

WRITINGS OF STEPHEN DAVID

by Stephen David

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Stephen David, compiled for study and devotional reading.

113 Chapters

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01.00. Unholy Matrimony

Unholy matrimony Confronting the Greed for Dowry C. Stephen David Unholy Matrimony:
Confronting the Greed for Dowry Copyright © 2012 by C. Stephen David First English Edition 2012

01.000. Publisher

Published by

TENTS 6-96, Srinivasa Nagar Colony Ramachandrapuram Hyderabad- 502032.

Andhra Pradesh.

India.

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01.01. Unholy Matrimony

Unholy Matrimony

India is a beautiful country with diverse traditions and cultures. In this multicultural nation, marriage is something which is greatly celebrated and honoured, valuing even its permanence and fidelity. Nevertheless, there is a vice which is destroying the beauty and sanctity of marriage. It is the well known custom—dowry.

Many pay lip service to condemn dowry as a contemporary social evil, however, men in our present age seldom get married without seeking for dowry. No wonder this ancient Indian custom continues to destroy numerous families, particularly the significance of womanhood.

Before addressing this issue to the non-Christian world, I believe this must first be addressed to the professed people of God who are called to be the light of the world. Since this custom of dowry is largely followed even by Christian families, it has become necessary to confront this issue.

Let us reason, examine and find out - Is seeking dowry a healthy practice or a perverted custom? Is requiring dowry in marriage unbiblical, or to say further, an anti- biblical practice?

Let me caution at the outset that this message might be offensive and discomfoting to money-loving readers. But the fact remains – truth is bitter but makes our lives better. Therefore, I encourage you to read this message with an open mind and a humble attitude.

01.02. What is Dowry?

What is Dowry?

Dowry is the practice of giving money or possessions by the bride's family to the bridegroom's family along with the giving of bride in marriage. In India, dowry negotiations are an essential prerequisite to marital bond. It can range from furniture, land, cash, gold and consumer goods, to paying the husband's study fees and the expenses of marriage. Interestingly, the terms and conditions of dowry, which is generally based on man's education and job, often match those of a regular business or a financial agreement.

Though it is claimed this has no religious sanction, the practice of dowry (Katnam in Telugu or Dahej in Hindi) has actually originated from Hindu social custom in India, and is an important part of Hindu marital rites. It is suspected that dowry originated in the upper caste Hindu families who could not provide for themselves sufficiently and therefore had to accept the material support along with the bride, who was another responsibility. It soon became an outlet of greed while masking itself as a voluntary gift given in marriage.

Considering the dire outcomes of the system of dowry, the Indian law, in 1961, has decreed it as illegal. Nevertheless, this practice is actively continued by most of the Hindus, even creeping into other religious communities like Islam and Christianity. These days, a dowry is no more a voluntary gift given by the bride's family – it has become a mandatory act. And shamefully, it is rampant even among Christians who are called to live different from the world.

01.03. Consequences of Dowry

Consequences of Dowry

It is the law of life that what we choose to do has inescapable consequences. Let us see how the dowry system in India has reaped dire consequences, particularly having heartbreaking impact upon women. i) The practice of dowry has demeaned the value of a woman in our society. To have a daughter means to lose money and material goods, but to have a son translates to gaining more. Since the world weighs everything materially, women have come to be considered less valuable to the parents than sons. The joy of the birth of a girl child is lost by the immediate realization of added responsibility of the father to start storing up wealth for her dowry. And the pressure and price of dowry payment are even higher if the girl is physically unappealing or has some physical disability. ii) Most families prefer a male child either because they can capitalise on him to bring in dowry or to prevent the giving of it. Unfortunately, the wife is held accountable and faces a lot of disgrace and mistreatment by her husband and in-laws, if the baby conceived is not male (though the XY chromosome that determines the baby's sex comes from the husband and he is to be held accountable, if at all). iii) Probably the most depraved consequences are female feticide (abortion of female babies in the mother's womb) and infanticide (killing an infant). Research points out that dowry is a direct cause for these horrible crimes. Because of atrocities like female feticide, the government issued the law in 1996 banning pre-natal sex determination (baby gender determination test) through ultrasound. Though the law prevents gender determination of the baby in the womb, greed and fear make people ignore it and deny life. O, how many unborn and born female babies are killed only to avoid the pressure of paying dowry for marriage! iv) Numerous married women are undergoing mental harassment and physical abuse in our society today because of insufficient payment of dowry by their parents. Due to this, some women attempt to commit suicide or be ruthlessly killed by their husbands and/or in-laws who lust for dowry. It is a sad statistical commentary of our times that 18 women are killed everyday in India because of dowry. (The Week, Vol. 24, No. 31, July 2, 2006, pg. 4) v) The huge debts that a bride's family undertakes in order to pay for the dowry thrusts them into severe financial crisis and depression. Many women's marriages have also been delayed because their parents could not store up sufficient dowry. Even worse, there are women who have remained unmarried just because their parents cannot afford to pay dowry, leading some of them to commit suicide. vi) A number of marriage negotiations break down if there is no consensus between the families on dowry. Besides, in many instances, the boy is compelled to reluctantly marry the girl only because her family agreed to offer more dowry. You see, dowry has become a main factor in determining marriage proposals, not the consensus of boy and girl who are getting married for life. Groom's families are well known to seek alliances that offer a better bargain. I came to know of a failed marriage alliance because the dowry negotiation was not up to the expectations. Ironically, these were Christian parties and the mediator was none other than pastor himself. vii) One of the reasons for youth to commit suicide in India is due to rejection of love-affair by their parents. They are forced or manipulated to marry someone of parents' choice. While there may be reasons that

are valid for the rejection of love-affair by parents, in most cases they appear to be invalid. How? Either the girlfriend or boyfriend does not belong to the same caste or the parents will lose to get exorbitant dowry if their boy marries a girl whom he loves, for more dowry can be bargained in an arranged marriage.

01.04. Is Dowry Anti-Biblical?

Is Dowry Anti-Biblical?

It is our tendency not to look for reasons for things we love to do, but when we are forbidden to do something we love to do, we ask for reasons. “Where in the Bible is it specifically written that we should not take dowry?”, some Christians ask ignorantly, or to justify their love of dowry.

It is interesting to notice that, in the Biblical times, it was cultural for the bridegroom to offer gifts to the bride and to her family, though it is not a command of God to do so! Abraham sent gifts to Rebekah and to her family as a token of acceptance for his son Isaac (Genesis 24:53). Jacob served his father-in-law for seven years to get Rachel (Genesis 29:18-20). Shechem said to Jacob and his sons, “Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I’ll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the girl as my wife” (Genesis 34:12).

Sometimes, a bride received voluntary gifts from her father, who could afford to do so, in the shape of land (Judges 1:15), or of cities (1 Kings 9:16). But the usual custom was that men gave dowry to women (Exodus 22:17).

Don’t you think the bride was highly valued in the Holy Bible? Speaking about dowry in the Old Testament, a friend of mine says, “Daughters were a great asset to their parents, not a liability.” So, what exactly should the Biblical tradition be, if at all?

Since cultures vary from society to society, there is nothing wrong in giving and taking gifts during marriage, provided it is done voluntarily. Since children have the right to their parent’s property, it is fine to give children their share as they begin to have a new family. But the Holy Bible sternly condemns the current dowry system in India wherein the bride’s parents are compelled, even beyond their ability, to pay the bridegroom to marry their daughter, thrusting the women of our society in jeopardy. The following are some of the reasons regarding how the lust for dowry violates God’s word. i) Dowry violates God’s glorious purpose for marriage. Jesus said, “What God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matthew 19:6). Biblically, God is the author of marriage. He is the center of the union between man and woman, not money. Unfortunately, because of dowry, money and material things have become primary factors in uniting man and woman instead of God’s purpose and will. How dowry corrupts the sacred institution of marriage!

How many marriage proposals have been rejected only because of unmet dowry expectations! To such corrupted people, God’s will for their son is the bride who gives more dowry. Before printing Holy Matrimony on the marriage cards, dowry is the unholy practice behind the screen. Are these marriages Christ-centered? Do you suppose the abundant blessings of the Lord rest upon them? ii) “The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil,” is a truth revealed in the Holy Scriptures (1 Timothy 6:10). Jesus taught us to be generous givers out of love and not greedy seekers for money (Matthew 6:3; Matthew 6:19-24; Luke 10:25-37). When money or possessions is put as a condition to marry someone, what does it prove? Seeking dowry evidently proves lust for money and possessions. Bro. Zac Poonen, addressed this well:

Dowry is another evil that is found among many believers. No true disciple of Jesus will ever ask for dowry from a girl or from her parents as a condition for marrying the girl. There is nothing wrong in the girl's father giving her a gift after she is married. But there is everything wrong in making money a factor in deciding about a marriage! The present-day dowry system in India is satanic. Yet we find Christians in almost all denominations (evangelical and liberal) receiving it. The French infidel Voltaire, after observing Christians in Europe for many years in the 18th century said that, "In whatever doctrines the many Christian denominations differed, they all had the same doctrine as far as money was concerned – they all loved it." When it comes to dowry too, they all have the same doctrine – they love it. iii) The Holy Bible says just as Christ loved the church unconditionally (which is symbolically His bride) and gave Himself up for her, the husbands must likewise love their wives (Ephesians 5:25). Marriage is a holy institution of God where holy vows of love, faithfulness and commitment are exchanged unconditionally. 'Love' in marriage is a selfless act of giving for the partner's welfare. When it comes to marriage, the bridegroom who is about to become a husband ought to be in a giving position, even offering his own life for his girl, not in a taking position, trying to possess things that his girl has. The requirement of dowry violates unconditional love in marriage and instead becomes a business transaction. Is marriage a love relationship or a commodity which a bride has to buy? A man who marries a girl out of love for money—is he fit for marriage or for business? If a man says "I can't love you unless you give me money," is he truly loving or greedy? iv) The Holy Bible exhorts Christians to shine as the light of the world and to set a good example to others (Matthew 5:14-16). Does the practice of dowry by Christians exemplify good deeds? An unbeliever who came to know of a Christian family demanding dowry asked me, "Being Christians, how do you people still demand dowry?" What a disgrace and humiliation to defend "Christianity" here! (Interestingly, this unbeliever committed to not seek dowry when his two sons get married. Shame on us greedy Christians!) Christianity has a great reputation of being morally and socially ethical, so let us not desecrate it. v) One of the Ten Commandments is this—"Do not covet your neighbor's property" (Exodus 20:17). Nowhere is this sin of covetousness clearly manifested as in marriages where bridegroom's family blatantly covets bride's property. How unashamedly Christians ask for dowry in marriages, which is nothing but a sin of covetousness! vi) Dowry violates the will of God to not oppress anyone (Ezekiel 18:7). It is painful to know how many brides' families are oppressed under the yoke of dowry. How pathetic it is for bridegroom's family to seek material prosperity by bringing adversity upon bride's family! In the Biblical times, God's people were oppressed through bribe and injustice by their own people, but these days people are oppressed through dowry by professed God's people. Make no mistake: demanding dowry is a sin of oppression in the sight of the Almighty God whom you worship! vii) Dowry violates the command of God to submit to the secular authorities (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 3:22). According to the Indian law, "the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, is as serious as bribery. Yet, this has become a common rebellion by people - including Christians - against law.

01.05. Excuses to Justify the Practice of Dowry

Excuses to Justify the Practice of Dowry When sin is exposed, it is human tendency to seek every opportunity to justify evil actions, just like the Pharisees and the Sadducees in the Gospels. This justification of sinful actions is even seen when it comes to the exposure of the evil practice of dowry in Christian marriages. i) Some say, “Dowry is just a gift – so, what’s wrong?” Well, what is a gift? It is something that is offered voluntarily to others out of love. But if it is given under obligation or compulsion it is no longer called a gift. When the bridegroom’s family asks for or even courteously demands dowry, how can it still be classified as a gift? Sadly, some bride’s parents give dowry fearing that without it their daughter may not be treated well by the in-laws. By the way, why should the burden of giving gifts fall only on the bride’s family? Why can’t the bridegroom’s family also give gifts that they expect from bride’s family?

It is up to the bride’s family to shower gifts deliberately out of love, but it is sinful to demand dowry as a prerequisite for marriage. There is nothing wrong if the bride’s family, even from the groom’s side, blesses the newly-weds with gifts within their affordability. But let there not be demand of dowry or use manipulating words to extract dowry. Dowry is evil, some young men give excuses that they had to solicit dowry under their parents’ compulsion. They even justify themselves: “Doesn’t the Bible say that we have to honor our parents?” What a silly excuse to justify an evil act! Sometimes, the devil too craftily quotes Scriptures in order to lead us into sin (Read the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4:1-25). The Bible does say that we have to honor our parents. But nowhere in the Bible does it say that we have to honor them at the cost of dishonoring the standards of God. Is it not written, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right?” (Ephesians 6:1). Observe these words, “in the Lord”, not against the Lord.

Moreover, Jesus forthrightly said, “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37-38). Mark these words: no cross-bearer can be a dowry-seeker.

If it is a matter of either obeying God’s Word or your parents’ wish, which one would you choose? If your parents insist on dowry, teach them that it is not a good act, and if necessary, rebuke them in love. If we do not obey our parents in matters that are not according to God’s will, it does not mean we are dishonoring them but honouring God above them. Bro. R Stanley, a wonderful Indian Christian writer, commented: When money transaction becomes a major factor in marriage, all sorts of evil will creep in. Money does matter but it does not matter for Christ-centered marriages. Many a Christian young man has missed God’s best in the choice of his life-partner because he has yielded to the pressure from his parents to make money in the marriage deal. It’s not cash or complexion but character that lasts (Proverbs 31:30). Boys must have the backbone to resist parental pressures. Throwing the entire blame on parents is not manliness. iii) Still others (from the groom’s side) say, “You know, the money that we get from dowry can be used to meet some debts we have or to meet the expenses of the marriage or to meet the expenses of our other children’s

marriage. Also, we have spent a lot educating our son.” What a great and ungodly deal! Well, what about the parents who invest in upbringing and educating their daughters? Who will bear her expenses? Will the bridegroom and his family be willing to meet them? Or is the bride’s life worth nothing to consider?

Just think, in order to get rid of our burdens, is it fair to put burden on the other side, particularly on a woman? If in crisis, the Bible says to pray, seek God’s help and work hard with our hands (James 5:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-8).

Dear men, I ask you—what is a sign of manliness? Is it carrying one’s own burden or burdening others? I often say to girls, marry men who are courageous and manly enough to work hard with their own hands and come up in life, not the cowards who stretch their hands and beg for dowry, whether before or after marriage.

Note: It is sad that marriage ceremonies in India have become an issue of public performance, personal reputation and pleasing people. Large amount of money is unnecessarily spent in marriage, even at the cost of borrowing money on credit from others, either to show their prestige or to impress people.

Please don’t fall into this worldly trap. I want to suggest, if there are no sufficient finances to have a marriage ceremony grandly, it is good indeed to conduct it modestly with few attendees, decent decoration and inexpensive food, or perhaps just snacks. Yes, marriage does happen only once, but the crucial issue is not about how you get into it with grand celebration but how you live in it with exhilaration.

01.06. Taking Stand Against Dowry in Secular World

Taking Stand Against Dowry in Secular World

It is interesting and inspiring to hear some non-Christians taking a strong stand against the deplorable practice of dowry. The newspaper quotes a secular Industrialist - "We are more concerned about the evils of society like dowry. Moreover, he stated, that his company undertakes young men with an agreement that they will not accept dowry, from the prospective bride's parents. A similar undertaking is given by women employees that they will not pay dowry." I also remember reading that a famous film actor had turned down an offer to star in a torch advertisement which sought to glorify the product as a dowry gift. In an anti-dowry conference, over 200 Indians, both students and professionals, signed a dowry pledge which decrees, "I promise never to give or take dowry." Moreover, listen to the words of the renowned film actor Aamir Khan:

Dowry I am totally opposed to. This is a retrograde practice, and also illegal. Think about it — can a relationship, built on the foundation of money and greed, ever be meaningful or beautiful? Should we not invest in our daughter's education instead of saving up for her dowry? Make her so accomplished and independent that she is capable of crafting her own future, and becomes the master of her own happiness. Then she won't need a greedy, useless groom to complete her life. Let her marry a person who respects her. Let her marry a man who she believes is worthy of her; whom she is happy to spend the rest of her life with. (The Hindu:Opinion/Columns: The Aamir Khan Column: It's Your Entire Life - Not Just An Event, May 21, 2012)

I commend such people for their stand against this deplorable practice and am equally ashamed at those so-called Christians who still love to require dowry in marriage and also at those pastors who conduct marriages where the greed of dowry is entertained. O, how I wish to see our young Christian men, Christian parents and Christian leaders taking stand against this dehumanising practice!

Dear young Christian men and Christian parents, where is your saltiness (good testimony before the world) today? Do you remember hearing these words of Jesus, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men" (Matthew 5:12)? Jesus wanted those that partake of His blood and body to maintain such a moral standard so that the world would be influenced through their godliness and praise our Father in heaven. Are we Christians truly shining in darkness or have we allowed the darkness (the evil systems of the world) to creep in? Have we Christians separated from the evil social system of dowry, thereby reflecting true godliness to the world? Maybe I am not talking about you, or maybe I am, but there are many so-called Christians who strongly claim of not compromising with the other religious practices but when it comes to issues like dowry (which actually originated from the Hindu social system) they cherish to indulge in it. Money indeed blinds eyes from the Truth. May we repent and turn to the Lord with brokenness and allow Him to represent Himself through us to the hopeless world!

“O Lord, forgive us for bringing disgrace to your Name and for the worldliness in the church.” As one of your servants prayed, “Bend the church and bless the world.”

01.07. Final Words

Final Words

Once I happened to read a newsletter regarding dowry and it was requested, "Dear saints, please say a prayer for the women/girls of India." How can the saints of India pray when they themselves engage in the evil act? Those who did not stain themselves with this evil practice need to really pray, first for their fellow Christians who are caught up in seeking dowry, and then for other unbelievers who are enslaved by it.

I humbly urge you - dear young men and parents - not to partake in this evil practice of dowry. And I urge you, dear pastors, to teach your congregation to refuse seeking dowry. I would appreciate your commitment if you vow not to lead a marriage ceremony if there has been a demand for dowry. I came to know that even some pastors do demand dowry for their own marriages! What a shame! To quote Bro. R Stanley again: In the repentance messages preached by late Br. N. Daniel of the Laymen's Evangelical Fellowship in the fifties, he often condemned the dowry system. In response many husbands either returned the amount to their in-laws or settled the matter with them in order to get right with God and with men. Modern pulpits hardly address social evils. On the other hand there are pastors who bless the dowry amount so they get one-tenth of it. Shame!

O People of God, repent and change your ways! Finally, dear brothers, sisters and elders, since centuries - dowry, sati (self-immolation by a widow) and child marriages - which originated from Hindu social customs, have been prevalent in our nation. William Carey (1760-1834), who was known to be the father of modern missions, influenced not just missions but also the society. He fought the evil practice of sati in his time along with Raja Ram Mohan Roy and witnessed its abolishment. Are there believers in our nation today who can stand against dowry which has crept into Christianity? Will we ever hear messages from the pulpit addressing this major issue? Are Christian preachers willing to teach their congregation regarding dowry? Are we Christians and Christian leaders willing to stand against this evil practice in the church and society and witness its abolishment? Young men, are you willing to commit yourselves to have selfless and unstained marriage?

Rise up, O children of God, and shine for the glory of the Holy One in this nation!

01.08. ABOUT US

ABOUT US

TENTS is an indigenous and non- denominational training ministry, operating from Hyderabad, India. Our MISSION is to provide sound training to leaders and believers, especially with a focus on the pattern of New Testament ministry, so that the whole body of Christ would be engaged in ministering to each other and together reach the people around. Our training is oriented towards discipleship.

If you need any information about our training, feel free to contact us:

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S. 3 Questions To Ask When You Marry

3 Questions To Ask When You Marry "She is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord." The Holy Bible (1 Corinthians 7:39 b)

It is well said that next to believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior there is no decision as crucial as marriage. It is a decision which calls for great thoughtfulness, prayer and counsel. It is a decision which can make the rest of your life either a blessing or utterly miserable. It is a decision, which if made with utmost carefulness, you would not reap unnecessary regrets. It is a decision about which if you make a wise choice can bring immense joy to you, your children, and above all, glory to God.

Oh, it is regretful to see so many believers making a wrong choice when it comes to marriage! I have seen how they go against God's word to marry unbelievers and reaping unavoidable, painful consequences. God made it quite clear in His word, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Therefore, no matter how seemingly good your intentions are and whatever superficial reasons you may find to justify your actions, do you suppose you can have an absolutely blessed married life by making a choice to marry against the standards of God's Word? In nothing does the folly of a believer show itself more clearly, after so many warnings from God's word, than in this cursed fascination and stubbornness of running into an affair with an unbeliever who is not born of the Spirit. The Living God loves you and loves seeing you enjoy His blessings by living in accordance with His word. He doesn't want you to compromise when it comes to this most crucial decision of your life. I believe, there are scores of miserable believers who would do anything if they happen to get a chance to go back and change their decision to marry an unbeliever or a nominal Christian. Hence, before it is too late to change, the following three questions to assist you in making a wise choice:

1) Am I Giving to Myself a Person Who Encourages Me in My Walk with God? A believer knows that his/her happiness is dependent upon the right relationship with the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Marriage by itself doesn't bring joy and peace; God should be the centre of our life to enjoy on-going bliss. But there are temptations which often come on our way, robbing us from taking delight in our relationship with Christ. And we also know that Christian life is not always walking on the path of roses; there would be thorns and thistles on our way; there are afflictions and disappointments. Encouragement is something which is greatly necessary in our cross-carrying life and who else could encourage you more than your spouse, your constant companion!

So, in regard to your choice of marriage partner, what kind of an encouragement would that person be in your life with God? Would you be able to become a better Christian? What a blessing it would be when your spouse motivates you, saying, "May God be the centre of our family", "Come let's pray together", "Have you read your Bible today?", "Don't give up, let's trust God", "We shouldn't neglect church fellowship", "Let's help others"...etc.

Oh, how many believers married an unbelieving spouse and have ended up with no encouragement in their spiritual life! I believe—it is one of the devil's subtle traps to tempt a passionate believer to marry an unbeliever in order to make that person dispassionate. How many believers, because of marrying a Christless spouse, became lukewarm in their spiritual life, having lost that first love! Although, in some cases, their unbelieving spouse may take good care of them physically, they are still joyless and restless because of spiritual emptiness. Lord Jesus said, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Consider, therefore, are you marrying a person who not only nourishes you physically but also encourages you with God's word? It is well said by Tim Kerr, "An unbeliever may love his wife and make her very happy. But when a believing man loves his wife it results in more than just her happiness; it results in her holiness. "

2) Am I Giving to My Children (who would be born) a Person Who Brings Them Up in the Ways of God? When it comes to marriage, it is saddening to see many believers focusing on just immediate choice and happiness without considering how that would affect their future. Remember, you are not marrying only for your sake; it is not just between you and your spouse. The decision you make regarding your marriage not only has an effect on your life but also on your prospective children. The kind of person you are going to marry is as well a gift you are giving to your children. Consider this for a moment and think it over—what kind of a father/mother you are presenting to your children? Would your children be thankful to you for making a right choice in your marriage and blessing them with a godly father/mother?

I know children who regret for their mother's marrying an ungodly person. I know fathers who are sorrowful for getting wives who have no interest in godly things, much less influencing their children positively. I know women who married unbelieving husbands and had children—their children's father doesn't pray with them, teach them God's word and influence them with God's moral values. All such fathers are concerned about is the worldly things, thereby having worldly impact on the children.

How wonderful it is for you to marry a person who obeys God's way of bringing up children as prescribed by the Holy Bible – "Impress them (God's commands) on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). What a blessing it would be for your family if the person you marry would become a spiritual partner with you to train your children in godliness! Do you want your children to have only one parent as a godly person and the other as ungodly, having them torn between two contrary worldviews of their father and mother? Do you want them to miss the grand privilege of being completely brought up in a godly family? Are you willing to bless them with a wonderful, godly gift of parenting?

3) Am I Giving to God a Person Passionate to Expand His Kingdom, Bringing Glory to His Name? The Holy Bible clearly teaches that we are created by Christ and for Him (Colossians 1:16). We are taught that Jesus, "died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:15). We are exhorted, "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Well, when we are created for Him, called to live for Him who loved us and laid His life for us, commanded to do all things for the glory of our Maker, what kind of a person do you suppose you should marry? Shouldn't he/she be the

one who loves the Lord, lives for His glory and passionate to expand His Kingdom on earth?

Now I don't mean you have to marry a missionary or a pastor or a full-time Christian worker, but any believer, of whatever profession, who loves God and desires to see His Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

If you are passionate to live a godly life, desiring God to be its centre, it isn't enough to ask "Am I marrying a good person?" but "Am I marrying a godly, Christ-centered person?" Of course, he/she may be a weak person, since none is perfect, but is that person honest enough to acknowledge his/her weaknesses and passionate enough to become more like Christ Jesus? If you are grateful to Christ for what He had done on the Cross for you, shouldn't you marry a person who would live for His glory and spread the good news of Jesus Christ? Will not God be delighted to see you both serving Him in order to bring people into His Kingdom and to strengthen those that are His flock?

Consider carefully how your decision to marry the person you want to will make both of you serve God more effectively and fruitfully. What a blessing it is to marry a person who wants to be a blessing to others! What a pleasure to marry a person whose goal is to please God! What a fragrant offering it would be from you to God in marrying a Christ-centred person in order to serve Him as a complete family from generation to generations! What an overwhelming joy when you both serve and help people just like Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19)! Believe me, there is holy exultation in touching the lives of the people around us for Christ as a family.

Ask these three questions before you decide to marry and save yourself from asking painful questions afterwards. And make sure you yourself prayerfully cultivate the characteristics you expect in your future spouse. Remember, you have only one life on this earth to make a difference. Don't ruin your bright future for the sake of immediate pleasure. Do not be hasty in making a decision for a life-long partner. Give yourself, your children and God a grand, unregretful gift!

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below (or) write to E-mail: cstephendavid@gmail.com (or) stephen@tents-india.org

S. A Lesson from Cotton Buds on Sexual Purity

A Lesson from Cotton Buds on Sexual Purity

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable." The Holy Bible (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4)

One fine Sunday morning, I was reading *Undefined: Redemption From Sexual Sin, Restoration For Broken Relationships* by Dr. Harry Schaumburg. It is a wonderful book, addressing how to sustain sexual purity within marriage. As I was reading this book, all of a sudden, my eldest son, Joy, appeared before me with cotton buds, expecting me to pick. I didn't understand why he brought them since I haven't asked him. He generally doesn't do such things without asking; later I understood, and you too I suppose after reading, he might have been led by the Spirit of God who wanted to teach me a significant lesson.

I could not resist picking that cotton bud, for you know how pleasant it is to roll it in the ear canal, although it isn't safe to do often. I gently rolled the bud in the ear, in that thin and tender skin, experiencing a great sense of pleasantness. As I was enjoying this momentary delight, a thought struck my mind—what happens if I go deeper and deeper in the ear canal and reach the eardrum? What an acute pain it causes, the whole pleasure turning into an unbearable pain! Ooh, if I just cross the boundary of ear canal into the ear drum, the whole sense which is triggered with excitement would be quickly twisted with excruciating pain!

Then right at the moment, the wise Lord, I believe, opened my mind to learn a lesson from this incident. As pleasurable and ecstatic sex is, if I cross the boundary of sexual purity and fall into sexual immorality, the whole pleasure turns into terrible pain. Of course, the pain here may not be in the act itself but certainly in its consequences. Sex, which is within marriage, is a blessing, but sexual immorality, which is outside marriage, is a curse.

Ah, how many today have fallen from the mountain top pleasure into the deep valley of pain, just because of crossing the boundary of sexual purity! How sexual immorality turns goosebumps into guilt complex! How sexual impurity sucks lasting peace by giving momentary pleasure! O, how many have destroyed their personal happiness, marred their reputation, ruined their family life, abandoned their relationship with the Living God, all because of trespassing the standard of sexual morality (crossing the ear canal into the ear drum).

Take heed of these Scriptures: "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18). "Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor homosexuals nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Well, in light of inevitable, dreadful consequences, is the pleasure of sexual immorality (pornography, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, voyeurism, orgies and sexual fantasies) worth enjoying?

ENQUIRIES:

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S. A Word to Tongues Speakers and Non-Tongues Speakers

A Word to Tongues Speakers and Non-Tongues Speakers

Since I have been born-again by the grace of God in the year 1996, in God's sovereign providence, I lived in both the circles—the tongues speakers and the non-tongues speakers. I wish in my heart to boast about their love and respect they have for each other in spite of the differences, but sadly that's not the case. Instead, what I generally observed in both of them, though not all, is this—self-righteousness and other-accusation.

Hence, here is a word for them.

Tongues Speakers

Dear brothers and sisters who speak in tongues, may I plead with you in Christ Jesus—do not look down on those who do not speak in tongues. To the church at Rome that had certain differences among them, Paul wrote, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:10).

Based on what Paul said, do you become a better person than others just because you speak in tongues? If you speak in tongues, should you honor yourself above those who don't speak in tongues? Walking in humility is a great sign of being filled with the Holy Spirit than just speaking in tongues. Sadly, there are many tongues speakers in the body of Christ but few humble walkers. And do not suppose that those who do not speak in tongues do not have the Holy Spirit. Do not confuse the empowerment of the Holy Spirit with the indwelling of the Spirit of God. Every person who sincerely believes in Christ is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). The greatest sign of having the Spirit of God in an individual is not speaking in tongues but not living a life controlled by the sinful nature (Romans 8:9). Your non-tongues speaking brothers and sisters are loved by the Lord and are indwelt by the Spirit of God as much as you are loved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Of course, both need the power of the Holy Spirit for which both need to constantly seek God to empower them for effective witness (Acts 1:8).

Let me also be plain in saying this—just speaking in tongues is not a sign of spiritual maturity. You don't become spiritual only by speaking in tongues. To the church at Corinth that was good in speaking in tongues, Paul wrote to them, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). The church at Corinth was filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but it immensely lacked maturity due to lack of love. A person can speak in tongues and still be carnal. The love of God in our hearts for people is the greatest sign of spiritual maturity. Without love for his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter how much an individual speaks in tongues, he is simply an irritating sound.

Therefore, may I encourage you to love and respect your non-tongues speaking brothers and sisters in Christ without despising them in your heart, words and actions.

Non-Tongues Speakers

Dear brothers and sisters who do not speak in tongues, may I urge you in Christ Jesus—do not despise those who speak in tongues. Do not mock at them and treat them with contempt. Do not put them off as if they don't belong to the family of Christ. They belong to God through their faith in Christ Jesus just as you belong to God. To the church at Rome where the folks disagreed on certain issues, Paul wrote, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7). Christ accepts an individual, not based on whether he speaks in tongues or does not speak in tongues, but based on his sincere faith in the complete atonement of what He had done on the cross for the sins of people. Don't you suppose that should be our base too than petty doctrinal differences? And do not consider speaking in tongues as something of the devil. Do not be quick in judging those speaking in tongues as being led by a demon. There is no evidence from the Scripture where people spoke in tongues by the devil. Such comments are unwise and do not manifest a proper biblical attitude.

