County | 7:00 PM |
|---|---------|

ALL NIGHT PRAYER VIGILS

| | |
|---|----------|
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| 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 |

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