You do have complete freedom not to believe in tongues, but be careful of taking the freedom to make unbiblical judgments and fall into the accusing trap of the devil.

What is certainly from the devil is bitter envy and self-boasting (James 3:14-15). Moreover, people are never like the devil than when they walk in pride, feeling better about themselves and despising others. And this pride is found in every group, both in those who do not speak in tongues and in those who speak in tongues. There is a great need of humility for which all God's people ought to pray and practice.

Let me also mention not to think of yourself as knowing the Holy Bible much better than those who speak in tongues. Do not shun them as emotional brats and consider yourselves as wise in the Word. Paul wrote that if we have all the knowledge but have no love, then we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2). The one who loves knows the Holy Bible much better than all those who possess great theological knowledge and sound doctrines but have no love for their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Love is the greatest sign of spiritual maturity, not mere knowledge. Of course, all have to grow in knowledge but not without love.

Therefore, love and respect your tongues speaking brothers and sisters in Christ without despising them in your heart, words and actions.

Final Words To speak in tongues and not to speak in tongues is a minor doctrinal difference; it is not an issue of sin. I say it is a minor doctrine because—whether you speak or do not speak in tongues, it has nothing to do with your salvation which was bought by Christ on the cross. You are not accepted in heaven based on this but only because of the finished work of Christ Jesus our Lord.

I think, had Paul lived in our age, perhaps he would have added "there are no tongues speakers and non-tongues speakers" to the following list—"Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Colossians 3:12-13).

You who speak in tongues and do not speak in tongues—are you clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience towards one another?

Finally, some speak about tongues as if this is the only worthwhile thing under the sun to do and some speak against tongues as if this is the only evil thing on the earth to disprove. On both sides, this seems to be a childish conduct and an immature mindset.

There is no clear indication from the Holy Scripture that speaking in tongues is a must for all people of all generations or that tongues have ceased with the death of Christ's apostles. What all the Scriptures people take to defend each others' belief is an assumption which is not completely based on the explicit evidence. It is a never-ending argument about which we do not have to fight at the cost of ruining our relationships [but this can be discussed in love without giving up on each other or accusing one another].

There are major doctrinal problems, like assaults on the trinity, the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the authority of the Holy Bible...etc—let's fight against them. There are terrible sins in the church, like pride, envy, conflicts, selfish-ambition, sexual immorality, gossip, complacency...etc—let's fight against them.

Let's stay together in the things we agree and work together for the expansion of God's holy kingdom and to pull down the strongholds of the enemy.

Think—if we have to live together only when we agree with each other in everything then no husband and wife can live together for more than few days. The church of Christ Jesus, which is the family of God, is no different from our family life.

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6).

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below (or) write to E-mail: cstephendavid@gmail.com (or) stephen@tents-india.org

S. Accept One Another

Accept One Another "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (Romans 15:7)

I am grateful to God for constantly changing a worst person like me to be conformed into the likeness of Christ. I am glad to have Christ as my Lord who is patient enough to deal with my failings. One of the worst weaknesses of mine is to give up a person or dissolve from a relationship when I'm confronted with interpersonal conflicts. Not so long ago I was annoyed with a person whom I constantly sought to encourage and eventually resolved to give him up due to his lame excuses to evade responsibilities. As I was reflecting on a passage in the book of Romans, I was led to a Scripture which captivated my attention and convicted my heart. The Lord clearly spoke to me from Romans 15:7, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." In the first verse of the chapter it is written, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves." I could not move any further as my weakness became evident before me and I felt absolutely ashamed of my ungracious attitude.

It seemed as if the Lord was asking me, "Stephen, did I accept you because you are perfect in what you believe and strong without any weaknesses?" My obvious response was, "No." When Christ Jesus accepted me in spite of all my weaknesses, endures my constant failings and enables me to become better day-by-day, shouldn't I be gracious to others like Him? If I fail to be gracious toward others' weaknesses, am I not ungrateful to what Christ has done to me? If Christ had to treat me the same way I treat others would there be any hope for me?

Well, my heart was broken by His word, confessed my sin before God and committed myself to His grace to help others become better without giving them up. And about the person I thought to give up, I pursued to encourage him and am glad to see him progressively growing better. I am learning to accept others despite their weaknesses and differences (including minor differing beliefs) because this is what Christ has been doing to me. Of course there is a room for correction and discipline and these are done out of love and acceptance, not out of reaction and rejection.

I know this is quite difficult because of our most cherished egotism; however, he who is grateful to God for His grace will also be gracious to others. It was Selwyn Hughes who said, "God loves you and accepts you as you are even though it is not His intention that you stay as you are." True, Christ accepts us as we are and enables us to become like as He is. Should not His followers imitate their Master?

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S. Accountability - An Impetus to Overcome Pornography

Accountability – An Impetus to Overcome Pornography I have observed, whenever we fall in sin, for the most part we slip into it unprepared.

It happened to me that one day I was browsing on the Internet to read some inspirational stuff. I was low in my spirit and looking for some encouragement. It is when we are downcast that this lust within us reaches fever pitch. As I was rummaging through Google's search engine, I was subtly enticed towards partial sensual content. My mind became dumb. I shut down my moral convictions. I lost control over my passions. My heart was hardened. Curiosity increased. And that later took me into watching porn for a while, indulging in sinful sight and imagination. I had the choice to resist and get back to my work but I foolishly gave in to temptation.

I need to admit that my past life, before Christ, was ruled by lust and that old nature reared up its ugly head again. I was completely shattered when I fell into this sin. I hated and condemned myself for yielding to it. I could not face myself, my family or anyone, even God. I degraded in my own eyes. I decided to give up ministry, for I thought I am unworthy to serve the LORD with an impure heart. What Ravi Zacharias said makes complete sense, "The loneliest moment in life is when you have just experienced that which you thought would deliver you the ultimate, and it has let you down."

During this inward battle, a thought came, "Is this a solution to my sin?" I knew it's not. Going away from God because of sin is to drive ourselves deeper in sin. I sincerely repented before the Lord. Although I was never addicted to watching porn, I was afraid that I may fall in it, for I have seen people how they had regretted only to see themselves helplessly turning to it again and again. They eventually came to a stage of such hardness of heart wherein they had lost that sense of guilt and guts to change. So I could not trust myself in this area and knew that I had to do more than repentance to guard myself against this sensual sin. The next morning, I immediately called my good friend to visit me. It was humiliating but I confessed my sin to him. It was hurting but I asked him to hold me accountable in this area. It was painful but I wanted to live for the pleasure of God. After giving myself to accountability, I found great relief in my heart.

Guess what happened after few days? As I was doing my search on the Internet on some personal project, I again bumped into a strange link, lured to click and enter into the world of lust. I brought the cursor right on it to click. Then immediately it flashed into my mind that I am accountable to my friend. What would I tell him when he asks me? Should I tell him that I watched again? How would I face him? This brief reasoning pulled me back from clicking this site and saved me from falling into the pit of immorality. I thank God for this accountability, for it worked as an impetus, not just once but many times, to abscond from the traps of the evil one.

Since I gave myself to be accountable to my friend, by God's grace, I haven't returned to it again. And as God gives me opportunities to help those enslaved by lust, in my counseling to them struggling with addiction to pornography, I make sure to mention accountability as a way of

discipline to overcome its temptation.

Fearing God or fearing only man

Some may suppose that this accountability structure implies that we fear man more than God. It could be, but not necessarily. Want to know my reasons?

1) It is the fear of God which drives a person to be accountable. If there is no fear of God, why should a person be bothered about voluntarily submitting himself to be accountable to someone in the first place? He could continue with his sinful lifestyle and live according to his sinful passions, right? Since he fears God and shuns evil, he uses God's providence of accountability to walk in sexual purity.

2) If there is no fear of God how can a person tell the truth when asked about his dealing with the sin? Can't he tell lies and live a life of secrecy, indulging himself in lust? It is the fear of God which causes a person to tell the truth when accountable. Since he loves God, he loves to come out of sexual immorality by speaking the truth.

Besides, lack of accountability actually proves fear of man. As good as accountability is, there is a hurdle for people in not being accountable – fear about what someone would think about them. We need to overcome this anxiety and choose a mature and trustworthy person to disclose our secret life. Let me give a caution here – If we don't take serious measures to deal with our evil addictions, it would inevitably lead us some day to public disgrace. Doesn't reason suggest present accountability, however painful, is better than future humiliation?

Scriptural Support for Accountability

Accountability is buttressed by the Holy Scripture. It is not man's own invention, but God's gracious providence. To quote C. J. Mahaney, "It's a gift from God, a vital means of experiencing His grace for protection from the deceitfulness of sin."

It is written in Proverbs 27:17, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." Isn't a person sharpened in accountability structure?

Solomon offers wisdom in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" Helping a fallen friend – isn't this exactly what happens in accountability?

Paul exhorted the young Timothy, "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). Isn't a person in accountability fleeing from the evil desires and seeking the Lord with the help of godly people?

The author of Hebrews wrote, "Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Hebrews 3:13). Isn't a person in accountability saved from the deceitfulness of sin, placed in transparency from living a life of secrecy and encouraged to live a holy life? Any person who has failed to personally discipline himself in sexual purity, and at the same time unwilling to give himself to some form of

accountability in God's community—he is most likely to live a life of deception and hypocrisy, invoking damage upon himself and in some way hurt those connected to him.

God's word says, "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20). Isn't this what happens in accountability, saving a person from perishing in sexual immorality and bringing him or her back to the truth?

In this age of sensuality, the storm of lust is so fierce that many God's people are swept by its fascinating enticements. It would be shocking to know how many seemingly good people are caught in the web of pornography, secretly living a life ruled by sexual immorality.

Friends, if you helplessly find yourself strangled by the sin of lust, I encourage you to seek an accountable partner (reliable and helpful). Sometimes, to deal with this sin by ourselves is but to give ourselves more to its mastery. I have learned the assaults of the devil against us intensify when we live in secrecy, but it does decline in accountability. There are many ways to find deliverance and God has provided the structure of accountability as one such to experience the power of His grace.

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S. Actions Speak Louder to Children

Actions Speak Louder to Children "In everything set them an example by doing what is good." The Holy Bible (Titus 2:7)

Few days back, my wife and two kids, along with my friend Benjamin, were on our way to buy groceries for our training centre. As I was driving, a person riding a bike popped up in front of our vehicle; holding his bike's handle with two hands, he was speaking on his mobile phone. How could he do that? He clasped his phone with his head fully bent over the right shoulder, and as expected, he couldn't drive his bike properly and confused us who were at his back.

Feeling a bit frustrated, I commented to my wife, "Look at that fellow's driving!" My eldest son, Joy (six years old), immediately exclaimed from back, "Papa you speak likewise on phone while driving bike!" My wife too affirmed his constructive criticism. It was like a slap on my face. I was silenced and had to accept his correction.

(We parents often think about shaping our children, but believe me, if we let the all-wise God, He often uses our children to mould our character. I am glad that having children helped me to change a lot. I got rid of many unhealthy things, even some good but may not be best for my family.)

What I learned is this—children are always watching us and how we live before them speak louder to them than our words.

How about us? How are our lives before our Children? Although at times I have failed, I don't want to say something in front of my children or to them and do the opposite. I am aware the foremost way I can influence my children or earn their sincere respect is—not by the use of demand for being their parent, but by living an honest and genuine life before them. Ray Comfort made a gutsy statement, "The key to having your children respect what you say is for them to respect the one who is doing the saying. Nothing dissipates respect like hypocrisy. I would rather lose my right arm than have one of my children consider me a hypocrite."

Don't you suppose there are many parents who may be considered hypocrites by their children? You know, our lives are transparent before our children, whether we like it or not. We almost become real before them, leaving the phony part of our lives. And children respect us, even imitate, when they don't find contradiction between our words and deeds. Do we earnestly desire our children to find consistency between our words and actions, not contradictions? O Lord, enable us to live our life like a bright shining light, not like a fleeting shadow.

Well, the other day, as we were having family supper, I noticed my son licking his fingers by sweeping the gravy on his plate. To be honest with you, it is something unconventional. I looked at him and asked, "Joy, do you know why I don't correct this act in you?" He paused for a moment, looked at me with an amused smile and replied, "Because I learned this from you!":-)

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S. Admitting Flaws: An Essential Quality of an Authentic Christian Leader

Admitting Flaws: An Essential Quality of an Authentic Christian Leader

Randy Alcorn, one of my most enjoyed inspirational Christian writers, was asked, "In your view, what are the qualities of an authentic Christian leader?" He answered, "He loves God with all his heart, is quick to admit his flaws, listens to his critics and doesn't dismiss them." I kept thinking about the second point he mentioned—"quick to admit his flaws." As leaders in the responsibility of leading people, don't we find ourselves being quick to reject and to justify our flaws than quickly admit them?

Sad Example, Good Model

Few days back, I met a Christian brother who seemed to be quite embarrassed about approaching Christian leaders. He shared about confronting an old experienced preacher to gently offer a reasonable word of correction in regard to his preaching. The old preacher annoyingly responded to him, "It is not your age to correct me." Seeing his response, this brother was completely shattered, even afraid to approach any preacher the next time.

What a sad experience of this brother and a pathetic example modeled by that preacher! In contrast to this brother's experience, I know an old preacher who is engaged in missions for more than twenty years. In my fellowship with him, many times he told me, "Stephen, I may be wrong. Please feel free to correct me." What a humbling experience to a young man like me to witness such humble models!

Regretfully, not many of us are as humble to accept correction and to admit our faults as this wonderful man of God! Think—how many people find it comfortable to approach us to offer correction? How many of us deny ourselves and humbly confess our sins? Being Stupid, Being Honored In my fifteen years of Christian life, I ought to honestly confess—not many Christian leaders love to accept correction and are quick to admit their flaws. They are great preachers but weak models in regard to admitting their faults. When it comes to correction and confession—some walk with a sense of loftiness as if they don't commit mistakes, some foolishly blame others, some adamantly justify themselves and some stay silent, putting on a sad facial expression.

Don't you suppose such reactions are unfit to Christian leaders who are called by the Living God to servant leadership?

Moreover, I found leaders who suppose by admitting their faults they lose their honor and respect among the people. What a deception! The book of Proverbs says, "He who hates correction is stupid" but "whoever heeds correction is honored" (Proverbs 12:1 b; Proverbs 13:18 b). We are more stupid when we despise correction but more honored when we heed to it. In my view, there are many great leaders who lost their honor, not because of committing faults, but because of

rejecting to admit them.

Heed Correction, Humbly Confess In writing this, I am not saying I find it easy to accept correction and always admit my faults. I find admitting my flaws more hurting to my ego. There were numerous times where I justified myself and acted stupidly. Nevertheless, the Lord seriously dealt with my heart. He still does His painful surgery on my arrogant heart. Because of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in me, I am learning to sincerely admit my faults and to accept correction, even from my little kids. O, I am finding it a great blessing in my life and ministry!

Dear Christian leaders—we may be great preachers, having a great passion, possessing great talents, doing great ministry—but all these are nothing when there is no essential quality of humility to heed correction and to humbly confess our flaws. May we pray and allow God to humble us for His glory, honor and praise!

Note: Not every correction may be valid. However, we need to humbly consider the correction given to us, honestly examine our heart and then gently respond with appropriate answer.

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S. Answer to the Point (Guarding Peace at Home)

Answer to the Point (Guarding Peace at Home) In conversing with your spouse or vice versa, does this question sound familiar, “Why don’t you answer to the point?”

I was planning to go to Operation Mobilization library to spend the entire day to study and write. It takes one-hour drive from my house or even more depending on the traffic. To me this journey is often hard, for it is a busy road and I cannot avoid pollution and traffic hassle. So as I was getting ready and informed my wife about my day’s schedule, she curiously asked me, “Are you coming back in the afternoon?” Boom! “What on earth are you asking,” I thought to myself. That questioned annoyed me beyond reason. Think—by the time I go there, after traveling hard, I will be just two hours ahead before afternoon. And this woman, I thought, is asking me whether I will be coming back in the afternoon, as if it is something behind the house.

After hearing her, I blurted out, “How can you ask me such a question? How do you think I will come back by afternoon?” What a reckless response that was! Although some questions sound silly, such fretful response can easily put me into conflict with my wife, wrecking my entire day. After that incident, the Spirit of God started to deal with my heart with these convicting thoughts – Is it necessary to answer recklessly, although the question may seem funny? Can’t I just say, “No, dear. I will be coming in the evening”? There might be something on her mind to ask that question, so I can go a little further and ask, “Is there anything important you have for me?” What great peace such a gracious response would save for the day!

I can relate many such ungracious responses that quickly wreck peace at home. And I think you may relate such too. How many times have we been irritated at home because of some questions we think are weird! Consider the following:

Question: Where is my phone?

Ungracious response: Can’t you see, it is on the TV?

Question: When is he coming?

Ungracious response: How many times should I tell you?

Question: Are we going out today?

Ungracious response: Why do you ask such a question? Are you not interested to come?

Question: What happened to.....?

Ungracious response: Are you not aware? Should I tell you something new again?

These are just a few examples. There will be volumes if we probe and open up. Have you been in a situation where you were on a smooth drive and suddenly, to your shock, some vehicle pops out from the other side, making you scared to death? Such responses, as mentioned above, are like

that threatening vehicle when somebody asks a smooth question. Did you experience how an ungracious response provokes a person to anger, eventually leading to quarrel? Is it worth responding in such a way?

Can't we be patient enough to respond kindly? What do we lose if we gently answer to questions which seems unreasonable and irritating to us? What is patience by the way—is it not putting up with the unpleasant situations? Will not a little patience in our response save us from insurmountable troubles? Did we seriously ponder over these words, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1)? To cultivate respectful communication and peaceful atmosphere in the house, I have learned this—gently answer to the point. Period. No extra questioning. No unnecessary answers. Why should I foolishly put myself into speaking so many words of offense and later, to rectify my folly, speak so many words of apology when I can politely answer few words to the point! It is always good and beneficial to respond kindly straight to the thing, even though the question may seem pointless. After all, are we not saving the energy (of our tongue) and peace (of our heart) in answering right to the point?

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S. Are You Tormented by Self-Condensation?

Are You Tormented by Self-Condensation? Have you genuinely repented in view of God's mercy but still struggling from thoughts of self-condensation? Here are few Scriptures you can stick to like glue. Remember, these are not for an unrepentant soul but to those who sincerely repent and yet suffer from tormenting thoughts of self-condensation.

Friends, treasure these words in your heart. Preach them to your soul and find strength through them:

- Are you haunted by past failures?

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! (Isaiah 43:18-19) • Do you have this question, "Can God really forgive me?"

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) • Do you fear the Lord is always angry with you? The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. (Psalms 103:8-10)

- Do you see the discipline of the Lord because of the sins you have committed show God's hatred towards you? My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? (Hebrews 12:5-7) • Are you thinking your sins can never be blotted out? The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7) As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalms 103:12) • Are you feeling hopeless? But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:31) • Are you afraid of some curse upon you?

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." (Galatians 3:13) • Are you condemning yourself?

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1) For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. (1 John 3:20, NKJV) • Is the enemy of your soul condemning you? Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. (Romans 8:34) • Do you see yourself trapped in any temptation without redemption? No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Corinthians 10:13) • Do you feel cut off from God because of your sins? For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to

God. (1 Peter 3:18)

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S. Awake, O Christian Parents!

Awake, O Christian Parents!

In recent past, I have been invited to speak to teens in a Youth Camp. In the middle of my discourse, I asked, “How many of you know the ‘Ten Commandments’ by heart?” There were many teens present but not a single person could raise hand. Almost all these teens have come from Christian homes and some whose parents are active in ministry. I was surprised to witness blank response! After the message, I discussed with the coordinator and expressed my regret to him. I told him and tell you too—we can’t simply blame the children; the reason for lack of understanding of God’s word in present day youth is due to lack of effective Christian parenting at homes.

Growing in the World without Knowing the Word

Today’s young generation in Christian homes is advancing in all kinds of knowledge—celebrity gossip, technology, science, academic subjects, politics, entertainment (movies and music), sports—but with no proper knowledge of the Living God and His word. They are growing in the world without the Word. And I believe Christian parents are mainly responsible for the improper growth of youth in the ways of God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

Many parents mistakenly believe it is the responsibility of the pastors or Sunday school teachers to bring up their children in God’s word. It is you, you yourself, you my dear Christian parents, who are primarily responsible! The Holy Bible reveals—parents essentially carry the sacred responsibility of bringing up their children in the ways of God (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Deuteronomy 11:1-32; Deuteronomy 18:1-22; Deuteronomy 19:1-21; Proverbs 1:8-9; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). Are we faithfully fulfilling this divine commission?

You know there is one sad incident in the Holy Bible. After the death of Joshua, it is written in Judges 2:10, “After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.” How did the new generation grow up in ignorance of God and His word? Because the old generation, their parents, did not educate them in the ways of God. If only we could obey this Scripture:

We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. (Psalms 78:4-7)

Why today’s youth is so much ignorant about the knowledge of God? Because of parents’ negligence to bring them up in the fear of God! Too many have cast off that responsibility on the church and washed their hands off their godly responsibility at home. But God is so concerned

about the upbringing of children in His ways at our home that He had it written twice in the book of Deuteronomy:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 11:19-29)

What kind of talk do we have at our home, my dear Christian parents? Do we talk about God's word with our children? Do we discuss about the Lord's work? Do we teach our children the ways of God? Do we pray for them and also with them? Do we grab opportunities (without being too preachy) to lovingly impress on them the wisdom of God? Many Christian parents are too busy to spare time for such godly things. Regretfully, even there are pastors and preachers, who go around preaching God's word, have their own homes uneducated and neglected in spiritual values. No wonder we see the new generation coming up without knowing the ways of God.

Spiritual Giants Shaped at Home

I was reading about the great spiritual giant and missionary to China, J. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905). I was stunned to read that while he was still a child of four or five, he would tell visitors in the home, "When I am a man, I mean to be a missionary and go to China." How could he get this understanding? It is because of the godly exposure his parents gave to him. Taylor later confessed that the constant discussion that took place at his home about God's word and the Lord's work made a great impression upon him. His parents lived and taught godly values to their children. [1]

F.B. Meyer (1847-1929) is another man who was a great blessing to his generation, not to mention till ours. It is said his home life was not only happy and comfortable, but also spiritual. His mother taught the Holy Bible and his father was an exemplary and dedicated Christian businessman. In the evenings, they had regular family prayers at home. So powerful was the godly impact upon Meyer at his home that while he was still in his teens he had a passion to serve God and began to share God's word. [2]

How alien today's young generation has become to the spiritual world! There are spiritual giants in the history of the church who could testify that their homes have been a great blessing to them in knowing God and His word than pulpits. Do our children hear the word of God only from pulpit or even at home?

During the Puritan Movement in the 16th and 17th centuries, every child knew the Ten Commandments and was taught to carefully observe them. Puritan parents reminded their children from an early age that even the greatest worldly learning, acclaim, or success would be worth nothing if one's heart were fixed on something other than God.[3] Do we find our present generation parents reminding children of this significant fact? O, how many young ones are serving self and success alone for lack of godly teaching at home! Aren't they observing their

parents who teach by their priorities and pursuits that money, materialism, luxuries, success, fame are the most important things in life?

It is with sadness I have to say that God is not the centre of many Christian homes. If today's youth has to be revived for God, there need to be revival first in parents. O, how can our young people live a life on fire for God when parents remain lukewarm! They have to witness in their parents that spirituality is not something which is practiced within the confines of church atmosphere; it is something which is lived out in every aspect of life, beginning from home.

Final Words There are two things I want to mention before I close:

1) I am not saying our children have to become missionaries, pastors or full-time Christian workers through our godly parenting. I believe there is a great need of God's witnesses in the marketplace than in church. We need to train our children in such a way that whether they do business, job or church ministry, they would live their life loving God, walking in His ways and impacting the people around them for Christ.

2) I am not claiming that if we teach our children God's ways it is a cast-iron guarantee of their growth in godliness; however, there is a high possibility of that being so. If our children become disobedient, let it be because of their own choice in spite of our thorough godly training but not because of lack of it. May we do our best in training and bringing up our children by utterly depending upon the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and leave the results to God "who makes things grow" (1 Corinthians 3:7)!

Finally, may I not hide from you that I feel ashamed for neglecting my own home in godly training for years and give glory to God for convicting me to realize the necessity of ministering to my family. I have learned it is disobedience unto God to ignore to train my children. What profit it is for me to minister to the whole world, yet neglect my family and forfeit them? So let these words be constantly heard in our home, "Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD" (Psalms 34:11).

Notes:

[1] Warren W. Wiersbe, *50 People Every Christian Should Know* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), pg. 134 [2] *Ibid.*, pg. 210

[3] George M. Marsden, *A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), pg. 16-17

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S. Better, But Not Perfect

Better, But Not Perfect When Malcolm Muggeridge (1903-1990), a prolific English journalist and writer, was asked, "Did you ever get to a point where you thought you were a good Christian?" He candidly responded, "No...No, I'm afraid not. But I'm better than I was." The response given by Muggeridge reveals an apt description about what Christian life is. It isn't a life of perfection. Not even a life of dereliction. It is but a life of continuous sanctification. In living a Christian life, we are not as worse as we were nor will we be as perfect as we should be. It is a life of transition, not a state of life, from imperfection to perfection, from evil to good, from ungodliness to Christ-likeness. It is a life where we become better and better and better in our brief journey of life on earth. Are you disappointed because your life isn't perfect? Focus on perfection and you will end up condemning yourself for not being so. Focus on the person Jesus Christ and you will find hope to keep going after Him amidst the storms of life. Is it not written, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith?" (Hebrews 12:2)

Yes, there will be times we miserably fail, but Christ says, "Rise up and walk." There will be times we feel insecure, but Christ says, "Be strong and do not fear." There will be times we become anxious, but Christ says, "Trust Me." There will be times we fall in sin, but Christ says, "Repent and follow Me." There will be times we feel hopeless, but Christ says, "Rise up and cling unto Me." There will be times we are shattered, but Christ says, "Humble yourself under My mighty hand and I will make your life better." As I write this, I am remembered of a work I had given to a carpenter. In the process of his work, I showed some flaws here and there and questioned the work of his hands. His response went something like this, "I need to still work on them. I haven't finished my work yet." Likewise, when we are disappointed looking at our lives, marked with flaws, failures and weaknesses, I think, our Divine Carpenter is saying, "I haven't finished My work on you yet."

"God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

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S. Biblical Principles for Healthy Communication

Biblical Principles for Healthy Communication Who doesn't agree that one of the greatest problems we are facing today in interpersonal relationships is unhealthy communication? Who doesn't confront difficulties in family, in workplace and in neighborhood because of lack of good communication? Who isn't aware of the fact that conflicts in relationships are usually flared up due to ill-mannered communication? In spite of so much of advancement in technical communication isn't man still lacking the discernment to speak well?

There are surplus books on communication in our day but nothing like the wisdom we find in that Old Book which is as old as sun and as fresh as the dawn. Indeed all communication skills echo the truth we find in the Holy Scripture. Have you miserably failed like me in apt communication and struggling to improve your attitude and skills for healthy communication? Then join with me in considering and obeying the following exhortations of the Scripture:

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR HEALTHY COMMUNICATION Guard Your Tongue when You Talk He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity. (Proverbs 21:23) Listen Well before Answering He who answers before listening-- that is his folly and his shame. (Proverbs 18:13) Think before Speaking & Answering The heart of the godly thinks carefully before speaking; the mouth of the wicked overflows with evil words. (Proverbs 15:28) Speak not in Haste Do you see a man who speaks in haste?

There is more hope for a fool than for him. (Proverbs 29:20) Speak the Right Words at the Right Time A man finds joy in giving an apt reply-- and how good is a timely word! (Proverbs 15:23) Be Quick to Listen, Slow to Speak Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. (James 1:19) Speak the Truth in Love

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. (Ephesians 4:15) Be Truthful in Your Conversations Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices. (Colossians 3:9) Speak Words of Edification Do not let any corrupt talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:29) Avoid Quarrelsome Talk Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out. (Proverbs 17:14) Stay Silent when Necessary Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.

(Proverbs 17:28) Beware of Being Talkative When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. (Proverbs 10:19) Understand Others' Words and Feelings A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly.

(Proverbs 14:29) Speak Pleasant Words Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. (Proverbs 16:24) Communicate Gently A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1) Resist Using Reckless Words Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (Proverbs 12:18) Let Your Speech

be Sound, Gracious and Enthralling Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Colossians 4:6) When You are in the Wrong, Don't Use Defensive and Justifying Words, but only Words of Apology Confess your sins to each other. (James 5:16) Avoid Nagging and Grumbling about Others' Faults He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends. (Proverbs 17:9) Condemn not Others if They are Different

Let us stop condemning each other. Instead, make up your mind to live in such a way that you would not put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. (Romans 14:13) Deny using Vengeful Words and Reacting Angrily Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:9) Keep Yourself Away from Gossiping about Others A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends. (Proverbs 16:28) Speak not without Knowing the Facts A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps. (Proverbs 14:15) Correct not a Person's Alleged Faults without Careful Examination

One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. (Deuteronomy 19:15)

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

(Psalms 19:14) Feel free to post your comments below or you may write to : friendsofchrist@gmail.com

S. Biggest Killer of Interpersonal Relationships

Biggest Killer of Interpersonal Relationships

Four preachers met for a friendly gathering. During the conversation one preacher said, "Our people come to us and pour out their hearts, confess certain sins and needs. Let's do the same. Confession is good for the soul." In due time all agreed. One confessed he liked to go to movies and would sneak off when away from his church. The second confessed to liking to smoke cigars and the third one confessed to liking to play cards. When it came to the fourth one, he wouldn't confess. The others pressed him saying, "Come now, we confessed ours. What is your secret or vice?" Finally he answered, "It is gossiping and I can hardly wait to get out of here." [1]

Look at the people when they come together and what do you notice? Gossip is the heart of conversation; it adds spice to the talk. You can hardly find a gathering of two or three people without wallowing in gossip. These days almost everyone looks like a newspaper with a gossip column. Well, what is bad about gossip? "To gossip means," wrote Lawrence G. Lovasik, "to talk needlessly about the faults and failings of others....To gossip means to watch closely the conduct of one's neighbor and to indulge in unwarranted criticism of his motives and in rash judgment as to the nature of his sins." [2] Who doesn't relish talking about the weaknesses of others? Quite few, right? "The only time people don't like gossip is when the gossip is about them", said Will Rogers. [3] Like a hungry person desperate to stuff his stomach with food the one who gossips is always desperate to talk about other people's affairs. Gossip gives incessant pleasure to its instrument and insurmountable pain to its object. It is, no wonder, the major killer of interpersonal relationships. Heaven knows how many relationships have been broken, causing irreparable damage, because of this ill-mannered conversation. When it comes to gossip what saddens is that many Christians manifest no different attitude from the worldly people. It has become almost impossible for them to meet together without speaking ill of others. Where two are gathered there is the devil usually present to tempt them to talk evil about the third person. In my experience I'd seldom witnessed people who do not gossip. I am ashamed to admit that at times I myself fell victim to this wicked conversation.

How many enjoy gossip under the mask of Christian fellowship! How lovingly people act when face to face and later speak evil behind each other! At worst, this is one area where people become too defensive to accept their sin. They have become so desensitized to this sin that they no longer consider it as something detestable in the sight of the Holy One. If we honestly examine ourselves in the light of the Holy Spirit, many of us may be found guilty of this wretched sin—gossip. In these last days, the devil is using this as his mighty weapon, for he is aware that gossip has disruptive influence upon the unity of the Spirit. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, "I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder" (1 Corinthians 12:20). I fear it is the same with many Christians today. As it only takes a spark to destroy the whole forest, so it takes just a gossip to wreck wonderful relationships.

Remember, relationships perish when people relish to gossip!

REASONS FOR GOSSIP

There are reasons why people love to gossip. These reasons do not justify the sin of gossip but should rather caution us to avoid gossip when we find ourselves in such situations. Some of them are: a) Problems: People generally gossip when they confront problems with others. Gossip is often the reaction of an offended heart. No problems, no gossip. At times problems may not necessarily be with others but with themselves, for there are times the real problem doesn't exist in a situation but in perception. Of course, there are rare situations when people gossip even when there are no problems, only to create problems. b) To seek comfort and attention from others: When people are hurt by someone what they often do is to try to seek comfort from others by gossiping about the offensive one. They want others to feel sorry for them. c) To release bitterness: Gossip is a release of bitterness from one's heart against someone. This release isn't about "freeing from bitterness" but "spreading of bitterness". In most cases, people gossip, not to get the right counsel in order to approach the problem, but to spread their bitterness to others. d) To justify themselves: Those who gossip do so to justify themselves before others. When their 'ego' is under disrepute or under threat, people gossip to prove that they are right and good by defaming others. e) To idle away the time: Some gossip to idle away their time. They are sluggards and idle talkers who relish gossiping about the affairs of other people—after all, gossiping is the best way to pass time. About such people the Holy Bible says, "Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to" (1 Timothy 5:13).

Those who know how to use their time wisely do not get into superfluous talk.

Notes:

[1] Taken from: <http://net.bible.org/illustration.php?topic=664> [2] Lawrence G. Lovasik, *Kindness* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pg. 205.

[3] Taken from: <http://www.kentcrockett.com/cgi-bin/illustrations/index.cgi?topic=Gossip> Contact: friendsofchrist@gmail.com CONSEQUENCES OF GOSSIP

There was a man who told so many malicious untruths about the local rabbi that, overcome by remorse, he begged the rabbi to forgive him. "And, Rebbe, tell me how I can make amends." The rabbi sighed, "Take two pillows, go to the public square and there cut the pillows open. Wave them in the air. Then come back." The rumormonger quickly went home, got two pillows and a knife, hastened to the square, cut the pillows open, waved them in the air and hastened back to the rabbi's chambers. "I did just what you said, Rebbe!"

"Good." The rabbi smiled. "Now, to realize how much harm is done by gossip, go back to the square..."

"And?"

"And collect all your feathers." [1]

Gossip often reaps irreparable consequences, yet focusing on the weaknesses of other people and gossiping about them has become a disposition of the majority of Christians. In doing so, many relationships are shallow, weak and dismantled. The intriguing thing is that people find great

pleasure in gossiping and also listen with great curiosity and delight. It is said, "The words of a gossip are like tasty bits of food. People like to gobble them up" (Proverbs 18:8, NCV). Yes, speaking ill of others appeases one's 'self.' To many, gossip is a kind of great pleasure and quite difficult to avoid. Nevertheless, the Holy Scripture offers few warnings regarding the consequences of gossip which every Christian need to seriously consider: a) Those who gossip cannot enjoy the holy presence of God in their lives. God hates gossip and His manifesting presence is far from gossipers. It is written, "Lord, who may enter your Holy Tent? Who may live on your holy mountain? Only those who are innocent and who do what is right. Such people speak the truth from their hearts and do not tell lies about others. They do no wrong to their neighbors and do not gossip (Proverbs 15:1-3, NCV). b) A gossip is an untrustworthy person, lacks confidentiality and is therefore to be avoided. It is written, "A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much" (Proverbs 20:19). c) Gossip ruins healthy relationship and wrecks one's reputation. It is written, "A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends" (Proverbs 16:28). d) Gossip stirs up anger in interpersonal relationships. It is written, "The north wind brings forth rain, And a backbiting tongue, an angry countenance" (Proverbs 25:23, NASB). e) Entertaining gossips is to invite insurmountable problems in relationships. It is written, "Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down" (Proverbs 26:20). f) The one who gossips is a troublemaker, not a peacemaker. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

Let us give thought to the above consequences before we attempt to gossip.

OVERCOMING GOSSIP

Most of us know that gossip is sin, yet most of us gossip. Remember - Gossip is like the fireworks, for it explodes valuable relationships. It is never a solution to the problems; instead it adds misery. As we are called to make every effort to live at peace with all men, we ought to deal with interpersonal problems according to God's instructions. God knows our every problem and He has revealed in His Word how to deal with problematic situations. We have to approach issues without staining our mouths with gossip - after all, what good it does to stain ourselves by throwing stones of gossip into the flaws of others. Therefore, to those who are willing to live in obedient to God's word, the following are some of the practical guidelines to overcome the problem of gossip: a) Determine not to gossip: Make a firm resolution not to gossip about others. It is written about Daniel that he, "resolved not to defile himself" (Daniel 1:8 a). Dave Hunt wrote, "Obedience begins with a determination to obey." [2] Who can help an unwilling heart! There is no transformation without firm determination. To overcome gossip one must seriously resolve not to speak unnecessarily about the weaknesses and affairs of other people. We must not say, "I cannot help myself from gossiping" but "I can overcome gossip through Christ who strengthens me." b) Discipline to mind one's own business: People generally mind their own business when it comes to caring others but try to meddle in with other people's private affairs. It is written in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders...." The admonition "lead a quiet life" is the translation of Greek [hesuchazo], "to refrain from gossip or meddlesomeness." [3] We must focus on what we have to do and do it than worry about what others are not doing and start gossiping. Discipline yourself to stay focussed on your work and responsibilities without meddling in with superfluous issues. Be hard on yourself to become kind to

others. c) Deny those who gossip: One reason why people gossip more is because of eager listeners. Gossip must be firmly avoided, or else it will inevitably influence and entrap those who listen. We must not fear of hurting the people who gossip to us (when the hurt is actually for good) by firmly refusing them to gossip. If gossiping is dumping garbage on others then listening to gossip is to become a garbage can. So don't become a trash can but a vase of flowers. Listen to Paul's counsel, "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Warn a gossip gently to cease gossiping and if needed, firmly rebuke. If no change, avoid a person who gossips. God's word exhorts, "A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much" (Proverbs 20:19). d) Directly confront in love: Some people try to justify gossip by claiming what they speak is really the truth. Whether truth or false - gossip is harmful. If any problem occur in interpersonal relationships there is a way for restoration and must be dealt according to the set pattern given in the Holy Bible. In Matthew 18:15, Jesus taught, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault just between the two of you." This is the most significant and appropriate method for restoration (Of course there is room to share with confidential people who can help in counseling or solving the interpersonal problems. Matthew 18:16). If others sin against us, we must take initiative to correct them personally in love than gossip about them publicly.

It is always good and healthy to speak to the person regarding the problem rather than speak about the person before others. But some give excuses, "This doesn't work; people won't accept correction." Our goal is to do all that we can, make every effort possible, to be in good relationship with others. It is not good to come to conclusions before facing the results. God always expects us to do our best and leave the rest to Him.

It's true that all do not have the attitude to change but there is a great possibility of building sound relationships through this kind of approach. Though correcting others may not work all the time but there is all possibility for resolving conflicts and to build healthy relationships. Never forget this wise counsel, "If there are problems that need to be addressed, it is better to confront in love than to gossip."^[4] If we do not have boldness and respect to confront the person directly it is better to shut our mouth rather than gossip. e) Do know yourself: I have learned that when I don't examine myself and recognize my own weaknesses I am easily prone to gossip about others. He who does not examine himself will always sneak to criticize others' faults! If I know my own weaknesses and failures I will fear to speak ill about others. He who knows himself well will not be hasty to speak ill about others. When I truly understand how much God is gracious towards me I will refuse to be unkind toward others. I have observed that if I unkindly gossip about others the Lord will not shower His grace upon me, however desperately I cry, to overcome my own weaknesses.

I believe it is quite important that we always examine ourselves and know ourselves well, for doing this will help us to abstain from gossip. The more we understand our struggles with our own imperfections the more we would learn to speak kindly about others. Very rarely do people speak about others' weaknesses with a concerned heart. Gossip usually comes out of a ruthless heart. Let us never forget the words of our Lord, "Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy" (Matthew 5:7). Gossip is a sign of merciless heart, so let us learn to be merciful. f) Dominate your tongue: I think most of the sins that we commit are with our tongue. We have to learn to dominate or tame our tongue. No wonder it is written, "When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise" (Proverbs 10:19). Charles Swindoll was right when he said, "More than

any slanderous event, any immoral act, any unwise financial dealings, that which breaks up a church quickest is an unchecked tongue.”[5] Not only the church, an uncontrolled and unchecked tongue wrecks any relationship. Therefore, let us consider carefully before we speak. Alan Redpath suggested that before we speak - THINK:

T—Is it true?

H—Is it helpful?

I—Is it inspiring?

N—Is it necessary?

K—Is it kind?

If what I am about to say does not pass those tests, I will keep my mouth shut![6] [1] <http://net.bible.org/illustration.php?topic=664> [2] Dave Hunt, Loving God (Bend Oregon: The Berean Call, November, 2004), pg. 4.

[3] International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic text and markup copyright 1998 by Epiphany Software.

[4] Life Application Study Bible, New International Version (Co-published by, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. & Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), pg. 2124.

[5] Charles R. Swindoll, Three Steps Forward Two Steps Back (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), pg. 166.

[6] Alan Redpath, Daily Christian Quote (March, 2005).

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S. Can God Be Absolutely Loving Without Being Righteous?

Can God Be Absolutely Loving Without Being Righteous? For centuries, what stunned people, shook their hearts and moved them to tears is the scene of CROSS. The cross has become a sign of God's ultimate expression of His love. Jesus Himself said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The memorable John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son..." Also, Romans 5:8 declares, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." But why did Jesus have to lay down His life on the cross? Why did God sacrifice His Son for us? Why did Christ die for us, undergoing disgraceful and painful death on the cross? As we know, it is for the forgiveness of our sins. It is written, "For Christ died for sins once for all" (1 Peter 3:18). But why did He have to do all this to forgive us? Could He not just declare forgiveness without having Christ die on the cross? The Holy Bible reveals that God is righteous (Psalms 119:137). Can one be righteous without loving purity with perfect love and without hating sin with perfect hatred? Absolutely not! Because God is righteous, He perfectly hates sin, for sin is against His nature and attributes (Proverbs 15:9; Proverbs 15:26). And it is to meet the righteous requirements of God—Jesus had to die on the cross (Romans 8:3-4). Everyone who sins shall die, for God is righteous; He hates sin and He ought to punish sin (Ezekiel 18:20 a; Romans 6:23). But God also loves us, so He poured out His wrath and curse upon Jesus, punishing our sin in Him and having Him suffer and die in our stead (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13).

Remember, without God's righteousness the cross has no meaning and purpose. And without the righteousness of God, the full extent of His love could never have been manifested to us and comprehended by us. The price for our sin was so expensive—costing the life of Christ—because God's standard of righteousness is high and perfect. O, the cross was the junction where the righteousness and the love of God fully met and kissed each other!

Here is my question: what really moves us—God simply declaring His forgiveness or the death of Christ on the cross for the atonement of our sins? Obviously, the death of Christ which gave us life! We could never have been amazed at God's love if forgiveness was just a matter of declaration in words. It is the righteousness of God which showed God's full extent of His love for us, the sinners. The complete expression of God's loves was shown on the cross because it is there where God's righteousness was fully satisfied.

Therefore, I believe, God cannot be absolutely loving without being righteous. How well it is asserted:

- Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have done great things. Who, O God, is like you? (Psalms 71:19)
- Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. (Micah 7:18)

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below

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S. Can Married Couples Watch Pornography Together?

Can Married Couples Watch Pornography Together?

One day my wife and I happened to visit a married couple. As I was discussing about marital issues with them, the woman candidly asked me a question—“Is it okay for my husband and me to watch pornography together? Someone known to me suggested it is sexually healthy for a couple to watch porn together.”

There are many misleading voices these days, saying—“Watching porn together is one of the best ways a couple can connect.” “Watching porn together strengthens your sexual relationship.” “Watching porn together adds fuel into your dry marriage.” I have even found an article entitled, “Couples who watch porn together stay together.”

According to a debate on Times of India.com on whether couples are okay with watching porn together, 53 pct felt that it was perfectly natural, while 43 pct held it to be morally degrading. If this is the perspective in a more conservative and traditional nation like India, which is now becoming more liberal in moral issues, I can imagine the vote for couples watching porn together would be even higher in the West.

Although many may voice against watching pornography alone for personal pleasure, there are numerous people assuming that it is good to watch porn as a couple. They suppose it boosts their sexual life in marriage, but without discerning its side effects.

According to God’s word, I strongly believe it is wrong, even sinful, for a married couple, or anyone for that matter, to watch pornography. It is detrimental to one’s personal and marital life.

Want reasons? Here they are:

1) It is a shameful thing to watch the nakedness of a person other than your spouse. When Adam and Eve were created by God, they were naked all the time and felt no shame (Genesis 2:25). But after they sinned against God, they realized their nakedness and felt shameful (Genesis 3:7). Since then, man and woman have become sinful and their hearts corrupted. Their eyes have fallen short of viewing nakedness with sanctity. For this reason, we cover our body with clothes, not only to protect it from cold, heat and dust, but also from sinful eyes which craves to feed on nakedness. The only time a man and woman lose their shame when they look at the nakedness of each other is during sexual activity. Apart from the act of sex, even husband and wife would be ashamed before each other to live always naked in the house. (Of course, there are exceptions in the case of nudists who are weird folks in society)

Sex (during which a man and woman relish the naked bodies of each other) is God’s gift to mankind, which is to be enjoyed within the boundary of marriage, both for the purpose of reproduction and mutual pleasure. Outside of marriage, whether to think, view and participate in sex is biblically called “sexual immorality” or “immoral use of sex”.

Although this is a figurative language expressing the backslidden state of God's people, see how it is a shameful thing to expose one's nakedness, "When she [Jerusalem] carried on her prostitution openly and exposed her nakedness, I [the Lord] turned away from her in disgust, just as I had turned away from her sister [Samaria]" (Ezekiel 23:18). Look at the judgment prophesied by Habbakuk, "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies" (Habakkuk 2:15).

What do these Scriptures speak? The loving God detests deliberate exposure of nakedness before others, particularly with sensual intent and evoking sensual feelings inappropriately. If exposing one's nakedness sensually is sinful, is it not sinful too to sensually watch the nakedness of other people? Is not pornography a lustful gaze at other people's nakedness?

However, when it comes to marriage, it is plainly written, "The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:4). In marriage, the Holy Bible says it is good to give each other their bodies for mutual pleasure. It is wrong, in fact, for a married couple not to offer each other their bodies for sex, except by mutual consent, for Satan will tempt them to sin outside of marriage because of their lack of self-control (1 Corinthians 7:5).

Therefore, since a person's body and the enjoyment of its nakedness belong to one's own spouse, don't you suppose it is a shameful and sinful thing to watch the naked body of another person who is not your wife or your husband for sexual stimulation, whether watching it alone or with your spouse?

Remember, nakedness, which is cherished during the act of sex, is a private property of one's spouse, not a public exposure to all.

2) The object of sexual stimulation should be the body of your own spouse, not sexually explicit pictures and videos wherein the other person's body is viewed for sensual provocation.

Many don't give careful thought to what happens when couples watch pornography together for the purpose of stimulating themselves to have sexual intercourse. Are they are not receiving sensual stimulation from others' bodies, nakedness and sexual act? Don't you think the bodies of other people would become more stimulating for them than the body of their own spouse? Who ultimately is your source of sexual pleasure—your own spouse or that sexually explicit person in porn?

Here is a fact which many are unaware. Porn stars often build up the structure of their bodies for public attraction. Their breasts and genitals are enhanced surgically. They project themselves in such a sexy way that they become irresistibly fascinating.

Now how does this impact the couple who watch these unusual bodies? The bodies of their own spouses become unappealing in comparison to those projected in porn. Women in particular may feel inferior when they see their body structure not as fascinating as women in porn. Men may even compare their wives with those women in porn, finding themselves more dissatisfied with their wives and more lustful towards other women. They may crave and cherish more of who they see and what they see in porn than their actual marriage partner.

Some women from a study stated:

"I am no longer sexually attractive or desirable to him." "He's more attracted to the women depicted in the movies, magazines, and websites than he is to me, and I feel completely unable to compete with these women." Research has shown that most men experience decreased sexual intimacy with their marriage partner when they are given to porn. (The Men's and Women's Program, 2011, pg. 140-141)

Dear couples, do you hear this? In making a decision to watch porn alone or with your spouse, rather than resisting it, you are making a choice to lose yourself from each other's world. Beware, it could also become an addiction without which, i.e. without looking at the naked bodies and sexual intercourse of other people, you cannot enjoy sex together.

Besides, here is another dangerous thing that could happen when couples watch porn: When watching porn together with a purpose of engaging into sexual activity, there is a high possibility for either of them or both to secretly fantasize having sex with the person in porn while actually having sex with their own spouse. Take note of this: since mind is prone to easily absorb sensual images, what we watch has a terrible impact upon how we think, fantasize and act.

One woman expressed her embarrassment this way: "I am no longer a sexual person or partner to him, but a sexual object. He is not really with me, not really making love to me... He seems to be thinking about something else – likely those porn women... He is just using me as a warm body." (Study by Bergner & Bridges, 2002)

Therefore, dear husbands and wives, let the source and contentment of sexual pleasure be the body of your spouse, not those sexually explicit images and videos of strangers that rob true sexual pleasure within marriage.

Some justify watching porn to learn some sex positions in order to enjoy good sex in marriage. However, the fact is pornography mostly portrays sex in unrealistic ways, particularly hardcore porn wherein sexual images and videos are more violent and has negative impact upon sexual relationship with one's spouse. But there are good books written with balance and decency about how to stimulate each other sexually, providing good sex techniques for sexual fulfillment in marriage. The following are some books which I confidently recommend:

The Acts of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love by Tim and Beverly LaHaye

Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage by Ed and Gaye Wheat

Sheet Music: Uncovering the Secrets of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage by Dr. Kevin Leman

The Language of Sex: Experiencing the Beauty of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage by Dr. Gary Smalley and Ted Cunningham

Answers for Your Marriage by Bruce and Carol Britten

3) Watching pornography together may create more distance between one another, particularly during interpersonal problems.

There are those who are misled into thinking that watching pornography together will build sexual intimacy in marriage. Let us examine this fallacy.

I think, we all agree that marriage is not always a bed of roses. There are good times and there are bad times. When times are good, a husband and wife may enjoy each other sexually, but when difficult times come, i.e. interpersonal problems, where do you think they may turn to satisfy themselves? When husband and wife offend each other and when wife is not in a mood to have sex with her husband, there is a great possibility for her husband to turn to porn for some physical satisfaction. He who is used to watch with his wife will now watch alone for his personal pleasure. This may even lead to addiction to porn, even to some extramarital affair, eventually leading to disastrous family life.

You know, sometimes it is the hunger for sexual satisfaction which drives a man to get reconciled with his wife and to please her. Of course, this may not always be the best motive, but there is at least some good in it which unites him again with his wife. I believe, one of the reasons why God has blessed man with "testosterone hormones" [major sex hormones in males] is so that he would always cleave to his wife. But pornography may rob this possibility, driving a man to nude images and videos of other women and finally leading to emotional and physical affair with others. In a marriage relationship wherein a husband and wife look to each other alone for sexual satisfaction—they cannot stay far away from each other for a long time. Sadly, in our present age, many are looking for sexual satisfaction beyond their marriage partner, consequently leading to irreconcilable relationship and family break-up.

Therefore, don't you think spouses should discourage each other from watching porn, whether watching together or alone? Don't you see pornography creates more distance in marriage than intimacy?

Final Words

Sex is not just about the union of two bodies for some physical pleasure. It is most importantly the expression of love within marriage wherein a husband and wife give themselves to each other for one another's pleasure and satisfaction. For porn stars, sex comes at a price of money or for something else. But in marriage, sex comes at a price of love.

Everyone who is married for sometime may agree to this—to enjoy sex constantly and satisfyingly in marriage, one need to work hard on denying self and loving one's spouse. Sex is often a gift coupon received for some loving acts towards one's spouse. For example, when a wife is greatly pleased with affectionate acts manifested by her husband towards her, will she not easily yield to romance and sex?

So, what does this speak? Sex is a pleasure enjoyed in love relationship. Where there is no love, sex loses its purpose, vigor and true satisfaction.

You know, when marriage turns dry and boring, it is not primarily because of lack of good sex, but because of lack of affection for each other. It is because of lack of proper communication. It is because of lack of romance (apart from sex). So the remedy is not watching porn for healthy sex, but improving communication, affection and romance, which inescapably leads to having a healthy sexual life in marriage. The saddest thing in pornography is that there is no manifestation of love. You see just those unmarried partners treating each other like sexual objects. And those who are used to watch porn learn to treat their spouses as simply sexual objects and unlearn how to love another. But God has created sex to have more meaningful expression of love which couples are

privileged to enjoy as a result of loving each other.

Let me close this article with a thought by King Solomon, “Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love” (Proverbs 5:15-19). In other words, “Seek sexual satisfaction from your spouse alone. Don’t let others to take that place. Don’t look for sexual satisfaction outside your marriage [in our age, turning to porn or to some illicit affair]. Don’t share sex with others. Rejoice in your spouse, enjoy the body of your spouse and may you ever be satisfied by your spouse’s love. Let your wife or husband be the only person in whom you find your physical satisfaction.”

Finally, if you, as a believer, are engaged in watching porn, alone or together with your spouse, I encourage you to flee and resist such temptation by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. And if you don’t know Christ personally and are caught up in this bondage, I would like to let you know that Christ died for your sins and rose again from the dead to offer you forgiveness of your sins and eternal life. If you trust in Him, you will not only find forgiveness of your sins, but as you keep growing in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, you would also learn to grow in loving one another as a blessed family in the Lord.

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S. Caution about Contemporary Movies: Avoiding Every Form of Impurity

Caution about Contemporary Movies: Avoiding Every Form of Impurity

Watching movies is one of the most entertaining tools of our day. It has become a necessary recreation for many, not to mention, an addiction. Now I don't believe it is completely wrong to watch movies. There are movies that are quite refreshing, inspiring, challenging and even life-changing.

Nevertheless, most of the movies that are made in our time are found awful, entertaining people with disgusting content. Although there is something to get excited over the way movies are made with stunning technology, it is regretful to see how the current visual media is given over to sexual depravity, losing moral senses and shame. And what amazes me is how the people of the Living God have become desensitized to immoral scenes presented in most of the contemporary movies.

Avoiding Every Form of Impurity

One of the devil's tricks we learn from the modern media is this—if you want to popularize evil and make it acceptable, just present it in the form of entertainment. For instance, think about French kiss, foreplay and immodest exposure of one's body in the movies. I hear many Christians justifying themselves by watching such things, "It is just a drama."

Well, do we feel comfortable with our wife performing such scenes with other men in a play or drama? I can understand action scenes being faked but how are French kiss, foreplay and immodesty faked? Although it is a play, the actors are really involved in performing the act, sensually exposing their bodies and sexually touching one another's bodies. Consequently, they are having a detrimental influence on the emotions of the viewers, particularly upon children and youth.

Some say, "I watch them but I don't feel any reaction to them" or "It is just a movie" or "It's common" or "I am not practicing but just casually watching."

Listen, my dear people—The Holy Bible instructs us there should not be even a hint of sexual immorality (Ephesians 5:3). Note these words: Not even a hint of sexual immorality. Again, it is written in 1 Thessalonians 5:22, "Abstain from every form of evil." Make these words: Every form of evil.

What should we comment about most of the movies in our day? We not only find a hint of impurity but manifestly perform immorality without shame. So, as God's chosen people, are we not exhorted to despise and abstain from everything that gives even the appearance or hint of evil? Are we obeying the Scriptural exhortations when we watch sensual performances in the movies?

I was reading in my personal devotion today, "Hate what is evil; cling to what is good" (Romans 12:9). Do we hate the evil projected in the movies or do we get entertained by them? How can I

take delight in that which God forbids? How can I just watch sensual things, though with a neutral attitude, when God's word exhorts to hate such sinful acts?

God's Call to Sexual Purity

Sex is God's exhilarating gift to mankind with a mandate to enjoy it within marital bond and that too in privacy. But, what shall we say about the actors who participate in sensual acts? They not only perform sensual things publicly, but in real life they are also not married to each other. Much worse, what they propagate in the movies is fornication, i.e. having sex before or without marriage, even live-in relationships.

We are aware of how Dan Brown subtly tried to debunk the historic truths of Christianity in the form of a novel "Da Vinci Code." Likewise, I see most of the contemporary movies debunking biblical moral standards in the form of entertainment, thereby infiltrating the minds of viewers to make immoral things acceptable in the society.

Don't you suppose, we, God's chosen people, are fooled by the modern entertainment?

Think about obscene outfits, deep French kiss and lustful scenes found, even in the movies made for kids and that which claim of presenting an inspirational message. Is it biblically okay to entertain people or to get entertained by such things? How many Christians are entertained by sexually immoral acts performed in the movies when in fact they should be filled with righteous indignation for despising God's moral standards!

Dear friends, if we have engaged ourselves in the sensual entertainment of our day, losing passion for God's holiness and moral standards, don't you think it is time for us to repent and take our stand against the corrupt system of our age? In this age of sensuality and sexual immorality, God is calling us to sexual purity. It is written for us, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).

If we did not make a commitment like the Psalmist, "I will set before my eyes no vile thing" (Psalms 101:3), then let us pray, "Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word" (Psalms 119:37).

Finally, the words of Peter said about two millenniums ago are no less relevant today or perhaps even more relevant—"Save yourselves from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40).

Related Articles:

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[The Conversation of Job on Lust](#)

[A Lesson from Cotton Buds on Sexual Purity](#)

[Winning the Battle for Sexual Purity](#)

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S. Devout Worship

Devout Worship The way we frequently use the term 'worship' seems as if we are so well acquainted with its understanding and practice. But is it really so? To me it appears the true meaning of worship is waning in our day. There are many worshippers today but are they devout worshippers? It is time to blow the trumpet and call people to get back to the Scriptures and gain some comprehension of what devout worship is.

Few days ago, in my meditation on Psalms 9:1-2, I have observed two features associated with devout worship, which I would like to share with you.

Telling of God's Wonders

David expressed, "I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders" (Psalms 9:1). David praised the Lord with his whole heart and spoke of all His wonders. Now this telling about God's wonders is not only his mention of God's greatness in his worship to Him but also seems to be speaking of His majesty to others. Eugene Peterson, in his popular translation, *The Message*, puts it this way, "I'm thanking you, God, from a full heart, I'm writing the book on your wonders." *New Living Translation* says, "I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all the marvelous things you have done."

Moreover, listen to what David sung in Psalms 145:3-6 :

Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; His greatness no one can fathom. One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds.

So, here is the point—devout worship results in declaring God's wonders to others. In superficial worship, there is praising God but there is no passion to tell His greatness to others. O, how many of us worship God in prayer meetings and church buildings, but in our normal conversations and personal discourses, with believers and unbelievers, do we speak of God's glory?

Here is a thought to think—If I love and adore someone dearly, will I not only praise that person but also share about his/her wonderful qualities with others? The one whose greatness and good nature I appreciate deeply, will I not also get excited to talk about him/her with others? Likewise, if we love and adore God with all our heart, how can we shut our mouth from speaking about His goodness, majesty and wonders to others? Is it not for this very purpose that God chose us to be His priests: But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises [excellencies, majesty] of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Therefore, our worship unto God is not complete, devout and genuine unless we are passionate to speak of His wonders, talk of His glory, share of His goodness and proclaim His awesome works to others. Our praise is incomplete without the expression of the excellencies of God to those

around us.

Delighting in the Lord In Psalms 9:2, David states, "I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High." Notice, before praising God's name, what do we observe David doing? He was glad and rejoiced in the Lord. He took great delight in God. His rejoicing in the Lord led him to worshipping God.

Here is another point—devout worship comes out of our utmost delight in God. In superficial worship, there is praising God and feeling good about oneself, but there is no delight in Him. O, we who worship God in the gatherings, don't you think our utmost delight is not in the Maker of our souls but in the things that have been made? I fear our heart is set on the delights of the world, yet our lips worship God without having a heart or passion for Him. Did not God Himself say, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me"? (Matthew 15:18; cf. Isaiah 29:13). Where there is heart in worship there is also delight in God but where there is no heart in worship but only words, there is no delight in Him.

Devout worship is the outcome of a heart which overflows with delight in the object of its worship. God takes delight in our worship when it comes forth out of our joy in Him. God wants us to praise Him by enjoying Him, for what is that worship of Him when there is no delight in Him. In devout worship—praising God and delighting Him are inseparable. C.S. Lewis brilliantly enlightens this thought in the following way:

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation... our joy is no more separable from the praise in which it liberates and utters itself than the brightness a mirror receives is separable from the brightness it sheds. The Scotch catechism says that man's chief end is 'to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.' But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.

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S. Did Christ Become Poor to Make Us Wealthy Christians on Earth?

Did Christ Become Poor to Make Us Wealthy Christians on Earth?

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)

I think, today's Christianity is confronting more heretical teachings than any in church history. Out of many false teachings that are abounding in Christianity, one such which is commonly widespread is prosperity gospel. Not only in the Western countries, it is also spreading like a wildfire in the urban cities of my nation, India. Many gullible folks are becoming victims of this dangerous teaching. Hence, I decided to address this issue in my blog.

There are many Scriptures which prosperity preachers use, perhaps it is proper to say abuse, to prove their doctrine that God wants all Christians to become wealthy. And 2 Corinthians 8:9 is one of the key foundational Scriptures for the champions of prosperity teaching. They claim that this Scripture speaks about Jesus giving up His riches to make us wealthy Christians on earth. So, for the time being, I would like to address this particular Scripture. Was Jesus Rich or Poor?

First, to say that Jesus became physically poor to make us materially rich goes right against their own teaching. What prosperity preachers actually argue is that Jesus was a wealthy person and had surplus goods. Listen to what one of the prominent proponents of this view asserts:

"The Bible says that He [Jesus] had a treasurer-a treasury (they called it "the bag"); that they had one man who was the treasurer, named Judas Iscariot; and the rascal was stealing out of the bag for three-and-a-half years and nobody knew that he was stealing. You know why? Because there was so much in it, He couldn't tell. Nobody could tell that anything was missing..., if Jesus didn't have anything, what do you need a treasury for? A treasury is for surplus. It's not for that which you're spending. It's only for surplus-to hold it until you need to spend it. Therefore, He must have had a whole lot that needed to be held in advance that He wasn't spending. So He must have had more than He was living on." [Fredrick K.C. Price, "Ever Increasing Faith" program on TBN [23 November 1990] <www.letusreason.org/wf15.htm>

If Jesus was wealthy, according to the prosperity preachers, how can they claim that He gave up His riches, becoming poor, to make us wealthy people, as per their interpretation of 2 Corinthians 8:9? To the one who is sane in his mind, doesn't this prove to be a sheer contradiction?

Now to justify their stance, certain prosperity preachers subtly twist 2 Corinthians 8:9 to claim Jesus was rich before the cross and the only time He became poor was when He was taken to the cross. However, this doesn't stand the test of biblical reason. The text doesn't tell us that Jesus became poor when He was taken to the cross. It simply says, "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." This seems to speak about Christ's incarnation, in which He left His heavenly glorious privileges and became poor, having being laid in a manger, taking up finite and weak body and walking around Palestine as an ordinary man but doing extraordinary things. Is not

because Jesus was born in a simple family that His mother Mary had to offer a sacrifice consisting of a pair of doves or two young pigeons, which only those who cannot afford were supposed to offer such sacrifices? (Luke 2:22-24; cf. Leviticus 12:2-8) Did not Jesus say to one of the wishful followers, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head"? (Matthew 8:19-20) Of course, He had His earthly parents' house, but he was constantly traveling from one place to another with no permanent home to lay his head.

Moreover, in his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, did not Jesus have to borrow the colt from another man, sit on it and entered Jerusalem? (Mark 11:1-11) Even when Jesus died, He had no tomb of His own. A rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, asked for Jesus' body and placed it in his own new tomb (Matthew 27:57-60). Finally, someone rightly points out that if Jesus was so rich, having Judas Iscariot as His treasurer, why should he betray Him for just thirty silver coins, which comes to about \$15 or about INR800? (Matthew 27:3) <<http://www.letusreason.org/wf15.htm>>

What Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:9, wherein Christ became poor in His incarnation, goes in line with Php 2:6-7, "Who [Christ], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

How clearly we are revealed to the fact that though Christ, being in very nature God, He left His heavenly riches and made Himself nothing, ordinary, poor, by taking the very nature of a servant! Although He was the King of Kings, He became a meek servant. (Matthew 20:25-28)

We have no clear evidence from the Holy Scripture that Jesus was rich before He went to the cross. Nevertheless, to justify their kingly lifestyle and to accumulate more wealth, prosperity preachers twist the Scriptures to make Jesus appear wealthy while He walked on earth, when in fact the Scripture plainly reveals that He became a humble servant and lived a simply life on earth.

Macedonian Churches

Second, if we go to the preceding verses of 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul challenges the Corinthian church about generous giving by pointing out to the generosity of Macedonian churches. He writes, "And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity" (2 Corinthians 8:1-2). Mark these words, "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity."

Observe carefully, it doesn't just say "poverty" but "extreme poverty." It is also worth noting—the same Greek word "πτωχεῖα" [ptochēia] is used when mentioning the poverty of Macedonian churches in verse 2 and the poverty of Christ in 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Now here is my question—if Jesus had become poor to make His people wealthy, why did the Macedonians churches have to give out of extreme poverty? They should have been wealthy, giving out of their riches of goods. But their greatness stands out, not because they gave out of abundance, but out of their inadequacy. Their poverty did not rob them of generosity.

Don't you suppose, to claim 2 Corinthians 8:9 as speaking about worldly prosperity is to simply distort the context of the Scripture which actually speaks about the poverty of Macedonian churches? Indeed, 2 Corinthians 8:1-24 doesn't prove the doctrine of prosperity but refutes it.

Needy Saints of Jerusalem

Third, it is important to understand the reason why Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 8:1-24; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15. Knowing its background would help us to stand against the misinterpretation of 2 Corinthians 8:9, which is widely propagated by prosperity preachers.

Paul was on a mission to raise funds to financially help the saints in Jerusalem. He writes in Romans 15:25-26, “Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.” I think, according to prosperity preachers, there shouldn’t be poor saints, but how come there were poor saints in Jerusalem for whom Paul was raising help from the churches?

He also writes in his first epistle to Corinthians, “Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem” (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). You see, Paul was encouraging the Corinthian church to set aside some money weekly as a collection for God’s people, so that it would be sent as a financial gift to the needy saints in Jerusalem. And then in 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their desire to help the poor saints in Jerusalem. He writes, “And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means” (2 Corinthians 10:1-18, 2 Corinthians 11:1-33). The Macedonian churches shared their contribution to the saints (v. 4) and Paul writes, “There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.” (2 Corinthians 9:10-11)

Observe carefully, Paul was not writing these words to raise money for his ministry, thereby living a prosperous life based on the contributions given to him. He was writing to raise money to help the needy believers of Christ, the very thing he was eager to do (Galatians 2:10). The fact that “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7) and “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2 Corinthians 9:6) were written in the context of helping the needy people of God. But don’t you see all these Scripture are used by prosperity preachers to motivate people to sow money in their ministry rather than giving much to help the needy people?

Well, here is my question—why was Paul striving to raise funds from various churches to help the needy saints at Jerusalem when these needy saints should have been rich and wealthy, according to the prosperity gospel interpretation of 2 Corinthians 8:9?

Even if the prosperity preachers use these Scriptures to motivate people towards generous giving, why are they unlike Paul who wrote these inspiring words to help the needy saints of Christ? This is the clear difference I see between Paul and today’s preachers of health and wealth gospel—Paul was passionate for the poor and needy saints, and the latter are zealous for prosperity.

Concluding Words The appropriate consideration of the context of 2 Corinthians 8:1-24; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15, and the rest of the Scriptures in connection to them, helps us to come to this plain interpretation of 2 Corinthians 8:9—Though Jesus was gloriously rich in heaven, for our sakes, He became physically poor on earth, taking the form of a servant, so that through His poverty we might become spiritually rich. And the reason Paul writes this is to motivate the Corinthians to imitate their Lord who gave Himself to benefit others so that they too would excel in the grace of giving (compare 2 Corinthians 8:9 with 2 Corinthians 8:7). Paul penned these words, not to propagate the doctrine of prosperity, but to spread out our hands out of generosity in order to help God's people in adversity.

Similarly, Paul explains about the deity and the servanthood of Christ in Php 2:6-11, so that the Philippians too would possess the attitude as that of Christ Jesus, which is to look not only to one's own interests, but also to the interests of others (Php 2:3-4).

O, how the prosperity preachers twist the Scriptures, manipulating people to give contributions to their own ministries while ignoring the poor and needy people of God! They are giving false hope of prosperity to people while they themselves are prospering on the money given to them. The Living God is going to judge them for their selfish ambitions, if they do not repent of their sin of self-indulgence and for misleading multitudes of naïve people by distorting the Holy Scripture of God. May the Lord's people be awakened to flee from the disease of prosperity teaching and cling to the sound teachings of God's word!

Related Articles:

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S. Did Jesus Command to Love Oneself?

Did Jesus Command to Love Oneself?

If you ask the personality developers, motivational speakers and many counselors of our time, "What is the important commandment of life?" many would perhaps say, "Love yourself". The Most Important Commandment When Jesus was asked, "What is the most important commandment?", He didn't say, "Love yourself." Instead, He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31).

It is worth noting the ending words of Matthew 12:31 : "There is no commandment greater than these." The most important and joyful thing on the face of the earth is to love God with our whole being, the Maker of the heavens and the earth. And in loving Him, love our neighbour as ourself.

'Love Yourself' or 'As Yourself'

Now many suppose that Jesus gave a command here to 'love oneself.' It is surprising to see how 'self-love' has become a matter of paramount importance in our day. Even many Christian writers and teachers advocate this, erecting it as a third commandment. However, the grammar doesn't suggest such a notion. To do so is to impose one's thought upon the text than allowing the text to speak for itself. The words 'love yourself' can be a command, but 'as yourself' is simply an acknowledged fact. Jesus didn't say, "Love yourself", but "Love your neighbour as yourself." In others word, "You love yourself, right? Okay. Then love your neighbour as well. Just as you love yourself, so also love your neighbour. Add to the love of self, which you already have, your love of neighbour."1 John Piper suitably articulates what Jesus is saying in effect:

I start with your inborn, deep, defining human trait—your love for yourself. This is a given. I don't command it; I assume it. All of you have a powerful instinct of self-preservation and self-fulfillment. You all want to be happy. You all want to live and to live with satisfaction. You want food for yourself. You want clothes for yourself. You want a place to live for yourself. You want protection from violence against yourself. You want meaningful or pleasant activity to fill your days. You want some friends to like you and spend some time with you. You want your life to count in some way. All this is self-love. Self-love is the deep longing to diminish pain and to increase happiness. That's what Jesus starts with when he says, "as yourself."2 God's Order of Love Of course, there is an implication of loving oneself but that's not the focus of Jesus' commandment. It is not good to stretch too much that which was not a predominant thought.

I comply with John Stott (1921-2011), "God's order is that we put Him first, others next, self last. Sin is the reversal of the order. It is to put ourselves first, our neighbour next, and God somewhere in the background."3 Don't we see this is what many are propagating—to love oneself as a prerequisite to loving God and loving neighbour?

Unlike many psychologists today, Jesus believed that man generally loves himself. Man's problem is not that he doesn't love himself but that he loves himself too much. Honestly, when I look into my heart in the light of Holy Spirit, my greatest problem is that I overly love myself; and my greatest struggle is to love God and others. Günther Bornkamm is right when he says, "We are most skilled in the love of ourselves; whether in selfish passion or in cool reflection, whether prompted by blind instinct or by some ideal, we desire our own self."⁴ From Self to Unself The fact that man struggles for attention, acceptance and appreciation shows how much he loves himself and got obsessed with a focus on his self. Even those who hate themselves may do so out of love for themselves, for they cannot see themselves let down. The reason why man is miserable today is simply because of his engrossment in self. So remedy is not self-love, but to love God with his whole heart and then his neighbour. Martin Luther actually viewed loving God and loving others as a cure for self-love.⁵

One major problem with the self-esteem movement—because of too much focus on self-esteem, it has produced a bunch of narcissists, although this may not be its intended fruit. It has pathetically reaped 'Me-Generation' and 'Self-obsessed Society'. What man needs is a radical change of nature, what Professor H.M. Gwatkin called "a change from self to unself."⁶ In saying this, I am neither endorsing self-hatred nor condemning healthy love of oneself. My point is not to become self-absorbed but to stay focussed on what Jesus said—love God and love others.

Self-Denial is Not the Goal

Besides, let none suppose self-denial is the goal of life. Not at all! Whether delight or denial, self is not the central issue. C.S. Lewis captured it right: "The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ."⁷ Therefore, the purpose of self-denial is to release oneself to God so that He would continuously reveal Himself to us, sanctify us and use us to be a blessing to others for His glory. And in living this way, we would find pure joy in Christ Jesus.

Notes:

[1] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), pg. 209 [2] John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), pg. 257 [3] John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), pg. 95 [4] Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), pg. 113

[5] Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation, Vol. 3* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), pg. 85 [6] Cited by John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), pg. 97 [7] C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans), pg. 2

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S. Divorce: Diminishing the Uniqueness of Christianity

Divorce: Diminishing the Uniqueness of Christianity

Last Friday, on March 30th, 2012, we conducted a gospel meeting in our training center. It was a joy to witness the presence of unbelievers who came to listen to the message apprehensively. The one who ministered to the participants, brother Vimal, came from Gujarat, which is one of the challenging states in India for gospel work. For the entire time, he shared his wonderful testimony—how he came to Christ from a strong Hindu background and how his life and family were radically transformed by the power of the gospel of Christ.

What struck me in his testimony was his marriage life which went through severe crisis and crumbled. He and his wife came to such a point of bitter experience towards each other that they eventually got divorced. Then came a time in his life, when he was in utter despair, he heard the gospel of Christ Jesus from a pastor, who was a former Muslim, and was convicted of its truth. He put his trust in Christ and witnessed amazing change in his heart.

What happened later is quite interesting. He went in search for his divorced wife and when he found her, he shared with her the dramatic change that took place in his life and humbly asked for reconciliation. She was surprised to see the evidential change and agreed to recommit herself to him. Since they both were already divorced, they got remarried and now they serve the Lord Jesus Christ as a blessed family. Their family is now a tremendous blessing to many people.

Losing Christian Saltiness

After I listened to his testimony, I wondered how the gospel of Christ Jesus not only saved this brother's family from eternal destruction, but also rebuilt his family and made them one in God. I wanted to rush to the unbelievers and testify about what the gospel of Christ can do in the life of a person, bringing transformation in every aspect of life. But then I paused and thought—what if they point out to so many Christian families who are divorced. There are more people today who are getting divorced as Christians and testimonies like getting reunited in Christ are seldom heard.

I think if the brother who shared his testimony comes to know how numerous Christians are getting divorced every year, particularly in the West, he would be shocked. He may question, "I thought, by believing in Christ, the broken marital relationships can be healed but how can you people leave your marriage partners even after claiming to believe in Christ?"

How Christianity is losing its uniqueness and saltiness in the area of marriage! Rather than the world looking at Christians and getting attracted to the gospel by seeing Christian marriages built in love and unity, they are now questioning the validity of the gospel in changing lives by pointing to divorced Christians. The authors, James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe said it right:

Every time a family in the church gets a divorce, the testimony of the church is weakened. How are we going to say to the world, "God has the answer to the problems of marriage and divorce" if divorce is common in our ranks? People then say, "Oh really! Well, the statistics show that you're

right behind the world when it comes to divorce. (Lord of All: Developing a Christian World-and-Life View, pg. 254) God Hates Divorce

God made it quite clear in His word, "I hate divorce" (Malachi 2:16). He hates divorce because marriage is His design, not man's invention, "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6). Jesus said, "Anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery" (Matthew 5:32).

It is not surprising if the world is breaking God's laws, but it is aching to see so many Christians openly rebelling against God's word, getting divorced without biblical grounds and going for remarriage when it is in fact adultery. It seems they are looking more to the world for their inspiration than into the Word. They are not seeing how sinful this is in the sight of the loving Christ who loved us and laid His life for us on the cross. They are not understanding how displeasing it is to the holy God, and if there is no true brokenness of heart and repentance, they have to give an account to Him when they face the judgment seat of Christ.

There may be many shallow causes, but I believe, the primary reason for divorce in Christian families is this—there is no reverential fear of God and appropriate biblical role, either by any one or both partners. Of course, we may go to church, sing songs, read the Bible, offer short prayers and even participate in church activities, but is there practice of God's word in personal and family life? O, if we deny our selfishness and take up our cross and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, there would be more peace and joy in our Christian families than ever before!

Fight for Your Marriage

Since the world is failing to have perseverance and peace in family life, it is time for Christians to submit themselves to the authority of God's word and represent to the world an exemplary family life. Did not Christ say, "You are the light of the world"? (Matthew 5:14) Sadly, when it comes to family life, many of us are more like the world rather than being the light to the world.

Don't you think it is time for us to repent of our sin of worldliness, live different and make a difference around us? My wife and I have been married for more than thirteen years. I can say we are together only because of the gracious work of Christ Jesus in our lives. And I often remind my wife not to let our family life bring dishonor to God and to the gospel in any way. We have a lot of weaknesses and we have to fight together, by the grace of God, against all the temptations trying to ruin our relationship.

Remember, divorce diminishes the uniqueness of Christianity in this corrupted world. It is a stumbling block to the gospel of Christ Jesus. It brings grief to the Holy Spirit. It is dishonoring God's word. It brings disgrace to the name of God, by whose name we are called. Moreover, it shatters the lives of marriage partners, even those of children. It brings hurt to the dear ones and well-wishers of the family. It does not bring about the righteous and loving life that God desires.

Therefore, for Christ's sake, for God's glory and honor, I plead with Christians to fight for our marriages to stay together. Let us seek God's face, get godly counsel from mature ones, examine our own follies, talk to each other without accusing, but let us make every effort not to follow the footsteps of the world in giving up our partner to whom we have vowed before God, "I, , take you, ,

for my lawful (husband/wife), to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.” Our Father in heaven, forgive us of our sin and selfishness. If we truly think about your glory and the welfare of our partner, our families would have been quite different today from the world. O Lord, we have become much like the world, focusing on self-love and self-desires. We are following the worldly standards and turned our back against your Word. We pray that you have mercy on us, bring revival in our Christian families and bless our homes with your abundant joy and peace. May our families live in such a way that the world would praise your name as you reveal Yourself holy to them through our exemplary lifestyle. We pray in Jesus Name. Amen.

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S. Do We Take Things More Easily or More Seriously?

Do We Take Things More Easily or More Seriously?

One of the fascinating things we remember about our Christian life is our ardent passion for God when we had come to know Christ as our personal Savior and Lord. In retrospect, many of us express how passionate we were during the early stage of our Christian life, how we used to pray and meditate on God's word and how eager we were to share the gospel with others. But what happened as the years went by? Should we say we have become cold in our heart, lukewarm in our passion to live for God and lazy in disciplining our inner life? Did we become more worldly than godly in our passions and pursuits? Did we begin taking things that matter for eternity "more easily"?

There are some, in fact there are many—when they become more familiar with the knowledge about God and with His word, instead of developing more craving for Him and longing to live for His glory, they slide into frivolous attitude toward spiritual disciplines. Can we dare say we do not belong to such group? But there are those—when it comes to God, to the knowledge of His glorious splendor and to the advancement of His kingdom—they become more reverential towards God, develop more seriousness in their commitment to serve Him and grow more in their hunger for Him by disciplining their daily walk with God. John Wesley and Charles Simeon are stalwarts of such commitment, discipline and diligence.

John Wesley [1703-1791] is said to have travelled two hundred and fifty thousand miles on horseback, preached forty thousand sermons during his lifetime and produced hundreds of pieces of literature. At the age of eight-three, he was angry because his doctor wouldn't let him preach more than fourteen times a week. In his journal entry at age eighty-six, Wesley wrote, "Laziness is slowly creeping in. There is an increasing tendency to stay in bed after five-thirty in the morning." (Cries of the Heart, pg. 48)

I wonder how many of us feel ashamed for waking up late and neglecting to have consistent and adequate early morning devotions! In their busy life to make more money and in their ambition to become more successful, don't you think many have become desensitized to godly passions and sluggish in godly disciplines?

Even at the age eighty-eight, John Wesley kept working. "I am now an old man," he said, "decayed from head to foot. However, blessed be God, I do not slack my labour. I can preach and still write." (Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History, pg. 203) As we begin our journey from the time of our born-again in the Spirit till our death in Christ Jesus, do we find in ourselves such passion, such discipline, such diligence and such hunger to live for the glory of God? It seems many of us are spiritually decayed before even reaching physical decay. It is written to a generation such as ours, "Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you." (Hosea 10:12)

Charles Simeon [1759-1836] is another man who astounds me. He was a powerful expository preacher whose preaching transformed and revived the hearts of multitudes. After fifty-four years of faithful ministry at the Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge, UK, Simeon retired in 1836.

Even after his retirement, at the age of 77 years in which he died, a friend discovered that this elderly man was still rising at 4:00 a.m. every morning to light his own fire and to spend time reading the Bible, praying, repenting, and spending time with God. His friend thought this was over-kill. "Mr. Simeon," he pleaded, "Do you not think that, now that you are retired, you might take things more easily?" "What?!" replied the old Charles Simeon, "Shall I not now run with all my might when the winning-post is in sight?" (Tim Keller, Long Distance Spirituality, May 2010)

What a response! How seldom do we find those who run diligently till they reach the winning-post! How few there are in our day who can say with Paul, "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus!" (Php 3:14)

Well, friends, what do we observe in the lives of John Wesley and Charles Simeon? The more they went ahead in their Christian life, the more they grew old, the more they headed towards death, they became more and more serious and disciplined in their life with God. They did not take things "more easily". Is there any wonder why they had such an impact upon their generation and the generations thereafter?

Here is a challenge before us. As we pass days and years in our brief time on earth, as we grow older, as we approach near to death, are we becoming more flippant toward spiritual issues or are we becoming more passionate, disciplined and diligent in our walk with God and in His service? As we approach closer to our winning post, do we take things "more easily" or "more seriously"?

What the Lord Jesus had spoken to the Ephesian church, is He also speaking to us, "You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place"? (Revelation 2:4-5). May this hymn, written by William (Bill) Gaither, be found true and real in our own life:

Since I started for the Kingdom, Since my life He controls, Since I gave my heart to Jesus, The longer I serve Him, The sweeter He grows.

Chorus The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows, The more that I love Him, more love He bestows;

Each day is like heaven, my heart overflows, The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows.

Ev'ry need He is supplying, Plenteous grace He bestows;

Ev'ry day my way gets brighter, The longer I serve Him, The sweeter He grows.

Chorus The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows, The more that I love Him, more love He bestows;

Each day is like heaven, my heart overflows, The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows.

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S. Don't Blame the Devil!

Don't Blame the Devil!

There is a tale about a person who sat outside the church building, weeping profusely. A woman felt pity upon him and had asked, "Why are you crying?" He replied, "You people commit sins and then blame me for everything you do?" The woman confusingly questioned, "Who are you?" "I am the devil," said the sorrowful person. Who doesn't know the great tempter—the devil? But should we have to blame him whenever we fall into temptation? There are two ways, I have observed, we fall into temptation. Sometimes temptation comes knocking our door and we yield unto it. At other times we go knocking the temptation and fall into it. In both ways our fall is due to our choice. The devil knows he has no power over us. He has the power only to tempt us. And we have been given the power in Christ Jesus to resist Him (James 4:7). If we happen to fall it is only because of the choice we make to yield to the temptation instead of resisting it. We are responsible for our own fall. Yet we often behave like Eve who blamed the devil, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Genesis 3:13).

Let me share with you an interesting incident which the Lord had used to teach me an unforgettable lesson. It was a time of intense struggle with a particular temptation. I desperately cried out to God for help, only to face His silence. I know how on one side we cry to God to help us overcome temptation and on the other side walk into all possible things that drag us into sin.

One midnight, I woke up and went to the toilet. I saw, at the corner of the wall, a spider spread its web and hanging in the centre, probably waiting for some prey. Then I have noticed a small ant busily going on its way. It could have gone straight but somehow turned to the right and drew nearer and nearer to the web. When it reached close, it suddenly fell into the intricate web. The ant struggled to come out of the sticky net but it couldn't. The poor ant was helplessly trapped. The spider then wrapped the prey and within a moment it devoured the ant. I didn't understand anything in that sleepy mood and returned to my bed. The next morning when I came back I saw neither the spider nor the web. Suddenly God enlightened my mind and spoke to me that it is I, like that foolish ant, was making a choice to get closer and closer to the temptation, only to fall in it and wrestle to come out.

Ah, this is what the devil does! Satan will not throw his net directly upon us; instead, he will set a trap (like the spider that spun a web in the above incident) and patiently lures us to draw closer to sin. He entices our senses and will and waits for us to respond. We are left with a choice. How we respond makes the rest of our life. If we don't flee from temptation we will inevitable cleave to it. Do not forget, the devil tempts us towards the pleasures of sin by obscuring our attention from its consequences. Once we make a choice to walk on the slippery path of temptation, the devil puts his feet up and reclines to see our fall. The exhortation of Paul given to Timothy should knock some sense, "Flee the evil desires of youth" (2 Timothy 2:22).

It is also written to us, "Do not give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:29). Just a little foothold is enough for the devil to drag us into the mire of sin. I know how a lustful thought, if entertained, can become a stronghold in mind. I know how a simple glance, if cherished in an unhealthy way, would become an irresistible imagination. I know how a short unnecessary talk, if not avoided, can lead into gossip and harmful conversation. I know how a fit of temper, if not controlled, would cast me into irreparable consequences. I know how a little bitterness, if not forgiven, can result in strong hatred.

Satan's devious task is to tempt but ultimately it is I who is responsible for my fall. I am not free from facing temptations but am certainly free from yielding to them. As Martin Luther said, "I can't stop the birds from flying overhead, but I can keep them from building a nest in my hair." I cannot blame the devil or the circumstances because I have the power to overcome the temptations. If anyone has to be blamed it has to be 'myself'. May we learn to acknowledge our sin (without getting into condemnation) and determine to resist the temptations of the evil one by the power of the Holy Spirit indwelt within us.

"Your state is not at all to be measured by the opposition that sin makes to you, but by the opposition you make to it" — John Owen.

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S. Dr. David R. Willis - A Man Who Didn't Give Up On Me

Dr. David R. Willis – A Man Who Didn't Give Up On Me Stephen David receiving transcript from Dr. David R. Willis in his first semester, in 1997

Few people thrive in life without the lift provided by some godly people. My life is no exception. Whatever I am today, it is because God in His sovereignty and grace has used various people, books and situations to equip me in living and serving for His glory. One such person whom God used to make a remarkable influence on my life was Dr. David R. Willis.

I am always grateful to God for saving a wretched man like me, or else by now I could have become a smuggler or a criminal. Just few days after I was saved in the year 1996, one day Dr. Willis came to our church to preach. I still remember his sermon. He preached on Ezekiel, the watchman. After listening to him for the first time, I rushed to him with great excitement and expressed my interest to get trained for ministry. He gave his visiting card and invited me to his Bible college for further talk. When I went to see him, he warmly received me and enrolled me as his student.

Dr. Willis came from Canada to India in the 90's to equip and train the national leaders for effective church ministry. He founded Trinity Christian College through which many people were trained, both in doctrine and life. As a theologian, preacher and teacher, he did a tremendous ministry during his life in India. He was a stern man and also a friendly person. He is one of the finest minds, a best preacher and teacher I have ever witnessed in my life. His content of teaching was so sound and his style of preaching so dramatic that even a sleepy person would rise and sit erect to listen. I am blessed to have that wonderful privilege to study under him.

After I was born-again, I used to attend a hyper-pentecostal church. Although there were some good things to speak about that church, the teachings and conduct were generally not sound. It was under the teachings of Dr. Willis that I have learned to live a balanced Christian life. I have learned from him to walk in the gifts of the Holy Spirit by having a strong doctrinal foundation and fruitful living. God had not only used Dr. Willis to put a solid doctrinal foundation and to shape my mind, He had also used him to show me His grace. There are few gracious moments that are vividly alive in my mind even till today.

Gracious Chasing - 1

After finishing my first semester in Bible college, due to some family crisis, I gave up my studies and started to work in a hospital. I was depressed, confused and gave up my hope of doing ministry. When Dr. Willis came to know this, he took time to come to my home to meet me. I was living at that time in an inner-city slum. It wasn't such a nice place to come in. Dr. Willis parked his van in the centre of that slum, had me sit before him at the back of his vehicle, and spoke to me for a long time. On one side my heart was lifted through his words of encouragement, but on the other side I was feeling a bit uneasy as few slum people surrounded the van and looked at us, especially at Dr. Willis who is a foreigner, with great curiosity.

Well, I needed that encouragement and personal care, and guess what happened the next day?—I was back to Bible college to continue my studies. Dr. Willis coming at night to spend some time with me in that slum was a gracious and memorable moment of my life.

Gracious Chasing – 2

Another crisis came when I was in the middle of my studies in Bible college. I was in love with a girl (who is now my dear wife) and constantly went to meet her. This distracted my mind and could not concentrate on my studies. My love for the Lord had even become cold. My authorities in the college came to know my situation and warned me in love to stop meeting my girlfriend. However, I could not stay away for a long time and continued to meet her. I felt guilty for not living a life of integrity. I thought I am not worthy to do ministry with this kind of carnality. I sent a letter to the board of governors in Bible college, notifying that I am leaving my studies.

I left college and went straight away to meet my girlfriend. She was staying in girls hostel and studying physiotherapy at that time. As a failure in life, I was talking to her in the visitor's area, not knowing where I am heading in life. As I was speaking to her, I heard the sound of the bullet from outside. Dr. Willis, in search of me, came to my girlfriend's hostel to see whether I am here. Seeing us together sitting on the chair and talking, he parked his vehicle right before the visitor's area and stood there. I was shocked to see him. Leaving my girlfriend, I went near to him. He had me sit with him near the pavement there and counseled me. We spoke for a long time, from evening till night. I repented of my sin. He then took me on his vehicle, left me in the hostel of Bible college, gave me a big hug and went back to his home. That wonderful moment, marked by grace, is an unforgettable event of my life.

Final Words

I'll never forget in my life Dr. Willis' gracious chasings to help me get back on God's track so that I would become a man God wants me to be. I still remember the great moments I had with Dr. Willis, talking and discussing with him on many theological and personal issues. I cannot imagine how my life would have been if Dr. Willis had given up on me when I went astray. I praise God for such a gracious person who didn't give up on me.

Soli Deo Gloria!

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below (or) write to E-mail: friendsofchrist@gmail.com

S. E-Mail From Devil To A Demon

E-Mail From Devil To A Demon My dear little demon,

I appreciate your 24/7 labor to keep your Target neglect His God, our Enemy. But you need to labor with subtlety lest you waste your efforts. You must be extremely careful about how you mess up his devotional life. Are you scheming to cause him think that prayer, worship, meditating the Bible, self-examination and interceding for others are useless? Nah, don't do such a foolish thing. The more you try to do so, the more he reasons in his mind and may fall into the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Don't give him a sense of battle for that would be your disadvantage. Agree with whatever he agrees, but don't let him practice what he believes. The advantage of him being serious about spiritual issues is that you have greater opportunity to condemn him for not living accordingly. After all, is there any greater joy than seeing your Target wallow in self-condemnation!

Well, do your best to shuffle his priorities and have him neglect the godly disciplines. One way you can do this is by keeping him on the bed till late. Just suggest him to sleep little more. A little more sleep in the morning is much sweeter than all-night rest. Let this stick in your mind that procrastination leads your Target into a dreamland, wherein he knows what to do but just dreams of doing without actually doing. So when he wakes up late, he will be in a hurry to rush into his daily activities. In that hustle and bustle, he may attempt to pray and read a little, but no need to worry, for that would be of no avail as it is done as a duty, not as devotion. Congrats! You have won in robbing him from tapping the power of the Most High to live for the day. Now your Target is in your court; play with him and blow his day with stress, dryness and failure to overcome the temptations.

If at all you have failed to hold him on the bed, try to divert his mind once he is awake. The creation is our best aid to keep him away from his Creator. Show him the newspaper on the table. Make him curious to read some interesting news or to look at fascinating pictures. In doing so, he will lose his time to meditate. You also have a great advantage to use the modern technology. If he has a computer, arouse his interest to spend time on it. Why can't you make him think about checking his mails, chat or browse other sites? If there is music and television let him enjoy listening and watching. By hook or by crook waste his early time of meditation. To allow him to spend at the feet of our Enemy is to permit him to trample you under his feet.

Now keep in mind, some attempt to walk with our Enemy during the day. They are wise and know that living with our Enemy is not something occasional but a constant walk in the awareness of His presence. Such people are quite dangerous to us. If your Target is one among them, the best way to keep him from godly disciplines is to make him absorb in the worldly affairs. Lead your Target to get soaked in the works of the day and give him all the encouragement to work hard. It is a good discipline for him to take breaks during the day and meditate; so, see to it that you keep him busy throughout the day. Distraction is your powerful tool.

Here is another challenge you may have to face. You should beware of your Target as he may think of spending time with our Enemy after he gets back to his home. So once he returns home, make sure that you help him relax for a while. By now you should be firm in your plan about how to divert his concentration from meditation. You always have two great weapons – one is disappointment and the other I will mention later. Try to create some conflicts in his family or in other relationships so that he may get disturbed and disappointed. Many have been fooled in their thinking that they cannot pray or meditate when they are depressed, when in fact they need to seek their Maker even more for His strength and wisdom to cope with their troubling situations. And the other weapon you have is—entertainment. This has proven to be a successful tool in our temptation market. Tell your Target he can meditate before going to bed. You can incite him to watch television. Drag his time in entertainment, whether in the house or outside. And by the time he wants to meditate he is already tired and feels sleepy. We have lied in the minds of many that entertainment refreshes their mind but we know that it's only a temporal pleasure; it doesn't give them strength and peace which is obtained only by remaining in HIM.

If you can succeed in fooling your Target in this way, daily, you can make him a living corpse. Ah, he is no more a threat to our kingdom! Don't waste your time with him anymore. Go and find someone else who is conscious to live for our Enemy.

Wish you all the best.

Yours faithfully,

Devil destroyer@hell.com Contact: friendsofchrist@gmail.com

S. Epidemic of Individualism - Resistance to be Held Accountable

Epidemic of Individualism - Resistance to be Held Accountable

Imagine somebody coming and courteously questioning, “How is your family life?” or “How is your prayer life?” or “How is your thought life?” or “How wisely do you use your time?” To many who claim to be followers of Jesus and members of the body of Christ, this would be a blatant offense. There may be a wild reaction within (though not necessarily in words), “Who on earth do you think to question me?” “How does it matter to you the way I live?” “It’s personal; nobody has any right to intrude my personal life.”

Such frontal questions may expose the insecurity of a person. Should I say it also shakes the inner egotistic pillars? It may sting the heart. It may cause fretfulness. It may turn the face pale. It may even implant a root of bitterness towards the questioner. There may be a scream in heart, “Hello, I think you are crossing your boundaries!” Pitifully, the questioner maybe pushed at bay.

Why such bizarre reaction?

Permeation of Individualism The terrible disease of our day which is rapidly destroying the potentiality of Christianity is known as ‘individualism’. This worldly philosophy has permeated Christianity like weeds in the field of wheat. This is prevailing in both Western and Eastern cultures. What you believe is personal. What you speak is personal. How you live is personal. There is no sense of accountability, dependency and community. Folks suppose – “My life is my business and nobody has any business to get into my business.” They live in their own isolated, self-sufficient world and do not want anyone to be a part of it. Each one associates with strong boundaries of so-called widely used cliché “it’s personal”.

Further, they relate to each other on a surface level. They don’t express their struggles, weaknesses, temptations, doubts, failures, nor are they interested to listen to the same. Anything that goes in the name of fellowship, church, meeting, friendship is merely superficial. They feel cozy in their hiddenness. They don’t want anyone to peep into their inner life. They resist people questioning their lifestyle. Why? Perhaps some of the reasons are as follows: That hurts. That shows who they are. They get exposed. They feel vulnerable. They feel submissive (this word is viewed as weakness today). So they want to live secure in a cage of individualism. Should I say that this modern epidemic of individualism is nothing but sheer insecurity, or perhaps even egotism?

Christian Life – Personal and Communal

Now, this is not to say that Christian life isn’t personal. It isn’t just personal. Christian life is both personal and communal. It is personal in a sense every individual is responsible to make decisions of thought and act that would cater to his/her growth and maturity. It is personal in a sense each one has a personal relationship with the Living God and is accountable to Him for the choices he/she makes in life (Romans 14:12). But it is also communal in a sense each person is a part of

Christ's community wherein loving one another, encouraging each other and holding one another accountable is fostered (1 Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 10:25; 1 Peter 1:22).

We precisely observe from the writings of the New Testament that our life is personal and our life also belongs to a community. That is what Paul was endeavoring to convince Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 12:1-31. He was teaching them that although they are individuals, they together are community of Christ Jesus. He was persuading the folks to understand that living as a body of Christ means every individual belong to each other and ought to uphold one another for healthy functioning of the whole body. Why are we missing this truth in the body of Christ?

Moreover, when things were going terribly wrong in the Corinthian church, Paul rebuked these people of their individualism and for their lack of accountability (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). In New Testament, the apostles taught the church to live as a community with a sense of belongingness and accountability (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Galatians 6:1-3). They instructed them to protect themselves from the yeast, holding each other accountable in the holiness of God. And anyone who doesn't want to be held accountable, resisting exhortation and correction, such a person is considered to be cut off from the body of Christ (2 Thessalonians 3:14).

Abuse of Leadership

I don't deny how in the name of accountability, some, especially Christian leaders, abuse others by unhealthy controlling, exercising authority and curiously interfering with every aspect of life. No doubt such selfish leaders devour the body of Christ rather than devoting themselves to serve God's people. As regretful and morally unjustifiable their actions are, however, the answer to abuse is not complete eradication of the elements which can rightly be used. We need to be passionate for the glory of God by allowing the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ. Intriguingly, the Spirit of God often uses His people to purge His people.

Besides, I regret to confess that this individualism is strongly and markedly visible in many Christian leaders. How difficult it is to know them personally! How difficult it is to confront them! How difficult it is to find them approachable! How seldom do we find them exemplifying transparency and accountability! How they live in isolation but expect their people to be accountable to them! How they epitomize dictatorial lifestyle but demand others to be submissive to them! Is it any wonder why believers are so individualistic when the saying goes – like leaders, like followers. Isn't there a great need for change to begin from the top?

Becoming Vulnerable The Holy Scripture particularly addresses in regard to having a godly influence upon each other. In doing so, we don't allow ourselves to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13). It is regretful to see numerous churches, fellowships, friendships and other relationships being involved in shallow relationships without honesty and openness. There is just a superficial exchange of information without any impact towards transformation. In this way, how can we have a powerful influence upon each other towards Christlikeness? The focus on individualism, privatization of Christian life and the inherent right of each to lead his own life—all tend to nullify the New Testament concept of community and fellowship. People are so insecure, even with such strong egos, that when it comes to correction and accountability they try to protect themselves against such things, often to their own detriment.

This is an age wherein people tend to be more anxious about hurt-me-not and hurt-others-not issues (while relishing backbiting and gossiping) rather than saving others from the deceitful and destructive works of sin. In this corrupt world of advancement wherein there is much possibility to indulge in all kinds of sinful passions and actions, there is an immense need of encouraging each other, correcting one another, rebuking each other, and upholding one other accountable – all done in love and truth, in humility and grace. We have to uproot these individualistic elements from the body of Christ and live a life of community, protecting each other by the Holy Spirit from the depravity of sin.

Therefore, let us become vulnerable. Let us become humble. Let us learn to submit to each other out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21). Let us give others the freedom to disturb our ego. Let us lose our insecurity and gain our security in Christ. Let us peel off the facade. Let us become willing to listen – to learn and to receive exhortation. May people feel free to approach us to talk with us about our weaknesses and improvements. May they feel comfortable to encourage us. May they be permitted to warn us when our heart goes astray. May they be allowed to contribute in our lives towards Christlikeness.

Here is my final word: I don't think we would become like Christ without allowing people whom God uses to mend us. The development of our character does not take place in isolation but in our relation with others.

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below (or) write to E-mail: friendsofchrist@gmail.com/cstephendavid@gmail.com

S. Everyone Deserves Respect

Everyone Deserves Respect

Few days back I was at home taking care of my second son, Joe. In my conversation with him, I used words in my vernacular language, which is generally used by elders in our culture - "You have no shame." He is just three years and eight months old. When he heard, he repeated back those words to me, "You have no shame." I told him, "You shouldn't speak like that to elders." He replied without hesitation, "Such words should not be spoken by anyone, whether younger ones or elders." Those words came to me like a slap on my face. I apologized to him for using those words. He then gave back his usual cute and mesmerizing smile. My son taught me that day that every person, whether young or old, deserves respect.

Often times, I have observed, we elders do things which we don't expect our younger ones to follow. We think we have the right to speak and do anything and the children are forbidden to do such, even no right to question us. But should not we set a good example to them about how they need to perceive human dignity and treat one another with respect? It is unfortunate that many children are treated with disrespect. Remember, the way we respect them is the way they are going to respect themselves and even others, especially those that are younger than them. Of course, there is room for rebuking and disciplining our children, but we shouldn't forget that we owe respect to them as much as we expect from them.

Besides, what do they learn from us about how to speak to servants, drivers, waiters, vendors, watchmen and strangers on the street? Do they learn from our communication and conduct that every person is valuable, bearing the image of God and deserving respect? Do they understand from our treatment of fellow human beings that everybody has the right to be respected irrespective of color, class and background?

It is said, "The best way to teach respect is to show respect." May we treat our children and other younger ones with respect and let them emulate our lifestyle.

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below (or) write to E-mail: friendsofchrist@gmail.com

S. Fathers, Love Your Children's Mother

Fathers, Love Your Children's Mother

(I think fathers deserve special attention in parenting because their influence upon the children cannot be underestimated in regard to how they treat their mother. I share the following message not as a perfect father but as a man who loves to be a mature dad.)

"What is the most important thing I can do for my children?" asked a father to an elderly man. "Love their mother!" was the response.

I am glad for those men who are loving and caring towards their wives but this isn't the case with many. Let's be honest and ask—what description comes into the mind of our children when they hear the term 'father'? What impression do they have about fatherhood? Does the term 'father' or 'daddy' or 'papa' bring a sense of security and care to children because of the way he treats their mother? Or does it sound scary and disappointing?

Making the Lives of Children either Better or Worse A young girl confided to me:

I hated my dad because of his rudeness and anger towards my mom. He criticizes my mom a lot. His behavior left upon me a very bad impression about men. I am still scared of men. I think men are always fretful and explode in anger. My mom used to face all this and I thought we should always bear it. Consequently, I became rebellious against my dad and am even scared at the notion of marriage.

Now compare the above experience with the following words of another young woman, who recollects how she viewed her father's impact on her life:

It was a wonderful, close relationship. His love and respect for my mother was the greatest gift a man can give his family. Although I grew up during the Crisis, I never doubted that he would take care of me. He was well respected in our community, and I felt it a privilege to be his daughter.[1]

What a marked contrast between the lives of these two young girls? Who made that difference, the first ones worse and the second ones best?

Fathers!

How can a father make the world of his children either worse or better? The way he treats their mother. Studies reveal that one of the most important ways that men can be good fathers is by treating the mother of their children with affection, respect, and consideration.[2] Make no mistake, a father cannot be a friend to his children when he is hostile to their mother. Being Gentle with Your Children's Mother

It is natural for men to be harsh and inconsiderate towards the mother of their children. But research has shown that husbands who display anger, show contempt for, or who stonewall their wives (i.e., "the silent treatment") are more likely to have children who are anxious, withdrawn, or

antisocial.[3] According to John Gottman's extensive research, 85 percent of husbands eventually stonewall their wives during conflict.[4] For this reason, I believe, it is written for us, "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them" (Colossians 3:19).

Men are known for being strong but their strength exists to protect their wives, not to abuse their authority over them. They ought to have intimate relationship with their wives, not intimidating behavior. They being the head of the house do not mean possessing unquestionable authority and dominion but manifesting responsible and genuine love to their wives. God's word exhorts, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Christ loved us so much that He gave His life for us, and that is how husbands are exhorted to love their wives.

Husbands must treat their wives, not as playable toys, but as a valuable treasure. It is written, "You husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together" (1 Peter 3:7, NLT). The more men are loving and understanding towards their wives the more children will love and respect their father. I have a friend who shared his regret for being a son to his father. He hated him most because his dad often mistreated his mother. Many fathers aren't aware of this—the anger of a father towards his children's mother actually provokes children's anger towards their father. Theodore Hesburg said it right, "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother." [5] Committed Fathers

Fathers, how do you treat your children's mother? Do you love her, care for her and value her in your life? What model are you setting for your children about how they should be treating their own spouse? What lessons are they learning from your life about how to handle conflicts in family? Do they see you as a wise man who builds his family on the unshakable foundation of God's word? Would they love to become a kind of husband you are to your wife? Or would they hate to be like you? So powerful is the influence of a father upon the children that even if they hate to become like him they still end up manifesting some of his characteristics.

It is proven that many young people when they are married often get into conflicts because they grew up in an unloving atmosphere wherein their parents often fought with each other. Fathers who treat the mothers of their children with respect and deal with conflict within the relationship in a mature and appropriate manner are more likely to have boys who understand how they are to treat women and who are less likely to act in an aggressive fashion toward females.[6] Girls with involved, respectful fathers see how they should expect men to treat them and are less likely to become involved in violent or unhealthy relationships.[7]

Finally, it was encouraging to read about a husband's commitment to love his wife in their tenth year of marriage. Once when he had a big fight with his wife, she angrily packed her suitcase to leave him. The husband also started to pack his own bag and when she asked him, "What are you doing?", his reply was a powerful example of commitment—"If you are leaving, I am going with you." [8] What a blessing for children to have such a committed father!

Note: [Click here to read the next topic: "Mothers, Respect Your Children's Father"](#)

Notes:

[1] Cited by H. Norman Wright, *A Dad-Shaped Hole in My Heart* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 15

[2] Jeffrey Rosenberg and W. Bradford Wilcox, *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children's Bureau Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2006), 19

[3] Gable, S., Crnic, K., & Belsky, J. (1994). Coparenting within the Family System: Influences on Children's Development. *Family Relations*, 43(4), 380-386.

[4] Cited by Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2004), 60 [5] Cited in *The Best Things Ever Said about Parenting* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1996), 165

[6] Jeffrey Rosenberg and W. Bradford Wilcox, *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children's Bureau Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2006), 11-12

[7] *Ibid.*, 12 [8] *10 Things I Want My Son to Know* (Secunderabad: OM Headlines, 2002), 165

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S. Fathers, Our Children Need Us

Fathers, Our Children Need Us

One day during this week, I went to pick up my children from school. As I sat on a cement bench, waiting for my children to come, a cute little girl came and sat beside me.

Now I cannot endure myself to stay silent for a long time, except with a book before me or in mode of prayer or when I review the Scriptures that I memorized. I wasn't engaged in any of these, so I turned and started conversing with her.

I learned she is in third class, perhaps 9 years old, one year elder than Joy, my eldest son. As I was asking questions and getting answers from her, I casually asked her, "What's your dad doing?" Her voice went low and responded, "I don't know."

I was a bit surprised and asked her again. She replied the same. This time, not being casual, I questioned, "Don't you talk to your dad?" She replied with all innocence manifesting on her face, "No." My curiosity became intense and I asked, "Is your dad always serious?" She said with sadness, "Yes."

I again questioned, "Is he not friendly?" She said, "No."

After asking questions and listening to this little girl, my heart left that place with sadness.

Giving Ourselves to Children

Fathers, do we talk to our children? Are we friendly with them? Do they know us well and vice versa? Do we have fun time with them? Of course, there is room for stern discipline and serious exhortation, but that's not always required. I believe, a father ought to be both a teacher and a friend. Sadly, many children miss such fathers.

I am afraid at the advancement of our world, for it is robbing many fathers from their families. It is giving all the comforts in the sense of material things but stealing dads from giving their valuable time to their growing children.

I have learned that more than what we give to them, more than what we earn and store for them, more than what we claim of doing for them, what our children need is "us" (our presence and our conversation with them). There is no gift as great as giving ourselves to our children.

Children Desperately Need Us

I understand we men are so busy. There is always a lot for us to do. We have so many burdens to carry. There is so much we have to do for our family. However, don't you think, our children are more important than the work we do and the money we earn?

Remember, we may lose job and get another one. We may lose money and earn again. But the time lost in spending with our growing children can never be retrieved.

We think, what our children always need is toys, television and electronic gadgets. The reason, I suppose, they seek for such things is because there is none to converse with them. The more we talk and spend time with children, the less they are drawn to such things.

Yes, our children need us. They desire us. They want our time. They love to talk to us and hear from us. They long to be hugged by us. Again, I emphasize, they need us, desperately. Can we give ourselves to them?

If we have been neglecting our children, having become too busy with our work and in daily activities, why can't we take some time and talk to them today? We will make a difference in their lives, you bet! My Decision

Well, the next day when I went to school, I abruptly met this cute little girl on the way. I stopped my vehicle by her side. She was surprised to see me again. I smiled and gave her a chocolate. Her excitement was shining all over her face.

I decided, I never want to see my children suffering from having a father who doesn't take time to talk and walk with them.

What have you decided with your children?

ENQUIRIES:

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S. From Burglar to Benefactor

From Burglar to Benefactor This week, on June 26th, I have passed sixteen years of my faith in Christ. It is on this day, in the year 1996, I was saved and transformed by the life-transforming power of Christ Jesus. At that time, I was 19 years and now 36 years old. If there is any wonderful and unregrettable decision I have made in my entire life, it is the decision to give my life to Christ in my very young life. Hallelujah!

Stealing and Prospering As I reflect on my past life, i.e. life before Christ, I feel ashamed of being a thief. I was clever at stealing from the time I was a small kid, stealing toys in shops. When in my teens, I remember of once robbing a set of products from a big shop. My friend was a decent guy and was so afraid of joining with me in this theft. Nevertheless, I persuaded him not to fear and stole the products.

Somehow I was observed and was caught outright. My friend and I were dragged to the nearby police station. When we watched other thieves badly beaten by the police, my friend was too afraid and shivered. As we were waiting for our trial in the station, we subtly escaped and ran like a deer from its predator and jumped into a running bus. As I grew, I became more active in stealing things. I robbed enormous amount of money from workplaces, got involved in the distribution of counterfeit currency, produced fake identity cards and stole various things as I got opportunities. I was robbing so much money in my youth, not knowing where to store, I used to dump money in a big box, buying material things and enjoying a luxurious lifestyle. Influenced by some people who gained a lot of money from burglary, I was even forming a gang and planned to rob houses.

If I was not transformed by Christ at that time, you could imagine what kind of a stigma I would have been to my family and a great trouble to the society. If not for Christ, I am sure I could have either become a smuggler or a criminal. But my Lord Jesus is merciful and powerful enough to change sinful lives. I have seen Him transforming much worse lives than mine. Praise and glory to the life-transforming and life-giving Lord!

Confessing and Rectifying

One of the amazing things I have learned about trusting in Christ—you will not only receive forgiveness of your sins, but also get convicted to confess and rectify your sin before others. When Zacchaeus was saved, he said, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Lu. 19:8). This is what the gospel of Christ does, leading people to repentance and proving their repentance by their deeds (Acts 26:20). In the same way, when I came to trust Christ Jesus as my Savior and Lord, I received tremendous peace and joy in my heart. I was amazed and thrilled to know how much Christ loved and died on the cross for a wretched sinner like me. But at the same time, I got a conviction to go to the people against whom I had sinned to ask apology. One of the sins I was convicted to confess was a theft I committed years ago. I robbed a cycle from a known person, drove it to the downtown and sold it for a couple of bucks. After coming back, I pretended

as if I didn't know anything and tried to help him find his lost cycle. So the Lord spoke to my heart to go and confess this sin to him, asking him apology and making recompense for stealing his cycle. I struggled a lot to confess before him the sin I committed against him. I felt ashamed and was even afraid of the consequences. Eventually, I went to him, humbly confessed my sin, asked for his forgiveness and gave him the money in recompense for stealing his cycle. He was surprised and gladly forgave me. From Greed to Generosity When I trusted in Christ Jesus, another thing I have noticed in my life is that the Lord turned my heart from greed to generosity. My heart broke when I saw people in need and God gave me His abundant grace to help others. Earlier I robbed things which belonged to others, but after knowing Christ, I have learned to share what belonged to me. This doesn't mean I am perfect and selfless, but progressively growing in the grace of generous living. In all these sixteen years of my life in Christ, I am grateful to God for using a once-upon-a-time thief to help countless people in various ways. Such is the power of the gospel. This is what Christ does when He comes into a sinful life, turning a sinner into a saint.

I am reminded of the words of Paul written to the Ephesians, "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28). What a great exhortation—a robber becoming a helper! When coming to the cross of Christ Jesus and growing in the knowledge of the Holy One, a burglar stops stealing and learns to become a benefactor; a greedy man stops being greedy and learns to become a generous person; a plunderer stops plundering and learns to become a philanthropist; a selfish person—who may not be stealing things but yet keeps himself away from helping others—stops being selfish and learns to become a person who loves to share.

Well, this is why I love to preach Christ—I want to see miserable lives becoming wonderful beings and living for the glory of their Maker. People desperately need Jesus, for the Scripture says that all have sinned and cut off from the one and the only true God (Romans 3:23). The gift of eternal life is only through the Lord Jesus, for He is the only one who died for the sinners and rose again from the dead as the Living Savior (Romans 6:23). The Lord Jesus alone is the remedy for the world's tragedy.

Related Articles:

June 26th—Why is It an Unforgettable Day of My Life?

He Transformed My Life

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S. God Helps in Weaknesses.....But???

God Helps in Weaknesses.....But???

Have you ever wondered why God at times doesn't help us in overcoming our weaknesses? Why is it when we cry out to God to free us from our moral failures, He seems to hide Himself from us, as if He is not willing to come for our aid? We may be pleading to God to deliver us from vices, such as anger, lust, anxiety, impatience, greed...etc, and yet we find ourselves again and again staining ourselves with these evils, and therefore thinking, "When will God help me in these areas to live a life of an overcomer? If God wants me to be holy why is He not answering my prayers for holiness?"

God shuns the prayers of proud As I was pondering over this issue, the Spirit of the Living God taught me an important lesson. One of the reasons God doesn't help us in our weaknesses, no matter how much we pray (even fast), is that we are not compassionate towards others' weaknesses. How highly critical we are towards the weaknesses of other people! How unkindly we criticize others' failures! How careful we are in watching for and pointing out the flaws of others! How often we spend time in gossiping and backbiting, doing all such things with self-justification! How much we lack compassion, kindness, grace and mercy when it comes to dealing with those who are weak like us, even weaker than us! And we wonder why God is not answering our prayers for overcoming sins in our own life and get disappointed. The Holy Bible explicitly says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). A proud man, although he may pray to God for His holiness, is more troubled with others' sins than with his own. He is more critical about others' failures than of his own. He is more judgmental about the speck in others' eye than about the plank in his own eye. And then he is puzzled why God is not answering his prayers and left him to live a defeated Christian life. Remember, God hates arrogance and shuns prayers coming forth from such attitude.

Humble before God, proud before others

There is one intriguing thing about the proud. He prays to God to deliver him from all other vices but doesn't intensely recognize his own pride (although he may casually confess), thus neglecting to desperately seek God for deliverance from this most terrible vice. He confesses his weaknesses before God, but when he is out of the closet, he looks down at others. He seeks mercy from God but doesn't show mercy to others. He admires the grace of God but doesn't manifest grace to others. He adores the kindness of God towards him but is unkind towards others. The humble conduct which is shown before God turns exactly the opposite when it comes to people. Are you wondering how I know all these things? Because the Spirit of God revealed and keeps revealing my own heart.

I have learned in the Lord that if I expect and pray to God to help me in overcoming my moral weaknesses I need to be careful and merciful when it comes to looking at and dealing with others' moral failures. Imagine, if God answers the prayer of an arrogant person in delivering him from all

vices, except pride, he would feel of himself much better than others, thus despising those who are weak. One of the reasons, I strongly believe, why God leaves us to wrestle with our weaknesses is so that we would learn to be merciful toward others. Regretfully, not many of us learn this lesson and continue to dwell in unkindness and unmerciful attitude and therefore live a defeated Christian life. Be Merciful It is written, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." (Matthew 5:7)

Now, my dear brothers and sisters, being merciful doesn't mean 'ignoring' the sins of others and just minding our own holy business. It doesn't even mean 'endorsing' them. It means, when we look at or deal with others' moral weaknesses, we do so with 'love' and 'compassion', knowing that we ourselves are weak and vulnerable to fall and yet God is merciful towards us; when we speak about others weakness, we do so with fear, knowing that we ourselves are not better and yet God is gracious towards us; every word, correction, even rebuke, comes from a concerned and caring heart. It is written, "Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!" (James 2:12-13)

Finally, let our attitude be like that of a high priest of the Old Testament, about whom the author of Hebrews writes, "He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness" (Hebrews 5:2). When we humble ourselves before the Lord and treat others with mercy, the Lord would be greatly willing to help us live a holy and righteous life before Him. He bestows His mercy upon those who extend it to others. May the Lord humble us in our weaknesses, exalt us over our failures in humility and use us to manifest His mercy to the weak.

ENQUIRIES:

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S. God and Suffering

God and Suffering

Interestingly, this week I met two different people in two different circumstances. They both knew what pain is and what it is to go through suffering, but both have cultivated worldviews that are polar opposites.

Turning Away The first incident I would like to share happened this way. Ashamed of being not so active in evangelism, few days back, I decided, along with my wife, to go to a public place once a week, in the evening, and share the gospel of Christ Jesus. When we went this week, we saw a person sitting on a cement bench. I went near to him and initiated the talk.

After our initial talk, when the time came to speak about God, he started to blurt out his angry feelings. He shared how he lost one-third of his left hand in an accident occurred in a company for which he was working, and how, as a result of this accident, his marriage that was fixed called off. He went on expressing the various difficulties he underwent, like finding a good job and so forth.

He is now married, has a good job and things are much better than they were, but still, because of the pain he underwent, he no more believes in the existence of God. His argument—if God exists why should I have to suffer this way?

Turning To The second incident that I want to share happened a day before the above incident. I was invited to handle Q&A session, along with another preacher, wherein the participants were the students who wrote post graduate medical entrance examination. One main purpose of this gathering was to motivate them to remain strong in the Lord in spite of whatever exam results they get.

After the Q&A session, the brother who organized the event came up and spoke. As he spoke, my eyes were fixed upon him, my ears became more attentive to hear him and my heart was deeply moved by his words. He shared about how people get shaken in their faith in God during afflictions. Then he went on to share the illnesses he suffers in his body, which caused great difficulty even to travel long distance for the event. Much worse, his eldest son, since 8 years, suffers from cerebral palsy, requiring 24/7 attention and care.

Reflecting upon all the pain his family is undergoing, he asked, “What shall I do now?” He then reminded us about how many of Jesus’ disciples left Him because of His hard teaching. And when Jesus asked the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:66-68) This is what the brother said, “When I think about all the afflictions in life, what shall I do? Where shall I go? Jesus is having the words of eternal life. There is no way but Jesus.” Which is Better - Turning Away from God or Turning to God? In the first incident, because of suffering, this person ended up disbelieving in the existence of God. I have seen all unhappiness written over his face. He is emotionally in a pathetic state, although his external conditions seem to be better. He daily boozes

at night, chews tobacco and tries to spend time with some people in order to escape the inner ache of loneliness. He seemed to be more miserable without God.

I have never seen a man turning his back against God and living a better, blissful life. In the other incident, I saw genuine peace in the brother who believed in Jesus despite the afflictions in life. In fact, he is courageous and unflinching under suffering because of his faith in Christ. He has great hope in God. Even though he has to confront pain in this fallen world, there is great peace in his inner life and his heart is tremendously burdened to help others. He seemed to be more blessed, more optimistic and full of life because of Christ. This reminds me of Jesus' words to His disciples:

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

What can I deduce from these two lives? Here is my conclusion, which is based not just on these two men, but from reading the Holy Scripture and observing numerous lives in the fifteen years of my Christian life. The man who rejects God because of pain and suffering grows more miserable—if not outwardly but for sure inwardly. He lives in a hopeless state and becomes pessimistic about life. He may prosper materially and may appear externally happy but he cannot escape the inner ache of emptiness and loneliness. But the man who clings to Christ in spite of pain and afflictions becomes stronger, patient and mature. He knows that God is in control and works all things for good (Romans 8:28). He possesses indescribable inner peace and joyful hope in God. Moreover, he even refreshes the hearts of many, for people need encouragement from those who have been through the path of pain and have peace as their shelter amidst the storms of life. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (Romans 12:12)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (2 Corinthians 4:16-17)

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S. Good, But Not Humble

Good, But Not Humble

Lately, I have been thinking about the term “good”. It has become quite common these days to say, “She is good” or “He is good”. If someone speaks of us as a good person, it does make us feel good, right? However, I came to realize that I should not settle with being good. I need to pursue, purify and excel in the most excellent virtue. What is it?

If I ask myself, “Out of all the people I know who I think are good, can I testify they are also humble?” To be honest, I can’t. Perhaps, out of 100% of the people I know whom I call ‘good’, I wonder whether I would be able to testify at least 5% among them as humble. The term ‘good’ has become such an ordinary word, even often loosely used, we attribute that to anyone who may appear ‘nice’, at least in appearance. But the term ‘humble’ cannot be that easily applied to anybody, for it is the most excellent virtue.

How thoughtful we become when it comes to call someone a humble person! How difficult it is to testify about others, even the good we suppose, as being humble! And how difficult it maybe for others too to consider us as a humble person! What do people think about us - good or even humble? What do we want to become - just good or eager to live a life of humility? When Ravi Zacharias was interviewed about his ministry, he was asked, “What have you learned in this struggle about building a good team?” Ravi answered, “First and most important characteristic in every team member is humility.” His response is astounding. Since his is an apologetics ministry, reaching the intellectuals, one may expect his answer to have just a bunch of brilliants and speakers to build a good team.

I think Ravi well understood the point James made, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom” (James 3:13). Ravi ends his answer with these words, “If I had to do it all over again, I would start looking slower in building a team, and I would do it with a person whose first characteristic to me was that of humility.” After going through failures, I have learned this lesson too in my ministry. It is not easy to find humble people and it is even more difficult to learn humility.

Jerry Bridges writes, “The two Christian character traits taught most frequently in the New Testament are love and humility.” Therefore, should we not make these virtues our highest priority to pursue?

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below (or) write to E-mail: friendsofchrist@gmail.com (or) cstephendavid@gmail.com

S. He Transformed My Life

He Transformed My Life Stephen David's interview by CBN INDIA on how he was encountered by Christ Jesus.

"Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous Deeds."
(Psalms 71:17)

It is written in the Holy Bible, "Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples" (Psalms 96:3). I gladly take this great privilege to testify of the goodness and the greatness of God in my life. The following message is a brief testimony of my life and most importantly, of His grace upon me.

LIFE BEFORE CHRIST Family Background

I was born in the year 1976, on September 30th, in a lower class family. We lived in an inner-city slum for years. Half of my life was spent there and I remember the difficult times our family went through. My papa was a bus driver and poured his entire life for the upbringing of our family. My mom was a housewife and she too sacrificed her life for the service of her children and husband. My parents begat three sons and one daughter, also adopted two cousins. I am the youngest and of course, the most pampered son.

Religious Upbringing Our family was not very religious and I did not know what it was to grow in a godly family. Our religious background was basically Roman Catholicism, however, my family believed in polytheism and therefore all of us were idolaters. I still remember how as a child I used to go with my family to various religious places of different religions. We worshipped anything or anyone the crowd followed. My elder brother, in his teens, happened to become a devotee of one of the admired gods of India, 'Shirdi Sai Baba.' Not only did he lead others to become the followers of Baba, in the year 1990, he also won me over to become Baba's follower. I became an ardent worshipper of Baba and followed various rituals. To me all religions were various roads to God and I did not mind accepting anything that seemed to be appealing. Like many others, I did not care to examine my beliefs or practices as long as something good resulted according to what I had desired.

Secular Education

I suppose there is not much to speak about my academics. I was not a bright student and with much difficulty studied up to class 10th. I became too mischievous when I was in the 9th class and caused problems in the school. After coming to the 10th, I started to bunk classes to watch movies and loaf around. Because of my misconduct, my Principal almost decided to terminate me from the school. Due to my family's pleading, he relented and gave me another chance to continue my studies. Nonetheless, I continued to live a rebellious life. In the year 1991, I worked hard for a while and somehow managed to finish my matriculation. I do not take the credit of passing the exam because I cheated. Moreover, I was having affair with a girl at that time. Over the time of my

entrance into the college, though I was unfit to take subjects relating to medicine, because my girl friend chose to do Bi.P.C, I too opted the same. Sadly, I could not finish my college while my girl friend went through and eventually became a physiotherapist.

During my college years, my family was under dire financial struggles. My father went to United Arab Emirates to earn considerable amount of money to support my family. Regretfully he was deceived by the agent. He suffered terribly in the desert and lost his health. With a hope that our father is going to send surplus money, my family went ahead and got my sister married. You know how expensive it is to have a woman get married in India, for it involves dowry and numerous other expenses. After her marriage, our hopes were shattered and our family went into debts and faced severe accusations and insults from the creditors.

Troubled by our afflictions, my father went to the extent of selling his kidney in UAE to help us in our desperate condition but the doctors had to reject his plea because he had acquired diabetes. Removing his kidney will inevitably cost his life. Here in India, not knowing what to do, my mother and brother virtually decided to commit suicide, after giving poison to the rest of the family members. Thankfully, by the grace of Jesus Christ, things did not happen as they desired for my brother Nelson was saved at that time. Eventually, it took almost eight painful years to come out of our debts.

During those pathetic circumstances, I stopped going to college and started to work as a waiter in a pub where there was a cabaret act. I almost lost interest in studies by then and was caught up in a mood to earn money and enjoy life. If asked today about my secular academic studies, I must honestly admit that I am not a well-educated person, having only a tenth class certificate, that too passed in first class by cheating in the exam.

Indulgence in Wickedness and Evil Habits

Encircled by the poverty in my family, I supposed money to be the answer for life. I resolved to earn as much money as I could, be it through good or evil ways, to live a carefree and pleasurable life. Through lying and by producing fake educational certificates I secured work in an eminent hospital. There I began to misappropriate money. Once caught without sufficient proof, I was transferred to the main branch under disciplinary action. However, that would not restrain a person who had already committed himself to acquire riches by any and all means. My only aim was to become an affluent person through whatever means. I was pursuing various illegal ways to reach my goal. In 1995, one person, whom I suppose to be a maoist, had observed my radical life and offered me money to commit a murder. Without taking time, I immediately consented to do anything for money. However, we both had a conflict later and the plan to murder failed. I thank God for not letting that happen. In my wild passion to obtain more money and pleasure, I began to sink lower and lower in behavior and morality. I got addicted to smoking and loved to drink. Once I got drunk to such an extent that I almost behaved like an animal and fell unconscious on the road. My friends carried me to my house and I slept like a dead man for more than normal hours. Due to smoking, even today if I run fast for a little distance, I struggle to breathe normally for at least half an hour. I was earning a lot of money in an improper way and lived a hedonistic life. There were times I ended up in a police station twice and in a court case on petty issue. I was lured into pornography and lost the basic moral senses of humanity. My heart was wretched, my speech abusive and my lifestyle horrible.

ENCOUNTERING JESUS CHRIST In living a wicked life, my heart became terribly restless and I started to question myself about where I was heading. I was told about Jesus Christ but I was reluctant to either hear or believe. To me, money and pleasure was the answer for life. Believe me, my family was scared of my lifestyle and some of them, who already came to the knowledge of the Savior, started praying for me.

There came a time when I was preparing to commit a crime along with my friends. During that process, on June 26th 1996, something happened to me that changed the rest of my life. A heavy conviction came on my heart when I woke up in the morning and my mind was bombarded with questions about my life and future. There was nothing auspicious or a miraculous encounter to think about God. On that day I happened to go to the temple of Sai Baba, along with my relatives, and stood before the idol as the devotees were coming in one by one to worship. To me all gods were one and I found nothing wrong in differing religious practices.

However, on that day a powerful conviction gripped my heart and my sins emerged before me. I could clearly sense my evil heart. The Holy Bible actually condemns idolatry. The thoughts about Jesus were becoming more real to me. With a repentant heart, there in the Baba's temple, I knelt and gave my life to Christ and became His follower. Oh, I was born-again! It amazes me even today how God visits in unexpected places.

LIFE AFTER CHRIST When I became a Christian, my life drastically changed. Jesus transformed a horrible beast like me. I came to know that there is only one God and none other and salvation is only in Jesus' name (Isaiah 45:22; Acts 4:12). When I shared this with my friends they mocked at me and abandoned me for taking a decision to follow Christ. I wasn't disturbed much because the love of God was all-sufficient for me. During that time, I learned, "People may love me thinking that I am good but God loves me knowing that I am bad."

After being saved by Jesus Christ, I was passionate to know God more and more. I knew nothing about God and the Holy Bible except the gospel of Jesus Christ. The only thing I knew was that Jesus loves me, laid His life for me on the Cross and rose on the third day and that He was the only Savior and hope for the perishing world. Well, the Lord made a way for me to join in a Bible college. I wasn't good at speaking English and I struggled a lot to learn there. During my theological studies, initially, I could not preach well in English due to language barrier.

Thankfully, God gave me the grace to become a diligent reader of the Holy Bible. For the first time in my life I started to spend long hours in reading the books in library. Finally, after three years, I completed my graduation in theology and lectured there for a while. Later, I started a ministry and am continuing to upgrade my theological education. Currently the Lord has blessed me with preaching, teaching and writing ministry.

I must also mention that there were ups and downs in my Christian life. There were times I turned my back on the Lord and grieved His heart. Nevertheless, God chased me in His love and persevered patiently with me. He is constantly working in my life and now I cannot imagine my life without Jesus. The joy that I have in Him now is nothing compared to what I was pursuing in the world before coming to Christ. I am eternally grateful to know that the Lord Jesus Christ alone is the answer for life.

Final Words

Once in a hopeless condition, our family is now a mighty witness of Jesus Christ. My elder brother, C. Nelson David (a former devotee of Sai Baba), was the first person in our family to believe in Christ. Today he is an outstanding servant of God and a wonderful preacher of God's word. My papa trusted Jesus in his latter days and went to be with the Lord in the year 2003. My cousin sister, Vinolia, is active in ministry. My mom has an evangelistic heart and passionately shares about Jesus with many women. My girl friend, Chaitanya Devi, trusted Christ in 1997 and we both got married in 1998. We are now blessed with two wonderful sons, Joy and Joe.

Dear reader, if I was not saved by the grace of Jesus Christ, I would have become either a smuggler or a criminal. Jesus is the One who is able to save and change sinful lives. You may not be as worst as I was but the Holy Bible says that we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23); and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). When we repent of our sins and trust in the Lord's finished work on the Cross for the atonement of our sins, our sins are forgiven, our lives are transformed and we have eternal life. My life is a testimony of what God can do through a man who can do nothing by himself. Yes, He can bring the best out of the worst. The following Scripture is something I ought not to forget in my life: "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him" (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE SECOND PART OF MY TESTIMONY.](#)

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S. Hear O Servants of God

Hear O Servants of God In His discourse with the disciples, Jesus said, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). Many make a mistake in assuming that this question chiefly applies to unbelievers who run after the earthly things. But coming to the context, we learn that Jesus was actually speaking to His followers, to His disciples, to His future apostles, teaching them the cost of true discipleship.

"What does it profit to us if we gain everything in the world, yet forfeit our own soul?" This serious exhortation applies to us, the leaders representing God, as to anyone else. As we live in this sinful world serving the Lord, are we not surrounded by numerous temptations to serve God with a worldly attitude? Is it not possible to do the Lord's work with selfish ambitions, eventually gaining the world but forfeiting our soul?

Few days back I met a brother in the Lord who wrote a song, in which one verse goes like this, "You who say about leaving the world to serve Christ, are you now trying to gain the world in the Lord's service?"

Dying to Self

Going to the preceding verse, Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

We may love to do ministry and be busy in Christ's service, love to preach and teach and minister to the people, but if we are not serious in our private, inner life - denying our self and taking up our cross - everything we do is in vain for our eternal profit. Just think, how can we bring the lost under the lordship of Christ Jesus without we fulfilling the cost of discipleship which He laid down before us? How can we lead people to Christ without we walking with Him? How can we serve Christ without following Him?

Here is a perilous fact in doing God's ministry: It is terribly possible to get involved in ministerial activities while loving self and denying the cross. Like the church in Ephesus, we may labor, suffer and have a sound doctrine and yet forsake our first love (Revelation 2:2-4). Like the church in Sardis, we may have a reputation of being alive, and yet be dead inside (Revelation 3:1). Like the church in Laodicea who were neither cold nor hot, we may be lukewarm leaders and yet lead a lifeless ministry (Revelation 3:15-16).

Hence we need to digest this truth deeply in our soul – in our willingness to follow and to serve our Lord Jesus Christ, what matters most is our inner crucified life and sanctity in Him.

I see how easy it is for us, the leaders, to get involved in outward ministerial activities and neglect to practice private Bible-meditation, obedience to God's commandments, devoted prayer life, self-examination in the light of the Holy Spirit, holy living, brotherly love, humble walk with God and exemplary life in family and society. How often we walk outwardly with a garment of doing a grand ministry while being inwardly naked and void!

I fear that the worldly people as well as the people of God observe that our practical lives are far different from what we believe and preach. No wonder the Apostle Paul said, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16). Moreover, in our service to people in the name of Christ, we are even exhorted to set ourselves as an example for others in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (1 Timothy 4:12).

Sober Commitment My dear servants of God, real discipleship implies total commitment, not primarily to the service of God, but to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Our Lord is more concerned of our commitment to follow Him than of our service to Him. He in fact said, "Whoever serves me must follow me" (John 12:26). May we venture not to bypass the path to follow God in our endeavor to serve Him! Remember, our service to Christ will be a fragrant offering to God when we live for Him and serve Him in the beauty of His holiness.

Regretfully, because of our neglect in following what has been exhorted in the Word of God, no doubt, much disgrace has been brought to the Name of God, much trouble has been brought to the body of Christ [i.e. the church], much confusion has been caused to those who are on their way to the Cross, many opportunities have been given to the enemy to accuse and thus, much harm has been done to one's soul.

Truly, what profit will it be for us if we are not careful to walk our talk and talk our walk? C.H. Spurgeon rightly warned, "To be lost under the shadow of a pulpit is dreadful, but how much more so to perish from the pulpit itself!" Ah, we leaders carry the ark of the LORD! In his challenging book, *The Reformed Pastor*, Richard Baxter warns, "Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling-blocks before the blind, as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the great hinderers of the success of your own labors."

Passion for Christ and Souls

I believe, in our attempt to do the ministry of Christ, if our prime motive is not to glorify God and to impact lives, we are work-centered busy bodies, not Christ-centered laborers. It is scaring to know that it is awfully possible to do the ministry of Christ without having passionate love for Christ and burning passion for souls. We may be diligent readers, effective communicators of the word, skillful administrators, fiery preachers and yet be dead in our heart for the lost. A minister of God rightly observed, "There is a passion for ministry without having a passion for souls."

It is appalling to know that ministry can become a self-serving object than a desirable means to glorify God and to bring the people into His kingdom. But some may say, "I am doing everything for God and people." Well, let's examine ourselves: Do we long for God's intimacy? Do we fear to sin against Him? Do we have what is called soul-travail? Do we agonize in prayer for the lost? Do we passionately love God and people? Do we cry over the lukewarm condition of the contemporary church? Have we the sense of urgency to share the gospel? If not, there is something terribly wrong with our hearts. I myself am seeing a great lack of these qualities in my heart and seeking God's face for personal revival.

Dear brothers, we cannot expect God to bless our work which arises from a lukewarm heart. Leonard Ravenhill rightly observed, "We have too many dead men in the pulpits giving out too

many dead sermons to too many dead people." Dead people do not need dead ministers. They need preachers who are ignited with the flame of God's love to raise them from dead spirituality by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us ask God for such a burning heart of love for Christ and for people and the results of its descension on us are incredible.

Cry, O leaders, cry aloud, As we grieve the Spirit of the Lord;

Wake, O servants, stay awake, As many are blinded by devil's fake.

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S. How Can We Be Effective in Evangelism?

How Can We Be Effective in Evangelism?

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, was one of the greatest soul-winners ever lived in the history of Christianity. The Lord used him to win many into His kingdom, to plant churches, to raise leaders and to make a significant impact in his generation and in the generations to come. Though there was opposition and persecution, lack of results at times and various kinds of trials, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Paul was mighty in evangelism. But why is it that many of us in our time are not as effective as was Paul in evangelism and in impacting the lives around us? How can we become mighty in evangelism like Paul? In my today's evening quiet time, the Lord helped me to understand certain significant reasons behind Paul's effectiveness. It is my prayer and desire to possess these qualities in my life and I trust you would love to have the same in you.

1. Passion

It is humbling to read these words of Paul, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel" (Romans 9:3-4).

These are no superficial words. What intense passion and steady burden Paul had for his people! He had a great heart for people as he desired to see hearts changed by the power of the gospel. His passion for the salvation of his people was so tremendous that he wished even to accept eternal damnation for their eternal life's sake. Paul didn't just preach the gospel; He preached the gospel with passion and compassion for the lost. Do we have this passion and love for our people? Do we agonize in our soul that souls are perishing around us? Is our heart broken to see people living a life separated from the Living God? Do we burn in our heart to turn people from going into eternal fire? How can we be effective in evangelism without such intense passion for the lost?

2. Prayer

Paul expressed, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved" (Romans 10:1).

Paul not only wished to see the salvation of his people, but he also prayed, persistently prayed, that they would come to the knowledge of the truth. His was not a mere emotional wish, but his intense burden led him to fervent prayer. Since salvation comes from the Lord, he poured his soul at His feet to save them. He didn't simply preach the gospel; He earnestly prayed to the Lord of salvation to save those who hear the gospel. Paul was not just a man of the gospel; he was also a man of prayer.

We who desire to be effective in evangelism, are we effective in praying for the lost? Do we realize that all our labor and methods are fruitless in evangelism without the mighty work of the Holy Spirit? Do we completely depend on God through prayer for the work of the Holy Spirit? Do we

grieve, even weep, for the salvation of the lost? How can we be mighty in evangelism if we are not mighty in our prayer life?

3. Purity

Paul wrote, "You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed" (1 Thessalonians 2:10).

How careful Paul was when he did gospel work among the Thessalonians! He conducted himself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (Php 1:27). He strived always to keep his conscience clear before God and man (Acts 24:16). He was careful not to say or do anything that would become a stumbling block in the spread of the gospel. Despite his struggle with personal weaknesses, he conducted himself in purity and integrity, making his life attractive to the gospel of Christ. Reading his life makes it obvious that Paul defended the authenticity of the gospel not only by his words but also by the way he lived. As we want to see people transformed through the gospel of Christ, are we continuously being conformed to Christ-likeness? Does our life confirm or hinders the message of the gospel? Are we making every effort to live an exemplary life so that in every way we will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive? (Titus 2:10) How can we be effective in evangelism if we are not effective in our Christian lifestyle?

4. Preaching In his farewell message to the Ephesian elders, said Paul, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24).

We know that the best way to become an expert in any field is to keep practicing it. Paul was effective in evangelism because he continuously engaged himself in proclaiming the gospel of Christ. To him, nothing was more important than knowing Christ and making Him known to others. His life was sharply marked with a passion to preach Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). He was reluctant to miss a single opportunity of witnessing to others. To him, preaching the gospel was not an option, but a solemn obligation (Romans 1:14-15). He seriously took to heart the Great Commission and made every effort to fulfill it.

How about us, dear friends? Do we preach the gospel at all times? Does our heart beat constantly to proclaim the glory of Christ? Do we grab the opportunities of witnessing Christ to others? Or are we just engrossed in pursuing success and prosperity in this world without seriously considering fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord? How can we be effective in evangelism if we occasionally and conveniently preach the gospel?

5. Power In his letter to Corinthians, Paul asserts, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

Paul was not just simply filled with the knowledge about the gospel; he was filled with the Holy Spirit and power to proclaim the gospel of Christ. He wasn't content to present the gospel simply with words, but strived to preach it with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction (1 Thessalonians 1:5). O, there was energy, power and conviction in the gospel he preached! His gospel preaching was a power-filled preaching. Just like his Lord, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him as he preached the good news (Luke 4:18). Are we discontent with our knowledge, intellect

and experience and hunger more for a Spirit-filled life and ministry? Do we continuously seek to be clothed with the power from on high to live as Christ's mighty witnesses (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8) Do we hate our cold heart and dead preaching, and long to have fire in our heart and life in our preaching? How can we be effective in evangelism without being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit? May the Lord make us men and women of passion, of prayer, of purity, of preaching and of power and use us in these last days to effectively spread the gospel of Christ, proclaiming His glory to the nations. Our Father in heaven, we come before You with our hearts which is passionless, prayerless, powerless, godless and gospel-less. We ask You that You send Your holy fire from above and revive us to live a life like Your servant Paul. Help us not to waste our precious life on earth by indulging ourselves into materialism and worldly hedonism. Give us Your grace to live our life completely for Your glory, for the fulfillment of Your will and for Your kingdom purpose. May Your name be hallowed in and through our lives. In Jesus Name. Amen.

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S. How to Become Rich Forever?

How to Become Rich Forever?

“Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours” - C.S. Lewis

Recently, I read in the newspaper that with a net worth of \$29 billion (more than Rs. 1,32,000 crore), industrialist Mukesh Ambani remains the richest Indian. He is the world’s fourth richest, according to Forbes. But, is he the fourth richest or the fourth poorest person in the sight of the Living God?

People generally think those who possess abundant wealth and gain everything that is in the world are really the blessed ones. This may be true in a sense. However, God judges things quite different from people. The rich and poor on earth are not viewed by God in the same way as we do. In the parable of the rich fool, Jesus said, “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21).

Take a note here - those who store up things for themselves are not rich toward God. They are not the blessed ones in His sight. They are, in actual fact, impoverished and destitute. Conversely, those who give and share are considered rich before God, however poor they may be in the sight of the world. Did not Jesus say, “It is more blessed to give than to receive?” (Acts 20:35) It is not receiving which is the best test of blessing and reward but giving.

Store Eternal Treasures in Heaven Our Lord Jesus Christ said: Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

Paul exhorted the rich to "lay up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed" (1 Timothy 6:19). The Holy Scripture teaches us that our central focus should be on God and eternity, storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Randy Alcorn dialogues, “Consider what Jesus is saying: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.” Why not? Because earthly treasures are bad? No. Because they won’t last.”[1] It is written, “Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle” (Proverbs 23:5).

So, how can we become rich forever? How do we store up for ourselves great treasures in heaven?

Well, it is obviously by giving. Jesus said, "Sell what you have and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven!" (Luke 12:33, NLT). The eternally rich in the Kingdom of God are those who are generous on earth. God taught that the eternal things are more valuable than the temporal and the way we store great treasure in eternity is by generously giving up temporal things.

Coming to practical lives, how people of God consistently labor to amass great wealth and material things on earth! But at the hour of death do they take anything with them? Thrice it is emphasized in the Holy Scriptures that we came naked and go naked, for we brought nothing into the world and we certainly take nothing out of it. All our laborious earning will be left behind when we face the reality of death (Job 1:21; Ecclesiastes 5:15; 1 Timothy 6:7).

Now this is not to say that it is wrong to attain and save money and material things. But if we do not add generous giving to our laborious gaining and saving, everything is going to be in vain. Such people will be paupers in the Kingdom of God, for they have abundantly gained and stored without abundant giving.

Rich Forever Here is a true story of a man who has become radically rich forever:

C T Studd was the greatest cricketer of his day. While he was in Cambridge in 1882, the Australian Cricket team was shattered because Studd scored 101 runs and took eight wickets. His father was wealthy. So he had everything a young man want - wealth, fame, name and education. But one day he accepted the claims of Christ in his life and he became a believer and later became a missionary for Christ. While Studd was engaged in missionary work, his father died and left him more than 25,000 pounds. It was a great worth in his day. But when he read in the Bible the words of Jesus to a rich young man: "Go your way, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven" (Mark 10:21 KJV), Studd sat down and made out some cheques – 5,000 pounds to Moody, 5,000 pounds to General Booth of Salvation Army, 5,000 pounds to George Mueller, 5,000 pounds to White chapel Mission and another 5 cheques each of 1,000 pounds. When the Estate was finally settled he discovered he still possessed 3,400 pounds. He offered this money to his wife. She refused to accept it. He wrote to General Booth, "I am instructing our bankers to sell our last earthly inheritance and to give them to you; hence forth our bank is in heaven. Now we can thank God that we are in the proud position of being able to say, 'Silver and gold have I none'." [2]

People might have called C T Studd a fool for such an act of liberal giving. Yet in heaven's sight he was wiser and rich in God. He is like a person about whom Jim Elliot (1927-56), a missionary and martyr to Acua Indians, said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." [3] We may not be as liberal as C T Studd but are we seeking to live a life of generosity in this age crazy for prosperity? When we all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, all of us have to stand before Him utterly stripped of money and material things. We take nothing with us and stand naked before our God to give an account for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

I suppose, many would mourn on that day for neglecting to use their earthy things according to God's Word and leaving back everything in vain. Oh, in heaven, no person will be greatly rewarded for what he received but for what he gave. We may loose by saving, but by giving we will not loose anything but store eternal riches in heaven. In the Kingdom of God, the loser over here will be a gainer and the possessor over here will be a loser.

Lord, make us wealthy in your Kingdom by making us generous on earth!

Cautions

1) Generous giving doesn't earn salvation. Good works in itself cannot save anyone. We are saved solely by the finished work of Christ on the Cross. But great will be the reward of those in heaven who did abundant good works in Christ.

2) The Sermon on the Mount teaches bad intentions nullify good deeds. In the practice of generous giving, we must guard ourselves from falling into hypocrisy, giving in order to be noticed by men and to gain honor from them than with a purpose to glorify the Father in Heaven.

3) Generous giving ought to be practiced wisely. We need to examine and give where the genuine need is and bless the truly needy people. And when it comes to the support of missions and leaders, make sure they are truly laborers in the field, not sluggish and time wasters in the name of full-time ministry.

Notes:

[1] Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2001), 12 [2] Adapted from *Herald of His Coming* (Indian Edition), July 2003, 10 [3] Cited by Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor* (ILL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1981), 3

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S. How to Keep Your Fire Burning for the LORD?

How to Keep Your Fire Burning for the LORD?

The last weekend, the Lord has given me the privilege to minister to the young folks in Mumbai. During the Q&A session, someone asked, “How to stay steadfast in my devotion to God?”

Don’t you suppose this is an intense struggle many of us often pass through?

Enlarging Ordinary Devotions

There are many who disappointedly ask, “I went to numerous seminars, camps and church meetings. I heard powerful messages, was set on fire for God and made great commitments to change. However, just after few days, the fire subsided and I returned to the same pathetic condition. I lost hope to change. How can I have my heart continuously burning for the Lord?” In fifteen years of my Christian life, after experiencing many such topsy-turvy moments, I have learned a secret, or rather a fact—the way to keep fanning our inner flame for God, the means to steadfastly maintain and enhance our spiritual fervency, is through consistent private devotions. The seventeenth-century Anglican, Jeremy Taylor, well counseled, “If thou meanest to enlarge thy religion, do it rather by enlarging thine ordinary devotions than thy extraordinary.” In other words, “If you think about enlarging your spiritual life, do it rather by cultivating your daily ordinary devotions than by extending your extraordinary meetings.”

Too many of us think of going here and there for special meetings and seminars to get our hearts set on fire for God. However important they are, such fire dies soon if we neglect our daily devotional time with the Lord, for it is here that our spiritual fervency is preserved and boosted.

Fanning through Spiritual Disciplines

We live by eating our daily bread at home, not by occasional appetizing food in the restaurants. Likewise, we live by our personal daily quiet time [not short and hurried but sufficient time] before the Lord, not by occasional spiritual meetings and conferences. The latter is only a supplement, not a substitute.

Nothing can take the place of private devotions to guard and stir up our spiritual fervency in the Lord. It is through this private time with the Father, our Lord Jesus, during His earthly ministry, kept the fire increasingly burning within Him to fulfill the will of God [see Mark 1:35 ff; Luke 4:42 ff].

Few days ago, our family went to visit my in-laws. Since the climate was too cold, I sat outside with my children, warming ourselves before the wood fire. Whenever the fire kept going down, we kept putting the wood in the fire and enjoyed the warmth as the fire kept rising from declining into a smoke.

I think, it is the same with our spiritual fervency—whenever the fire goes down, we daily put the wood of prayer and meditation of God’s word in order to keep burning for the Lord. To burn continuously for God we need to keep ourselves close to God through the means of spiritual

disciplines.

Fight for Secret Devotions By God's grace, we need to fight daily against all the distractions and business for the private and adequate meeting with the Lord every morning.

I have observed this in my life more than hundred times—whenever I neglected my devotional time with the Lord, my heart turned from burning as a fire into a stench of smoke; I lost passion for God, sensitivity towards the Spirit, joy of the Lord and zeal to serve and encourage people.

Therefore, I fight daily, by God's efficient grace, to discipline my personal devotional time before the Lord, spending more than two hours early in the morning, meditating on God's word, praying and worshiping, so that the fire on my altar would keep burning for God. C.H. Spurgeon rightly said, "Secret devotion is the very essence, evidence, and barometer, of vital and experimental religion." Of course, this fight is a delightful battle and not drudgery, for the fruit of private devotions is increased spiritual fervency and overwhelming joy in the Lord. And this devotional time is not confined to the early morning; this definite time of devotion should enable our walk with God and sharpen our consciousness of Him throughout the day.

Yes, there are times of dryness, but I have learned not to give up at such moments; by God's gracious help, I get restored to the Fountain of Life and daily get that fuel from the Lord, my Rock, to keep burning for His glory.

Caution: Spiritual disciplines are only the means to grow in Christ; the source of all fruit is Christ and Christ alone.

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Insecurity - The Unavoidable Battle in Leadership

Insecurity – The Unavoidable Battle in Leadership

There is an intriguing event in the history of Israel. It is an incident from which today's leaders can be cautioned about digging our own pitfalls out of fear of insecurity. It is a story about a man who was strong and gifted but ruined his kingdom for being ruled by insecure feelings.

Jeroboam – A Man of Insecurity The story begins with the disobedience of Solomon. When he followed after other gods, turning his back against the Living God, the Lord then raised up Jeroboam (a key official of Solomon) against him (1 Kings 11:1-43). The Lord promised Jeroboam that he would tear apart the kingdom of Israel and bless him with ten tribes, making him king over Israel. The Lord also cautioned him to be careful in following His commands so that his throne would remain secure forever (1 Kings 11:31-39).

However, things didn't happen as God exhorted Jeroboam. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided, having Jeroboam as the king over Israel and Rehoboam as the king over Judah. Then Jeroboam did something detestable in the sight of the Living God. He made two golden calves and enticed Israel to worship them. He also built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites (1 Kings 12:28-33).

One wonders why Jeroboam had chosen to do these evil things! Do you want to know the reason? After Israel revolted against the house of David and submitted itself to the leadership of Jeroboam, they still had to go to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices at the temple. Now Jeroboam was afraid. He thought to himself, "If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam" (1 Kings 12:26-27). So, to guard his life and his leadership, he schemed such evil things at the cost of going against the standards of God, eventually ruining his life and his kingdom.

It seems apparent to me that the thing that led to Jeroboam's downfall is this—INSECURITY. Although he was excited about his new kingship, he could have felt insecure that he might lose his control over people, which leads to loss of leadership, and consequently went his own way to guard his position.

We leaders are not immune from this temptation. In fact, insecurity is widespread especially among the leaders. How possible it is for a person to be multi-talented, passionate, brilliant, influential, and yet be ruled by insecure emotions! How difficult it is to remain secure in God when leadership is threatened! How painful it is to remain confident in the Lord when fear of losing people lurks within us! How many good leaders, for the sake of controlling people and protecting their position of leadership, lost their godly character and gave in to manipulation, unhealthy control, strife, selfishness and wicked ways!

Lessons to Learn from Jeroboam's Insecurity The following are few insightful lessons to learn from Jeroboam's insecurity, which led to his downfall, so that we would not allow such follies to wreck both our lives and ministry.

1) Placed in leadership by God's grace, not by own efforts. Jeroboam failed to understand that it is by God's grace he became a leader of Israel, not by himself. He did not push his way to the top; it is God who exalted him. The thought of becoming a king didn't occur in his mind; it was God who revealed his plan to him. Yet, Jeroboam behaved as if his leadership originated from himself and is secured by himself. No matter how knowledgeable, smart and skillful we are, we become leaders by grace and are sustained by it. When we fail to realize that we are in leadership only by God's grace, we go worldly ways to build and protect our world. But recognizing the grace of God in our lives makes us more grateful, not greedy. When there is no recognition of grace from above we become ambitious for earthly glory. Knowing we are what we are only by God's grace directs us to lead for His glory, not for self-glorification. When our eyes are fixed upon God's gracious activities, even when we are not in leadership, we wait for God's timing, not take up crooked ways to fulfill our aspirations. Where is our focus—on our throne or upon the Throne of Grace?

2) Trusting in God's sovereign control. The divine orchestration of God's intervention is obviously seen in Jeroboam's life. He became king by God's appointment. If God had selected him, then it is He who provides him security. His throne was guarded by the Throne of God. The Living Lord was in control of his life and kingdom. Nothing could touch him without passing through the eyes of God.

Nevertheless, when his leadership seemed to be threatened by assumed events, what did Jeroboam do? Rather than recognizing God's sovereign control over his life, he decided to control things himself. In his leadership, he didn't teach himself that it is God who places and God who removes—if He places, I must humbly serve Him, and when He removes, I ought to humbly submit to His authority. He didn't learn the lesson from Saul's and David's life—when God decides to place someone, none can prevent him; when God resolves to remove someone, none can withhold him. No leader can be secure in his leadership if his trust is not in the sovereign control of God. Only when he trusts God with absolute control of his life and leadership can he confront the challenges on his way with courage and security. When comforts turn into crisis, do we turn to God and trust Him to handle things, dealing with the situations according to His wisdom, or do we endeavor to control situations out of fear of insecurity? When our leadership is threatened, do we clench the position of leadership or cling to the Leader of the heavens and the earth?

There is a gentle reminder for us in the Scripture, "No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another" (Psalms 75:7). Hence, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time" (1 Peter 5:6).

3) Focus on obeying the commandments of God. The Lord made it plain to Jeroboam, "If you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you." (1 Kings 11:38) Where was Jeroboam's security? In God alone and by living in obedience to His word! The endurance of his kingdom was dependent on his submission to the word of God. But Jeroboam's focus turned from

obeying the commandments of God to clenching leadership. He wanted to hold his position by hook or by crook rather than by walking in the ways of God. A leader's security is in obeying the commandments of God. The more he departs from it, the more he declines in leadership. A leader is a godly leader as long as he walks in the ways of God. Once he turns his back against God, although he may still continue as a leader for a while, he has lost his saltiness and destruction awaits him.

Remember, obedience is better than leadership. It is better for us to lose leadership than compromise on the standards of God. When love for leadership takes precedence over love for obeying God, a leader gives himself to wickedness, becoming a selfish, ambitious person. When taking his own ways, although he may think he is doing all things to secure his leadership, he is in fact digging his own pit to fall in it one day. Where is our focus—obedience to God or obsession with leadership?

4) Leadership is a place for servanthood, not for egoism. Jeroboam was placed in leadership by God, not for his own sake, but to serve the people of Israel. Sadly, Jeroboam didn't see leadership as a responsibility to serve people, but as a means for self-glorification. His passion was not for God's mission, but to gratify his selfish ambitions. His fear was that he may lose control over the people (and let them go back to Rehoboam) rather than being concerned to serve them. He loved power, position, praise, prestige, property, his own pride, rather than people who were entrusted to him by God.

How easy it is to miss this pivotal point in leadership—that we are there for people; they are not there for us! We are leaders to serve people; they are not there to serve us. We are supposed to give attention to them, not to gain recognition. We are there to lead them for the glory of God, not for self-glorification. We are responsible to think and do best for them, not to be absorbed in self-interests. We are not to hold them under our grip but gear them up to live according to God's will. When we live in this way, we would rather lose leadership than God's standards and His people.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear—leadership is not the goal; it is only a means for servanthood. Do we continuously deny ourselves—resisting to love power, position, praise, prestige, property, pride—and place people above all, loving them and serving them for the glory of God?

5) Walking by truth rather than entertaining assumptions. Jeroboam assumed that if people go to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices, they may again give their allegiance to Rehoboam, king of Judah. So, to avoid this supposedly pathetic situation, he erected idols and appointed unauthorized priests in his own land so that people may remain under his wings. He did all these things under assumption, without analyzing whether his presumptions are based on truth.

Insecurity breeds folly assumptions. Insecure leaders are often led by assumptions (becoming complicated personalities in interpersonal relationships) rather than by truth. They manifest unhealthy tendencies as below:

- exercise unhealthy control and authority over people
- lack of trust in people
- constantly live under the pressure to please people
- fear about what people think about them
- extremely sensitive and easily feels rejected by people
- lacks transparency among people
- lives with

unresolved conflicts in relationships • cannot bear if others are given more attention than themselves • long for approval, respect and praise from people • increasing defensive attitude • reluctance to accept correction from people • curious to know all public and private issues of their followers Who of us do not manifest the above tendencies, either in part or in whole! I suppose, we all are victims of such mindsets in one way or another. Therefore, we have to constantly watch our attitudes, know who we are in Christ Jesus, cultivate Christ-like character and discipline ourselves to walk by truth, not by assumptions. May the Lord enable us all to find our ultimate security in Him and enlighten us to see people as objects of service rather than as instruments to satisfy our insecure feelings!

6) Going against God is going against ourselves. Jeroboam foolishly thought that he can protect himself, guard his kingdom and secure his position by going on his own standards which are against God. He deceived himself into thinking that he can bypass the standards of God and still excel in life. His life story teaches that doing so reaps ruination of our lives and leadership.

We as leaders need to learn this most important lesson—going against God is going against ourselves. To damage His ministry is to destroy ourselves. To bring disgrace to His Name is to bulldoze our self-esteem. But loving God is loving ourselves. Obeying God is to shower great favor upon ourselves. Living a good life for God is doing good to ourselves. Following the Peace-Giver is to live in peace. Finding security in Christ Jesus—the One who loved us and gave Himself for us—is to live a life free from the fear of insecurity.

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Insights from Gen_3:1-24

Insights from Genesis 3:1-24 1. Doubting the Goodness of God

Genesis 3:4-5, "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

How crafty the devil is! His goal is to rob the people from their Maker by making them doubt God's very character. Here's the devil's counsel to his co-workers, "If you want to mislead the people from their Creator, it's quite simple - just make use of the opportunities to let them doubt His love and goodness." The serpent had been successful in tempting Eve by having her doubt the goodness and faithfulness of God. He implied that God is selfish and doesn't want to share His knowledge of good and evil with them. He deceived her into believing that God withheld from her the best. Regretfully, Eve believed the lie of the devil and did that which God had forbidden her.

Ever since then the devil has been busy in getting people to doubt the goodness and faithfulness of God. When things don't happen according to our expectations or when situations seem to be unfair, we are always tempted to ask, "Why did God do this to me?" The serpent lies in our mind: "If God really loves you then why did he put you in such a difficult situation? If God really cares for you then why is He not answering your prayers? If God is in control of your life then why all things are not going well with you?" By having us believe such lies, he turns us to get bitter against God and do things that which He has forbidden.

Dear friends, we have to destroy the devil's lie by the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). For it is written, "God is good and His love endures forever" (Psalms 118:1). When tempted Eve failed to acknowledge that God gave her the best. She couldn't believe that He works all things for good. She couldn't trust God's love for her. Oswald Chambers once said, "The root of sin is the suspicion that God is not good."

How painful it would be for God to see His children doubting His goodness in their lives! In most cases, the root cause for worry, disappointment, loneliness and depression is our failure to acknowledge who God is. The state of our mind and heart speaks more of what we believe about God than our statements. Whenever you are tempted to doubt God's love and goodness in your life gear yourself up to cling to the following Scriptures:

Romans 8:32 - He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

Matthew 7:9-11 - Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Romans 8:28 - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

2. Diluting the Consequences of Sin

Genesis 3:1-4, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman."

One of the subtle strategies of the devil in enticing people to destroy their relationship with God is by diluting the consequences of sin. When God told, "You will die," the devil said, "You will not surely die." Eve took seriously the words of Satan than the words of God. She ate the fruit thinking that nothing God warned would happen. She failed to understand that God is not like a man who is casual in his words. She allowed the father of lies to fool her.

Even today the devil is continuing to fool multitudes by blurring their understanding towards sin and its consequences. He lied in the minds of many, "How can a loving God send you to hell? How would a merciful God punish you for your sins? Jesus died for your sins, so you don't have to be concerned about how to conduct your life according to God's word. Live the way you want and you will certainly not die; nothing will happen; God's grace is all-sufficient to cover your sins." So people made their mind to focus on a God who is always loving, gives whatever people ask, blesses everyone, forgives whenever people sin, gives good health and wealth, offers peace and joy. Now that's true! However, the devil has fooled people to ignore the other undeniable aspects of God's character - such as holiness, justice, discipline and judgment. The devil has been successful in tempting people to direct their complete attention on God's love without holiness, blessings without obedience, forgiveness without repentance, heavenly joy without godly sorrow, crown without cross, peace without righteousness, grace without godliness and faith in Jesus without fear of God.

It is regretful to see countless Christians living a compromising and easy-going life by claiming to believe in the loving God. To the Romans, who had partial understanding of God's nature, Paul exhorted, "Consider therefore the KINDNESS and STERNNESS of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off" (Romans 11:22). Here is a caution that God would not spare anyone if we abuse His kindness for self-indulgence. In the same epistle Paul also cautioned, "Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" (Romans 2:4)

Dear brothers and sisters, God poured out His abundant grace and kindness upon us so that we would repent (without wallowing in self-condemnation) and change our lifestyle (without giving excuses to live a sinful life). We may not be entirely perfect but there is ongoing repentance and progressive growth in the holiness of God in all those who pursue His kingdom and righteousness. Moreover, the fall of man should constantly remind us that God is awesome; He cannot compromise with sin! Isn't it amazing that the entire humanity was cursed because of one disobedient act of our first parents? What does this speak about God's view of sin? And what about the horrible death of Christ on the cross? Shouldn't that bring to our mind that God put himself in terrible agony to provide forgiveness for our sins, revealing that He is never casual with sin and neither should His children be?

What about us? Do we take light of God's warnings? Are we fearing God and shunning evil? Isaiah cried, "Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word" (Isaiah 66:5). I am afraid to see many Christians losing the fear of God and becoming desensitized to the conviction of the Holy Spirit in regard to sin and righteousness. Do we seriously consider the exhortations and encouragement of God given in His Word or are we philosophizing our own view about who God is? One of the frequent exhortations given in God's word is, "Do not be deceived." Are we seriously considering the sober teachings of the Holy Scriptures on the destructive nature of sin? If unrepentant, the Holy Bible explicitly teaches that – "the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, impure, thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers, the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, those who practice magic arts, the liars, the envious, the aggressors will not inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 21:8; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5). Therefore, let us renounce every deceptive belief of the devil that ignores holiness and encourages people to sin and face terrible consequences.

3. Discontentment

Genesis 3:6, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it."

How "blessed" Eve and Adam were! They had everything to taste and enjoy in the world God created for them. They had all the freedom to eat the best fruits from all the trees in the garden and had only one commandment to obey, i.e. not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, Eve didn't remain content with all that God had given her and craved for something more which was forbidden. She forgot all the best she received from the gracious hand of God, and instead, focused on that one thing she didn't have. She failed to acknowledge, "God has given us the best and I am content with what I have." She allowed dissatisfaction to reign her heart. Make a note—discontentment was the ruination of our first parents.

What about us? Even today the devil is taking advantage of people's dissatisfaction by luring them into unwanted things. No wonder many are chasing things that are forbidden by God. The mankind is in misery because there is no contentment. Solomon observed it well, "All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied" (Ecclesiastes 6:7). How disillusioned people have become in seeking to satisfy their passions and appetite! Never forget, the vast sea has boundaries but there are no limits to the desires of our heart. It may be easier to empty the mighty ocean than to fulfill our heart's desires. To try to satisfy our passions and cravings is like chasing after the wind.

We Christians succumb to devil's temptation when we remain dissatisfied with the few things we don't have when God has blessed us with countless blessings. It is the devil's pleasure to see us regretting for things that we do not have than rejoice for the things we already have. When it comes to earthly things, therefore, the Holy Scripture exhorts, "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction" (1 Timothy 6:6-9). The Holy Bible teaches us that if we have the basic necessities of life we have everything to survive and to be happy on earth. Some are discouraged with God because of

unanswered prayers; they didn't get what they wanted. Well, we need to understand that God did not promise to satisfy our greed but to provide all that we need (Php 4:18-19). So whenever you are tempted to doubt the faithfulness of God, ask yourself, "Did God fail in providing me the basic necessities of life?" And remember, do not allow what others possess to direct your life and prayers. Solomon made an apt statement, "And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 4:4). Do not imitate the world, for the world is obsessed with materialism. As the world is advancing and so are people's cravings. Success is defined by what you gain, not with what you remain. But who are the blessed, successful and happy ones according to God's word? Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and are content with physical things (Matthew 5:6; 1 Timothy 6:6-9) Sadly, rather than being content physically and craving to grow spiritually many are physically discontent and spiritually complacent. I fear the things that are below are dominating our lives more than the things that are above (Colossians 3:2). In the place where I live we have a chain store named, "MORE for you." I don't know with what intention that name was kept but that speaks a lot about what people are seeking today. People want MORE sex (outside marriage), MORE money, MORE pleasures, MORE power, MORE fame, MORE food, MORE comfort, MORE things, MORE prosperity, MORE and MORE and MORE ... Do we realize the tragedy of discontentment—the more we get the more we become desperate to get more? True joy is not in receiving what we want but in being content with what we have.

Now, added to the struggle of innate greed is the prosperity teaching which triggers more craving for the things of the world. This dangerous teaching is making many Christians carnal, selfish and greedy. Instead of giving up everything to follow Christ people are following Christ to get everything (Luke 14:33). In these last days, without becoming victims of these false teachings which infiltrated the church we have to discipline the desires of our heart and make it submissive to God's Word. In doing so, we resist the temptation of the devil to be discontent. When we feel dissatisfied, consider all we have and thank God for His mercies that never cease. This keeps us from grumbling, greed and from ingratitude. We need to learn the prayer of George Herbert, "Thou hast given so much to me...give me one thing more—a grateful heart."

Finally, we are well aware of the saying, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). I see this verse hanging in many houses. But did we consider the context in which it is written? Please read the preceding words, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God said, never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). In other words it implies, "Don't live a discontent life because God is all-sufficient." Yet, how many Christians are living a discontent life because they just believe in God but are not satisfied by having Him who is all-sufficient? Remember, we are created by Christ and for His pleasure, not for the world and for its pleasures (Colossians 1:16). Our ultimate satisfaction is in living for the pleasure of Christ, not in getting the pleasures of the world.

4. Pleasure and Peril of Sin

Genesis 3:6, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it." Do you know why we people love to commit sin? Because it is pleasing, alluring and exhilarating. When the woman saw the fruit of the tree it seemed irresistibly pleasing to her eye. I think she did not eat the fruit

immediately after looking at it. She gazed at it and the more she had intent look at it the more it appealed to her. She couldn't control herself anymore from eating the forbidden fruit and finally gave in to the trap of sin. Eve stands as an example of how one can be deluded by the fascination of sin, failing to see beyond its pleasure. Someone rightly said, "Sin will always expose to you, the pleasure that lies immediately in front of you, it blinds to the destruction that lies ahead of you." Sin is attractive but destructive too; it is fascinating but also devastating.

Now here is a caution: If Eve was fascinated towards sin in her sinless state what about us who battle with our sinful nature? Don't dwell on something that is forbidden. To do so is to get captivated by it. Sin is such a powerful force that once we are caught in its lure we are left defenseless to resist. Therefore, beware of yielding to the cravings of the eye, for it comes not from the Father but from the world (1 John 2:16). Jesus said, "Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness" (Luke 11:34). Yes, our eyes direct our body. The eye is the organ whereby we look at something and signals the mind to think and move; the body becomes active by the mind to feel and act accordingly. I think we may abstain from committing most of the terrible sins if our eyes become blind. For this reason Jesus said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away" (Matthew 5:27). What did he mean in saying this? Did he say to literally pluck our eyes? Certainly not! In his paraphrased Bible "The Message" Eugene H. Peterson translated it well, "If you want to live a morally pure life, here's what you have to do: You have to blind your right eye the moment you catch it in a lustful leer." I know by experience that to turn my eyes immediately from the pleasure of sin is like plucking my eyes; it's really painful. However, this is what I have observed: To resist sin is painful for a moment but fruitful thereafter; to yield to sin is pleasurable awhile but proves perilous later. So, if our eyes are caught up in a sinful sight we have to instantly turn away and focus on something that is good (Php 4:8). Eve's eyes were caught by the pleasure of sin, eventually leading her into peril.

Friends, if we fail to discipline the way we look at things with our eyes the power of temptation becomes uncontrollable. What do we do when we look at things that are pleasing to our sight? Did we school our eyes and mind? How do we look at magazines, television, women, men, unwanted material things, forbidden objects...etc? Many are in pursuit to get what is seemingly good, pleasant and desirable to their eyes and consequently getting into misery and heavy burdens. It's true that sin is fascinating and luring, but it is also true that it is dangerous and destructive. Sin is quite attractive but by yielding unto it, we put ourselves into its ugliness. Ah, sin has pleasant lips with poisonous teeth!

It was Samuel Smiles who said, "Sow a thought and you reap an act. Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny." If I am permitted I wish to put at first, "Sow a sight and you reap a thought." Sight and imagination work inseparably to cause feelings and actions. Take a note, what we watch is what we catch; what we catch is what we hatch. If we don't control the way we look at things what we look will take control over us.

5. Sin is Contagious

Genesis 3:6, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her

husband, who was with her, and he ate it". Do you know one of the tragic realities of sin? IT INFLUENCES THOSE AROUND US. Sin is terribly contagious. It is more dangerous and rapidly spreads than AIDs virus. The Holy Bible often likened sin to yeast in bread which symbolizes the power of corruption. When Eve sinned, she also involved Adam in her sinful act. She didn't sin without immediately influencing Adam. She got spoiled and also spoiled the one with her. Perhaps Eve had best intentions in sharing the fruit with Adam but what she did was a worst action in the sight of the Almighty God. To quote Irish poet Oscar Wilde (a great thinker who lived a pathetic life), "It is always with the best intentions that the worst work is done."

What Eve did continues to this day. It is human disposition that when we do something sinful we will inevitably cause others to partake in it. He who yields to the temptation will also become a temptation to others. For example, the one who commits adultery will seduce the other person to take part in the act. People cannot gossip without a partner. Women cannot grumble without spreading the bitterness into others. Men cannot walk in falsity without misleading others. We cannot live a bad life without leaving bad steps for others to follow; at least few people will be influenced, especially the ones who are close to us, like family members and friends. And there is no part in our body which is as influential as our tongue. For this reason it is written, "The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (Proverbs 18:21).

Some may say, "I can sin in isolation, i.e. in my mind; what I think or imagine is confined to myself." True, but our thoughts and imagination does impact our words and actions, eventually influencing others. We influence ourselves with our sight and thoughts and others with our words and actions. Never forget—SIN IN ME BREEDS SIN IN OTHERS. SIN GROWS IN ME AND MULTIPLIES IN OTHERS. AH, THE SIN THAT TAKES ROOT IN ME WILL NOT FAIL TO BEAR FRUIT IN OTHERS! Ravi Zacharias was right in saying, "Sin has a ripple effect. You will never ever sin alone because when you sin you are changed and when you are changed you will affect somebody else."

Here is one of the deceptive statements by some – "I don't live a good life and nor will I influence others with my sinful lifestyle." Every person is a channel, either of good or bad. Remember, there is no neutrality when it comes to sin. We may (at times) sin in isolation but we cannot live a sinful lifestyle in isolation. I need to yet meet a person who sins without dragging others into sin. Moreover, we may not necessarily have to become preachers or teachers to cause impact on others. The way we live is far influential than the words we speak, and especially the impact of a sinful lifestyle spreads like wildfire. The Holy Scripture is replete with examples, teaching us that the affect of a sinful life is much easier and swift than holy life.

Dear brothers and sisters, what kind of life are we living? How are we influencing those around us? What is it that others are learning from us? Are we setting up a good model or a bad example to others? Let me make it plain—to continue to live deliberately in sin is to inevitably have devastating affect on others, whether intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or unconsciously. The Holy Bible has surplus examples and instructions about not being influenced by or influencing others with something bad. Here are some of them:

Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. (Luke 17:1-2)

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. (Romans 14:13) Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? (1 Corinthians 5:6) Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." (1 Corinthians 15:33) Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. (1 Corinthians 8:9)

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. (Romans 16:17) We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. (2 Corinthians 6:3)

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. (Hebrews 12:15)

Application: The only way to evade bad influence upon others is to live a holy and loving life. May we be quick to recognize our sins, confess them to God and repent before we are tempted to pollute those around us.

6. Sin is Sin Genesis 3:6, "She took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."

Whether you throw a pebble or a rock both will sink into the water, right? It is our tendency to quickly justify ourselves, saying, "What great sin did I commit! It was just a little thing!" Remember, whether small or great, sin is sin. Read these words carefully: "She took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (Genesis 3:6). And when God asked Adam, "What have you done?" he replied, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Genesis 3:12).

Eve did not eat the complete fruit. She ate only some and so did Adam. However, her actions were not belittled just because she ate little. There was no way for Eve to justify herself before God, "Lord, I didn't eat the complete fruit. It was only little that I ate. Don't take it too serious!" Doesn't this attitude sound familiar? How often do we consider some sins with 'take it easy attitude' simply because we view them as something "small" or "little." Oh, by the way, do you remember Saul's mission? God told him to completely destroy the wicked Amalekites. Saul did destroy Amalekites but he spared Agag king of Amalekites and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs-- everything that was good. When Samuel rebuked Saul of his disobedience are you aware of how he responded? Saul justified himself saying, "But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal" (1 Samuel 15:20-21). Saul didn't yet understand his sin. He still was under the impression that he obeyed God. He didn't realize that "half obedience (little obedience) is no obedience at all." He didn't grasp that little sin is still sin in the sight of God.

Furthermore, when we study the life of King Saul and King David, whose sin appears greater to us? Of course, David's. He committed an immoral act by sleeping with another man's wife and worse still, killing that man to take his wife. Saul's sin seems to be smaller compared to David's. Yet, Saul received a greater judgment than David. Why is it so? When prophet Samuel rebuked

Saul he justified himself before others but when prophet Nathan rebuked David he humbly repented before God. No matter how great or small our sins are, when we honestly admit our sins and repent, God is gracious enough to forgive us.

How often do we take sin lightly or consider sin “little”, only to continue living in sin! The Holy Bible doesn't weigh sin in terms of great or small; it just addressed sin as sin. May we dare not take sin lightly, saying, “It was just a lie, not a plunder; just a lustful thought or look, not an adulterous action; just an anger, not a violent fight; just hatred, not murder; just an unkind word, not an abominable speech; just unforgiveness, not vengeance; just premarital sex, not prostitution...etc.” Jesus' exhortations in His Sermon on the Mount are related to what humans consider trivial. May we educate our conscience to see sin from God's point of view, not from the world's perspective!

James was straightforward in letting us know, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10; cf. 1 John 3:4). Can we live our entire life without stumbling at one law? For this reason, however holy we may seek to live we can never claim of being perfect in this sinful world. We may not commit sins which appear mountainous before people but are we not prone to commit sins which are like anthill? Anyways, sin is sin. We are saved by grace from the penalty of sin and live by grace on earth and enter in heaven by grace alone. Our life on earth is a journey towards perfection. Paul urged the Corinthians, “Aim for perfection” (2 Corinthians 13:11). Therefore, we must constantly seek God's holiness, always examine ourselves in the light of the Holy Spirit, honestly repent of our sins (great or small) and keep growing in the likeness of Christ.

Well, I am not arguing here that all sins are equal in the intensity of offense or damage and that all sins have the same consequences. My point is—let us stop weighing sin (so to justify our actions) and take responsibility to confess and repent of any sin we commit, whether small or great. One of the great signs of a holy person—he is not flippant in his attitude towards sin. May we understand that sin, whether great or small, is still sin in God's sight. Therefore, may we humble ourselves and “let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete purity because we fear God” (2 Corinthians 7:1, NLT).

7. Blame Game

Genesis 3:12, "The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."

Genesis 3:13, "And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Hubert H. Humphrey, the thirty-eighth Vice President of the United States, once said, “We believe that to err is human. To blame it on someone else is politics.” If what Hubert said is true then politics began in the Garden of Eden. The first man and woman were great politicians in blame game. It is no wonder to see this attitude in men and women today. When the Lord God asked Adam, “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:11-12).

If we observe carefully, it seems Adam blamed two persons. He first blamed God. He said, “The woman whom You gave...” It appears Adam was blaming God for giving Eve to be with him. Perhaps, he is saying, he would have been an obedient man if God didn't have given him the

woman; his life would have been smooth if God had not brought this woman into his life. How sad it is that people still blame God today! I have seen folks blaming God more for putting the knowledge of the tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden than holding Adam responsible for his disobedience.

It saddens my heart when I look at people making their own choices against the wisdom of God and then blaming Him for putting them in crisis. I am reminded of a Scripture in Proverbs, "People ruin their lives by their own foolishness and then are angry at the LORD" (Proverbs 19:3, NLT). Are you blaming God for the consequences of your choice? Are you questioning, "Why did God put me into this situation? Why did He let this happen to me?" Perhaps it is because you made wrong choices. Examine the root cause and make amends. Life turns beautiful if we learn to thank God and repent of our unwise choices than blame Him and continue to make foolish mistakes. There is a proverb from India, "Do not blame God for having created the tiger, but thank him for not having given it wings." The second person Adam blamed was Eve. He said that it is the woman who gave him the fruit (Genesis 3:12). To put it different, Adam is saying, if this woman had not given me the fruit I wouldn't have eaten it. Well, didn't Adam have the freedom to deny Eve's offer? Was he a sucking baby in a stroller or a mature man to make his own choice? How often is this blaming attitude manifested in interpersonal relationships! Bear this in mind, no one can spoil us without our permission. Of course, others may influence us but it we who allow ourselves to be influenced. When facing conflicts how easy it is to blame others and deny taking personal responsibility! Blaming each other will never make things better – in fact, it only worsens. Someone rightly said, "When you blame others, you give up power to change."

Charles R. Swindoll well pointed out, "Three of the hardest words in the English language are "You are right." The other three are "I am wrong!" I wonder how many broken relationships can be healed if we learn to stop blaming each other and start accepting personal responsibility. The more we blame the more we make ourselves lame. As much as we are eager to take credit for success, if we show the same eagerness in taking personal responsibility for failures, things would turn out quite different. Unfortunately, our tendency is to take credit when it comes to success (even when we don't deserve) and blame others when it comes to failures (when we deserve). I appreciate the person who put this question, "If you blame others for your failures, do you credit them with your success?" And the last thing that was blamed in the fall of man was the serpent. When God asked Eve, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Genesis 3:13). As someone humorously put it, "Adam blamed his wife, his wife blamed the serpent, and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on." Now, did not Eve have the freedom to rebuke the serpent's temptation and trust in God's words? Doesn't the Scripture say to us, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7)? Yet it is the devil who is often blamed when people fall in temptation. Remember, Satan won't pull our collar to commit sin. He only entices us. We are solely responsible for making a choice to yield to the luring temptations.

Finally, do you know the saddest thing in this incident? Neither Adam nor Eve took personal responsibility to confess their sin. They didn't show any sign of repentance. They were busy blaming the other person. They felt shame within but didn't admit their sin. Don't we often feel that shame within when we commit sins or mistakes but refuse admitting them? When we do something wrong our ego or pride immediately rises to justify our folly. We do all that we can by

blaming people, devil and even God but deny taking responsibility for our sins. It is good for us if we stop playing blame game and heed to this Scripture, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

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S. Is God Unfair?

Is God Unfair?

One of the privileges of being born in India is that you may most likely fall in love with cricket. My children and I love playing cricket. But there is something funny and weird I find when I play cricket with my two kids. When Joy, my eldest son, does the bowling, he demands that I should hit the ball in a way that it would fall straight into his hands. If I play in a way that makes him difficult to catch the ball, he thinks I am not batting well, even playing unfair with him. And when I do the bowling when Joe, my youngest son, does the batting, he demands that I should bowl in such a way that the ball would go straight and hit his bat, making it easy for him to hit shots. If I don't, he thinks I am unfair with him and don't know how to bowl. To my kids, a good cricket player is the one who makes it easier for them either to catch the ball or to hit shots. But to us grown-ups, it sounds silly, killing the challenging excitement of the game. We also know that if they continue to play this way, they would never become great players.

Wanting God to Play as We Wish

Don't you think, my dear brothers and sisters, many times we behave like these kids when it comes to our life with God?

We suppose God should always make our life easier and comfortable. We desire that God ought to make the path on which we walk nice and smooth. We love God to always hear us, always bless us and always keep us miles away from trials and temptations. We want God to work in our own way, at our own time and according to our own expectations. In this game of life, we want God to play according to our convenience, don't we? But if God makes our life a bit difficult, if He makes things harder to achieve, if He makes our path bumpy, if He allows afflictions in our lives, if He doesn't move according to our will, if He doesn't quickly deliver us from troubles, if He doesn't promptly answer our prayers—we think He is unfair, even unloving. We assume, if God is good, He should do things according to our expectations.

Submitting to God to Fulfill His Will

Thankfully, God doesn't play according to our whims and desires. He knows that if He should work according to our wishes, we would never become mature and courageous in life, missing all the best He wants us to have in this life and in the life to come.

Therefore, He wants us to go through various trials and learn perseverance (James 1:2-4). He wants us to confront evil so that we learn to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21). He wants us to go through despair so that we learn to depend on God alone, not on ourselves (2 Corinthians 1:8-9). He wants to deny to always answer our prayers quickly so that we learn to pray without giving up (Lu. 18:1ff). He wants to permit a thorn in our flesh so that we would remain humble and not become conceited (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Furthermore, He wants us to suffer for doing good and become more like Christ Jesus (1 Peter 2:20-23). He wants us to go through hurt and learn forgiveness (Colossians 3:13). He wants us to go through discipline and reap a harvest of righteousness and peace (Hebrews 12:11). He wants us to go through temptations and come out victoriously (2 Corinthians 10:13). He wants us to confront the flaming arrows of the evil one and extinguish them with the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16). He wants us to lose our life for His sake so that we will save it (Luke 9:24). In this game of life, dear friends, God wants us to become courageous and victorious players, not run-away cowards. As He coaches us in the hard paths of life, may we humbly submit to His lordship and guidance, knowing that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

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S. Joyous Moments with JOY

Joyous Moments with JOY

There are many unforgettable events in our life and June 10, 2004, is one such of my life. I was in my friend's house then. I got a call at midnight which left me tensed. I immediately got ready and rushed to hospital, driving for about one hour. By the time I reached, my wife had already left for surgery. I didn't know what to do. I was silent and felt apprehensive about what was going to happen. Praying to God I was eagerly waiting outside the operation room. Then I heard a thin and raspy noise from the operation room. A nurse brought out a wondrous little baby, wrinkled and bright. I was overwhelmed with excitement to look at this cute little one, my firstborn son. What a joy to become a father! As this event brought so much of joy in my life, I named him 'JOY'. I didn't stop giving thanks to God for him since then. This year, on June 10, 2009, he had completed five years and entered into six. When he was five, I started to write some joyous times I had with him (between June 10, 2008-2009). I hope you would enjoy reading my joyous moments with JOY.

Joy was suffering from cough and cold. I felt concerned for him, took him on my lap and prayed for him. I prayed something like this, "Jesus, help Joy. Heal his cough and make him well. Amen." After I eagerly prayed, my son turned to me and asked, "What about cold then?" Oops! I prayed again for his cold.

Sometime back we bought a very old car (about 13 years old). One day, Joy and I were waiting for my wife in the car. Since we had some time, I was talking to him about the coming of Christ Jesus. I was telling him that Jesus is coming soon and will take us to His beautiful home. Then my son curiously asked me, "But how to get our car there?"

Last year, when we joined our Joy in school, he at first resisted going to school. When he was about to go bed at night his only worry was that he has to wake up in the morning and go to school. One night I was trying to explain to him about heaven. I was struggling for words and wondering how to help him understand. The Scripture says that in heaven there is no pain, no crying, no death, but how would my little son understand the pleasure of absence of these things. Suddenly I got a thought and told my son, "In heaven there is no need to go to school."

I was in a difficult situation and the Lord graciously provided and met my need. I was sharing with my son about how I was in need and how the Lord provided me the money. He looked at me and asked by making gesture with his hand, "Did Jesus throw money from above...Does He create money?" My son, Joy, has a habit of keeping his thumb in his mouth and suck it. I tried many times to break that habit but couldn't. So I told him that if he persisted to keep doing this he will get buck teeth and his friends would mock at him. He turned to me and said, "Jesus will heal me anyways, right?"

I was so hungry during the dinner time that after serving food for myself and for my son Joy, I hurriedly started to eat. My son sat before me and prayed, "Thank you Jesus for this food." I stood still and felt ashamed of eating without praying.

Another interesting thing is I never heard anyone praying specifically like him while giving thanks to God for food. For example, "If there is noodles or biryani before him, he prays, "Jesus, I thank you for this noodles or for this biryani."

Once Joy and I were playing cricket. I hit a shot and shouted "it's six." My son took the ball, looked at me and to encourage me he said, "Papa, now you hit seven." (for those who don't know the rules of cricket six is the maximum shot you can hit)

One day my wife told my son there is no school. My son said, "No mummy, the school is there. I have seen it three times today."

I asked my son, "How many students are there in your classroom?" He said, "I don't know." Then I asked him, "How many girls are in your class?" He told the number along with all the names of girls.

Joy and I were having breakfast in a restaurant. As we were eating, I asked him, "What is it that you don't like in me?" It didn't take a long time for him to answer. He said, "I don't like you spanking me." I smiled and asked, "Then what do you want me to do when you commit mistakes?" He was silent. I questioned him again, "Do you want me to kiss you when you commit mistakes?" He said, "No." Then what do you want me to do?" I asked. He firmly said, "Forgive."

Joy is fond of cool drinks. If I happen to pass by a shop, he would nudge me, "Papa, I want a cool drink." So once I told him not to have cool drinks with preservatives because they aren't fruitful to health; rather he can have fruit juices which are good for health. After I told him, there came a situation where I was quite thirsty. I went to a bakery, grabbed a cool drink and started to drink. My son gave a curious look at me, then came running to me he asked, "Papa, I think cool drink isn't good for health. Why are you having it?"

I went to a shop along with Joy. As I was leaving, he looked at a cool drink and wanted to have it. I told him, "That drink isn't good. I will make a good one at home." But when he persisted to have that drink, I said, "Don't you believe me Joy that I will make a good drink for you?" He looked at me and said, "Why should I believe in you Papa when I already believed in Jesus?"

PLEASE PRAY THAT MY SON, JOY, WOULD GROW IN WISDOM AND STATURE, AND IN FAVOR WITH GOD AND MEN.

Feel free to post your comments below or you may write to : friendsofchrist@gmail.com

S. June 26th -Why Is It An Unforgettable Day of My Life?

June 26th—Why Is It An Unforgettable Day of My Life?

I have earned the reputation among those intimate with me about being a forgetful person. My friend says he can write a book on this funny part of my life. Then how is my mind stamped with this date—June 26th? This day is the most remarkable day of my life. It is more important than the day I was born. It is more auspicious than the day I got married. It is more memorable than the day my children were born. Moreover, it would be more wonderful than the day I would die.

“Why is it so” you might question? This June 26th, 2011, takes my thoughts back to June 26th, 1996. Fifteen years back, on this day, I woke up from my bed with heavy conviction about the serious issues of life. Eventually, the Spirit of God brought me to the feet of Jesus. It was on this day that I gave my life to my beloved Jesus and became His child and disciple. [Click here later to read my brief testimony about how I came to know the Lord]

How I came to Christ is still a wonder to me! I didn’t experience a miracle, didn’t hear an audible voice and didn’t see a vision or dream. I wasn’t even driven for earthly blessings. I was simply wallowing in sin. But how good and gracious the Lord is—He sent His Spirit to convict me of my sins and of the reality of His presence and glory! I didn’t seek Him; He sought me. What an amazing blessing to be found by the Maker of the heavens and the earth!

“So what?” “What radical difference did it make as a result of believing in Christ?” some might ask. This wondrous song, written by John W. Peterson in 1961, well expresses the excitement of my heart:

O what a wonderful, wonderful day, day I will never forget;

After I’d wandered in darkness away, Jesus my Saviour I met.

O what a tender, compassionate friend, He met the need of my heart;

Shadows dispelling, with joy I am telling, He made all the darkness depart.

Heaven came down and glory filled my soul, When at the cross the Saviour made me whole; My sins were washed away and my night was turned to day, Heaven came down and glory filled my soul! On this day and from then onward, the Lord has made a world of difference in me. My life was tremendously impacted in many ways. Because of time constraint, let me share just a few of them.

Grand Purpose

I lived a life without purpose. Everything that I was doing under the sun; all of them were meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I didn’t know the reason for my existence and had no meaningful aim to live on earth. I lived for the sake of living and had done things for the sake of doing. I had no idea from where I came, what should I be doing on earth and where I was heading.

I sailed in this world like a ship without a rudder.

Everything was centered on me—my pleasures, my ambitions, my money. And you know, when ‘self’ becomes the master, the wages it gives is ‘misery’. Ah, my life was miserable in serving myself!

Then when the day came, the glorious moment of knowing Christ personally, I had stopped beating around the bush. O, I found the grand purpose of my life! For the first time, I became excited and passionate to live for someone worth living for. I realized—I am not the reason for my existence; there is an infinite, greater Being than me (a finite one) who created the whole universe; there is a greater purpose for my life than just me and my world.

Colossians 1:16 gives a definite answer to the purpose of life—“For by Him [Christ Jesus] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him.”

What a great revelation! All things, everything—you and me and everyone—were created by Him and for Him. What a joy to know—Stephen David was created by Christ and for Christ! When Christ has created me for Himself, I have no better purpose and meaningful way to live than for Him. He is the cause for my existence. He is the purpose of my life on earth. He is my hope with whom I would be living eternally. When Christ became the Lord of my life, joy and peace flowed in me like streams of water in the wasteland. From a dry desert land He made my life a beautiful meadow. Yes, I am amazed at what Christ wrought in me!

Radical Change The other day, I was telling my wife and children—you people have to be thankful to God forever, for if I was not transformed by Christ, I could have made your lives hell. Thankfully, my home is now a haven only because of Jesus. Without Christ, no doubt, I could have become either a smuggler or some criminal. That was the crooked path I chose. I was bent on doing evil things. Although I was there a few times due to minor offenses, I could have certainly ended someday behind bars because of serious crimes. I could have been a wicked and immoral husband, an abusive father and a stench to those around. Can someone love a wretched man like me? Unimaginable! I could not point to one person, from among the millions of gods many Indians believe (once I was among them), and say, “He loved me and gave Himself for me.” When my eyes were opened to the gospel, I could point to only one person and say—Christ loves, shed His blood on the Cross, offered His body to pay the price for the forgiveness of sins and rose again on the third day. How soothing are these words from Romans 5:8-9 :

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And that is not just a historical fact; it has become a personal and lively experience of my daily life. He loved me and gave Himself for me, a being unworthy of His abounding love and worthy of His holy wrath! Although He is currently invisible to my physical eyes (and one day I going to see Him face to face), His love and holy move that I experience by His Spirit living within me is more real than I can express. Thank you Jesus for revealing Yourself to me!

Considering how I loved sin and desired doing sinful things, I could never have changed myself. Only someone, who is perfectly holy, loving and sovereign, could do. And when I was encountered by that loving and holy person, Jesus Christ, I didn't just received forgiveness for my sins but my

life too was radically changed. He made me a different person. Of course, I am not perfect but God is patiently working on my life to shape me in becoming a person He wants me to be. There were times I turned my back on Him and forsook His ways; however, He didn't give up on me and won me back.

It really amazes me—the person who was a thorn to those around him, Jesus has touched him and is now using him to be a blessing to many. My heart gets excited when I see Christ touching lives and making a difference in them through me. I give all glory to Him who is doing good things in and through my life.

Unflinching Hope Were you ever struck with these thoughts—What would happen to me after I die? Where will I go?

Earlier I avoided thinking about such things. I was obsessed with making money and thriving in life in whatever crooked way possible. But when God arrested my attention to consider the inescapable fact called 'death', it was a chilling moment. When Christ Jesus saved me, my whole perspective about life, death and afterlife has changed. I didn't just find purpose to live on earth but also found hope to die here peacefully. My mind was enlightened to the glorious fact that death in Christ is birthday in heaven. I realized that death is not the end of the road; it is just a speed bump.

Because there is life after death and am accountable to God about how I live on earth, I endeavor by God's enabling grace to live a godly life, not to attain salvation but out of gratitude for receiving it. Because there is life after death, I am encouraged to endure afflictions on earth with hope that life will be gloriously different in the afterlife (heaven). Because there is life after death, I am not hopelessly frightened to face death. Because of what Christ had done on the Cross, I can shout, "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55)

Before Christ, I had no words to respond when questioned—what would be my reaction if I know I am going to die in a moment? I lived in despair. But now, in Christ, how marvelously different! Before his death, the great evangelist D.L. Moody said, "Someday you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now." That would be my response too—I would be more alive than I am now. I know my destiny. I will kiss the rod of death and fall into the arms of my Lord. Maranatha!

Think and Decide

Friend, if you haven't put your trust in Jesus and living a purposeless life, eventually to face hopeless death, I invite you to come to Christ who loved you and laid His life on the Cross for you. He is the One you need to save you from your sins and from living a miserable life here and forever. Everybody dies here but not everyone dies with hope. That unflinching hope to face death boldly is found only in Christ, the ultimate conqueror of death. Or maybe you have once put your trust in Christ but now have fallen in love with the world and became cold in your love for the Lord. Then I urge you to repent of your worldliness and turn to the One who forgives you and gives you a new beginning. Nothing can satisfy you except the Maker of your soul who created you for Himself. Heed these words of your beloved Savior, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door of your heart, I will come in and fellowship with you and you with me."

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." (1 Timothy 1:17) [CLICK HERE TO READ THE THIRD PART OF MY TESTIMONY.](#)

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S. LEADERSHIP - What Is Its Foremost Characteristic?

LEADERSHIP – What Is Its Foremost Characteristic?

Ask folks about what 'leadership' is primarily about, the following may be few responses from them:

- It is about leading.
- It is about delegating.
- It is about managing.
- It is about controlling.
- It is about organizing.
- It is about overseeing.
- It is about serving.

There is no argument in the assertion that a leader's function is to lead, delegate, manage, organize, oversee and serve. However, I believe, these are not his primary task. There is something which comes 'first' before all these. In fact, without doing 'this' foremost thing he would be a failure in the following. It can be said that 'this' qualifies him to do the rest. What could be that first and the most important characteristic of a leader?

Leading Oneself A leader, before leading others, leads himself well. A leader, before managing others, manages his habits well. A leader, before organizing things, organizes his life well. A leader, before exerting healthy control, practices self-control. A leader, before overseeing others, examines himself well. A leader, before delegating to others, directs himself well. A leader, before directing others, disciplines himself well. A leader, before serving others, masters himself well.

Just think – how can a person lead others in the way they ought to go when he himself cannot walk in the path he has to walk? How can he manage others when his own life is in disorder? How can he exert healthy control when he cannot stringently control his own passions, ambitions and tongue? How can he oversee others when he neglects to carefully watch his own life? How can he serve others without mastering himself? How can he expect others to follow him when he doesn't walk ahead of them? How can he direct others when he himself is lost? Consider these words of Christ Jesus, "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?" (Luke 6:39).

Personal and Public Life But there are those who say how a leader lives his life is something personal; how he skillfully accomplishes a task is what that matters. I do not hesitate to say that this is a faulty notion. Leaders are not machines; they are models. How a leader lives his private life (apart from acceptable privacies) has a tremendous impact on his public life. They are interconnected and inseparable. For instance, a leader cannot be approachable by women in the

workplace if he is evidently mastered by lust. He cannot be entrusted with confidential issues if he is a gossip. He cannot be wise in leading people if he is given to temper tantrums. He cannot be effective in problem-solving if he is impatient and rude. Fact: Who a leader is has much to do with what he does.

Remember, what a leader accomplishes may make people to aspire his success but how he lives inspires them to imitate his life. How many leaders are there in our time, brilliant and prosperous, yet folks don't want to become like them because of their pathetic personal lifestyle! There is a vast difference between inspiring people to have what we have and spurring them to become what we are.

Here is a thought for contemplation: No matter how much a leader is knowledgeable, skillful and successful, if he has no victory over himself, he didn't yet climb the first step onto the ladder of leadership. He who has conquered himself is worth leading others.

Now, this is not to say that a leader should be perfect. It is a known fact that none is perfect. Yet, this is not an excuse for him to settle down in weaknesses. A leader aims for perfection. A leader strives for excellence. A leader isn't complacent in his weaknesses and neither does he conceal his defects. A leader isn't paralyzed by his moral failures. A leader, by God's enabling grace, constantly works on himself; he keeps learning, keeps growing and doesn't renounce constructive criticisms. A leader always wants to become better, much better, persistently better. And who doesn't want to be led by such a leader?

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Leadership - Hidden Vices Behind the Virtuous Screen

Leadership - Hidden Vices Behind the Virtuous Screen

Leadership, whether it is considered as a position or responsibility, is truly hazardous. Why? Behind the virtuous screen of the role of leadership, who knows how many vices dance and dine!

I was reading my favorite author, Eugene H. Peterson's *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*, particularly written to shepherds or leaders in view. It is a book which strips off our pretentious and shallow rags, making us naked so as to put on genuine and fine garments.

Higher Sins

I suppose, everybody admits that leadership is a role encircled with fiery temptations. Talking about the enticements leaders confront, Peterson speaks about "lower sins" which are easily noticeable:

If I kill a man, I know that I have done wrong. If I commit adultery, I at least have the good sense not to advertise it. If I steal, I make diligent efforts not to get found out. The so-called "lower sins," the sins of the flesh as they were once categorized, are obvious, and there is not only a community of faith but a civil community that protests against their proliferation.[1] Not many leaders are susceptible to "lower sins." Few are the men who fear God and shun evil; and if not out of reverence towards God, by virtue of its consequences, the disgraceful and embarrassing exposure that may follow, many live above these vices. They carry a remarkable reputation of morality, at least in relation to these visible evils. But there are hidden vices, which Peterson calls "higher sins". These are not so easily discerned or visible like the outward form of sins. Diagnosis is humanly difficult. They are like germs invisible to our naked eyes. He writes: Is this outburst of zeal energetic obedience or human presumption? Is this exuberant confidence holy boldness inspired by the Holy Spirit or a boastful arrogance fed by an anxious ego? Is this assertive leadership courageous faith or self-importance? Is this suddenly prominent preacher with a large and admiring following a spiritual descendant of Peter with five thousand repentant converts or of Aaron indulging his tens of thousands with religious song and dance around the golden calf?[2]

I am tempted to add few thoughts of mine to Peterson's list—Is this entrance into ministry driven with a passion for God and for His purposes or to make a living out of it? Is this authority used to build people's lives or to feed one's own ego? Is this nice demeanor a manifestation of genuine love for people or a manipulation to gratify selfish ambitions? Is this work done as a performance for public applause or to please the Living God? Is this passion for church growth ignited with a purpose to further the kingdom of God or to build one's own kingdom? Do you know these subtle and unseen sins, perhaps called 'ulterior motives', are more gross and hazardous than any other? Are you aware the reason why the Pharisees became the religious hypocrites of their time was that they focused on the visible evils while ignoring the invisible hidden vices in the heart? They hated Jesus, not primarily for breaking their traditions, but for exposing their evil hearts which was

covered under the mask of devotion and ministry to God. O, may we not be overconfident of our integrity, for none of us are immune from this Pharisaic deception!

Hidden Evils

Ah, leadership—"in no other station do we have so many opportunities for pride, for covetousness, for lust, or so many excellent disguises at hand to keep such ignobility from being found out and called to account."^[3] Right, who knows how much pride exists behind that growth, how much covetousness behind that pursuit, how must lust behind that purity, how much worst evils behind those excellent virtues! Who knows how many innumerable vices lurk behind the virtuous screen of leadership!

How difficult it is to identify the hidden evils! How tough it is to see the darkness in the limelight! And how tragic it is when we ourselves are unaware of the polluted motives of our heart under the guise of spiritual leadership! I fear, while people follow us, admiring us as great saints, our heart may further be degraded by unseen evils. O Holy Lord, have mercy on us and save us from our depravity! The Holy Scripture affirms, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) Thankfully, it doesn't end there. It goes further, "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve" (17:10). True, only the omniscient Lord can bring to the shore the gigantic evils hidden in the sea of heart. Only He can deliver us from the evil one and from evil dispositions.

I can recollect numerous incidents wherein I conversed like an angelic saint but when I closeted myself in my room with my Lord, the Spirit of God revealed my demonic attitude of arrogance. I think, we leaders have to realize the grand responsibility which we have to faithfully carry on and at the same time recognize the deceptive, unrecognized, invisible evils in our heart which may compete to become the reasons for the acts we perform.

Peterson candidly pointed out, "Deception is nowhere more common than in religion. And the persons most easily and damningly deceived are leaders."^[4] I cannot but agree to this statement. We leaders are more liable to deception and corruption than any person, for deception is all along in the form of good and not easily recognized and caught. The crafty old serpent's strategy to knock down God's men is not by luring them to visible sins but to obviously good things behind which the intentions are horribly evil.

Therefore, may we give ourself continuously to the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit, the sanctifier of our lives and the perfect leader to guide us into all the truth. May we not walk around with a sense of saintliness but with conviction, repentance and hunger for righteousness. May we give freedom to our closest ones to hurt us by removing venomous thorns from our lives. Let us walk humbly with the Lord before whom everything is uncovered and laid bare.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

(Psalms 139:23-24)

1. Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 14

2. Ibid., 14

3. Ibid., 15

4. Ibid., 14

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Liberation from Pornography

Liberation from Pornography

Introductory words: It is no exaggeration to say that we are living in an age of sensuality. Starting from television and movies to mobile phones and Internet, we are constantly bombarded with sexual content, be it partial or explicit. It has now become only a matter of touch on remote control, on enter button or a click on mouse to indulge oneself in sexual immorality.

There are so many folks in our day, including the nice and sincere ones, living a life of bondage to pornography. There are untold people who are secretly addicted to porn. Sadly, they suppose there is no hope of deliverance from this addiction. Thus, the following interview is posted with a hope that such hopeless people will find hope. May be you are one among them and this message is for you.

Note: The following interview was done using open-ended questions. I put it in writing, edited myself and sent it to Prem for his final approval. Also, the actual name of the interviewee has been changed to Prem Raj for the sake of confidentiality.

CSD: Prem, I have learned you have been once an addict to porn and now walk in complete freedom from this bondage. Would you please explain how your addiction to porn began?

PR: I was first introduced to porn through an adult magazine. When I saw it, which actually belonged to my friend, my curiosity aroused and my sensual feelings went wild. Like a hungry dog for bones, I indulged myself in it. That later led me to look out for novels with explicit sexual content. As the days went by, my craving to watch and read such obscene things became intense.

I was desperately searching for porn material, particularly in second-hand book sales, for by now I became familiar with authors who write on this subject matter. I was willing to go to any extreme, pay any cost, just to satisfy my sensual hunger. As I watched and read them, I also got addicted to masturbation and immersed myself in a world of sexual fantasy.

CSD: How did things go further as you went along in life the following years?

PR: After finishing my basic studies, I worked for six months. Despite the fact of being a slave to porn, on the other hand, I had a bit of God's fear in my heart, wanting to know God's word and serve Him. So, I got into a Bible college. This training had somehow helped me, yet I did not completely give up watching porn. Regretfully, even while studying in a Bible college, I was watching erotic stuff once in a while and masturbating.

Incidentally, in all these years of addiction, none knew my secret struggle and addiction to porn. I was a pious guy before others. I did think of sharing it with someone, but I couldn't do so for fear of rejection.

Then came a major breakthrough in technology—the Internet world was introduced in India. This was a great opportunity to gratify my lustful passions. It became easy for me to watch porn, going

simply to Internet cafés and enjoy watching and reading sexual content. I also borrowed CDs and watched porn films.

Finally, I got a laptop with internet connection. You can imagine how my addiction escalated. Pornography was now available to me anytime I wanted to watch. I used to download all sexual stuff and secretly scan them at my convenience. Day by day, I became sensually wild and immoral in my thoughts and sight. I eventually found myself in a situation I could not live without watching porn.

CSD: You said that you have done Bible College with a desire to do ministry. How were you handling porn when you got into ministry?

PR: After completing my training in Bible College, I went for other trainings and got involved in ministry. I was ministering to various people, went around preaching and even giving counseling to others. I even became a youth leader in my church. Yet, in secret, I was helplessly living an immoral life, watching porn and masturbating. I was living a hypocritical life. And I lived this double life in a way nobody could doubt me. I left no trace of detection.

CSD: How were your feelings when you watched porn? Were you satisfied and living a happy life?

PR: The more I watched porn, the more I became miserable. Watching porn never satisfied me. If it did, it is only for a moment. In actual fact, it made me even worse, hungering for more and more. Even though I appeared to others as a jolly and nice guy, deep inside my heart I was empty, lonely, sinful and dismayed.

CSD: What about your feelings of guilt? Did you feel sorry for the way you lived?

PR: This was what had happened every time I watched porn. Once I finished watching porn and masturbating, feelings of guilt would overtake me. I used to ask God for forgiveness, cried and wept before Him. The remorse was so strong that at times I tore my clothes, fell on the floor and writhed in agony. I could not face anyone. I lost genuine connection with God and people around me. I despised myself and hated to look at my own face.

Sometimes, I cancelled my preaching, for I was filled with remorse for watching and soaking in dirty stuff. I knew what I was doing was sin. It is something I shouldn't be doing as a child of God. But, I was helpless, addicted and became a slave to lust.

Then after feelings of sorrow and repentance, my lustful passions would rise and I felt desperate to watch again. I couldn't control myself and gave myself over to indulge in porn. In short, I fell into a cyclical process—watching porn, feeling sorry, asking God for forgiveness and again returning to my own vomit, watching porn.

CSD: How did you eventually find liberation from porn?

PR: My deliverance from this addiction was not immediate, but progressive. After years of struggling with this sin, God mercifully revealed Himself to me. The healing actually began with an exposure to the majesty of God. For the first time, my eyes were opened to the glory and goodness of God.

Earlier, I had mere head knowledge of God. But I began to see for the first time the beauty of God. I was astounded to read about how great God is as found in Job 38:1-41; Job 39:1-30; Job 40:1-24; Job 41:1-34. How He created the whole universe by His wisdom and power, how He is sovereign and above all things, how He is sustaining the entire earth and how everything exists because of Him. And, yet, He has His eye over me, a tiny creature before the Most High God. When I started to know God's excellencies, explored His majesty and tasted godly pleasures, the lustful passions began to lose its power over me. As I experienced God, who in His rich mercy had forgiven me and showed His glory in my life, I found great joy and satisfaction. I discovered lasting pleasures in Him. I fell in love with Jesus and that freed me from the love of sensuality.

I now know God and I love Him and want to please Him. I even love my wife and I seek to find my physical satisfaction in my wife alone and not in anything else.

CSD: Well, Prem, thank you so much for honestly sharing your heart. Finally, what is the message you want to pass on to those whose lives are ruled by lust and pornography?

PR: First, I want to mention that watching porn is a choice. You cannot blame anybody or anything. It is you who make a choice to click, to touch, to see, to entertain and to fantasize the forbidden things. So, ultimately, you are completely responsible for the choices you make in your life.

Second, addictions are not easy to overcome. You cannot get out of it on your own. You require divine help. Not just help from God but God Himself. Although your prayers may not be answered immediately, don't give up. Don't get disappointed and dejected. Keep seeking God, keep asking for His help, keep studying His word, keep looking for opportunities to know more of Him and keep pouring your heart before the Throne of Grace to reveal Himself to you. These words are forever true, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13)

Third, share with someone. Don't live a life of secrecy. One reason for me to continue in this sin for years is due to withholding myself from opening to someone who could help me. And when you share with that person, make it a strict accountability. You may fall again, but still keep yourself accountable. You may even be rebuked and seriously corrected for watching porn, but still keep yourself accountable. Don't let your pride ruin the help others could offer you. Whether you are addicted to porn or may be on your way towards addiction, rise up and seek help right away. At last, I want to express—I have wasted a lot of my life and time by living in lust. For more than ten years, I was a secret addict to porn. Thankfully, I am now free from this sin, not just recently but long back. This does not mean I don't face temptation at all. By God's grace, I overcome it. I don't watch porn constantly. I don't watch porn once in a while. I don't watch porn at all. I now enjoy the freedom of purity. I want to tell that there is no lasting satisfaction and happiness in porn. True joy and contentment is found only in Jesus, the one who loved us and gave Himself for us.

CSD: I am thankful to God for liberating Prem from this addiction to porn. I know him quite well personally and find his testimony trustworthy. Prem is now having a wonderful family and is doing a great ministry. God is using him to be a tremendous blessing to many. He now walks in freedom from pornography and enjoys his life in Christ.

Friend, if you think you are lost in lust and have no hope of deliverance from pornography, remember, you would never reach a situation in your life wherein you find yourself having no hope

in God. There is always hope in Jesus. He died for our sins. He rose again from the dead to give us victory over sin. So, cling to the feet of Christ with a broken and contrite spirit. Know Jesus and love Him, for He is the most beautiful and wonderful person in whose presence sin loses all its power of enticement. Of course, accountability to others, confession of sin, repentance and exercising self-control—all these things are important to overcome lust and pornography. But the most important element is seeing and savoring the glory of God. When we draw closer to God, irrespective of our weaknesses and failures, and start seeking His holy face, study about Him, pray to Him, know Him and experience Him, we find displeasure in the pleasures sin offers. Knowing God more frees us from habitual sins. Living a life in His glorious presence is so pleasurable that even all the pleasures of sin fall short of it. Finding our utmost satisfaction in God liberates us from addiction to temporal, sinful pleasures. Falling in love with Jesus uplifts us from the mire of sin.

“Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; In Thy presence is fullness of joy; In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever” (Psalms 16:11).

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S. Living by the Spirit or Loafing in my spirit?

Living by the Spirit or Loafing in my spirit?

Speaking in tongues! Hearing the inward voice of God! Giving a word of prophecy! Experiencing spectacular guidance! Doing wonders! Emotional ecstasy! This is what Spirit-led life is to many Christians. But is this what all walking in the Spirit is? While I am not against all these manifestations, however, I have to honestly admit of witnessing sheer carnality among many who emphasize on being led by the Spirit according to the description given above. In our era of ignorance about the right understanding of Spirit-led life we need God's word to remind us about what it is to walk in the Spirit. Allow me to share just few thoughts I have learned from the word of God. In Galatians 5:16, Paul exhorts, "So I say live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." Why do you think Paul wrote these words? He mentioned in the preceding verse, "But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another" (Galatians 5:15). The reason Paul exhorted the people of God to live by the Spirit is crystal clear. To live a Spirit-led life is to live a peaceful life with others.

It confuses me when I see people claim of being led by the Spirit, yet manifest no visible signs of conviction and repentance when they gossip, lie, outburst in anger, walk in bitterness, greed, pride and envy. I think it is loafing in our spirit in the name of living by the Holy Spirit.[1] I strongly believe, the Holy Spirit is "Holy" and the very first thing He does is to convict us of our sins against God and people.

Paul wrote to the Romans, "For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, BECAUSE those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Romans 8:13-14). It is sad that many take only the last few words, missing the word 'because', which actually gives the reason for being led by the Spirit of God. The Spirit-led men and women are those who live a life by crucifying the misdeeds of the body, the desires of the sinful nature, namely— hatred, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, disputes, eagerness for lustful pleasure, impure thoughts, etc. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Make a note that these are the destructible sins which often hinder our healthy relationship with God and people. So, we are commanded to be led by the Spirit to overcome these evil desires. May we examine ourselves: Am I truly led by the Spirit of God? Do I pray to God to constantly fill me with His Holy Spirit with right Scriptural understanding? What is my ultimate purpose in seeking to live a Spirit-filled life?

Paul counseled the Ephesians, "Be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). In other words, "Be under the full control of the Holy Spirit." In what context did Paul write these words? Reading the Scripture from Ephesians 5:1-21 teaches us about the necessity of our holy conduct before God and people by living under the control of the Holy Spirit. Do you know, when we forgive the one who offended us, encourage the weak, correct the wrong person in love, help the needy, make every effort to live at peace with others, we display the signs of Spirit-led life?

I have learned that one may speak in tongues, emphasize on hearing God and on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, yet may not be a genuine Spirit-led person. Remember, living a Spirit-filled life isn't just about walking in the supernatural but also how we get along with others in our normal, everyday life. Being "led by the Spirit" primarily means 'living a holy and loving life by not yielding to the desires of the sinful nature which wrecks our relationship with God and people.'

Let us reflect on what Paul wrote, "But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, He will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23 NLT). May the Lord mercifully help us to have the right understanding and practice of a Spirit-led life!

Notes:

[1] I don't mean living a Spirit-led life is a life of perfection. To live by the Spirit is to live a life of ongoing repentance and progressive transformation into the likeness of Christ.

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S. Losers for the Gospel

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Few days ago, after many years, my brothers and sisters and all our families had the privilege of meeting together for a time of fellowship. Wondering when we would meet this way again, I arranged a photographer for snapping photos of our families together.

Wow, I thought, everything went on well! But when we got the pictures in print, we were disappointed to see them as they came out with a very poor quality, like a mobile's VGA camera. My younger brother was angry, went to the studio and yelled at the photographer for his crappy work. When I learned about my brother's reaction, since the studio person knew that we are Christians, I felt concerned about the gospel and wondered—what would happen to the saltiness of our Christian testimony? Will our reaction become a stumbling block for these unsaved people to the receptivity of the gospel? What kind of message are we giving to the unbelievers through our conduct?

Convicted by these questions, I immediately called the photographer on phone and apologized to him for the harsh behavior of my younger brother. Although I was unhappy with this photographer's work, I told him that we are Christians and we want to be at peace and his relationship is important to us. After hearing my words, he was overwhelmingly humbled.

Yes, we were at loss, but don't you think it is worth the loss for the gospel than react in a way that would mar the message of the gospel? If we cannot make little sacrifices and control our short-tempers, how can we lose our life itself, as Christ said, for the gospel? (Mark 8:35)
Disgraceful Behavior

Now do not suppose this is how I conduct myself every time I face disappointed situations. Regretfully, many times I reacted to unbelievers in a way that was shameful. I brought much disgrace to the name of God and to the gospel because of my unchristian behavior.

I am learning now to be more careful about how I talk and act when I confront odd behavior from unbelievers.

There were times that I behaved in such a way with customer service executives that when they asked my name to resolve the problem, I was ashamed to say it [Stephen David], for they would know that I am a Christian.

I remember how wildly I reacted in a gas station when the fuel was not filled in my bike according to the exact amount. After leaving that place, the Holy Spirit convicted me, "Stephen, if you go back and share the gospel with him, would he be willing to listen to you?" Would he not hate my message? When I was discussing about such behavioral issues with my elder brother, he expressed it right, "We pray to God for the lost souls and then ruin the work of the gospel through our behavior." We preach the gospel to the unbelievers and then behave rudely with them when things go wrong. Would they be impressed with our gospel in this way?

Don't you suppose such behavior is unfitting for God's children and Christ's ambassadors who are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world? (Matthew 5:13-16) Were we not exhorted from God's word, "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity?" (Colossians 4:5) Are we not commanded to live our daily life in such a way that it would win the respect of outsiders? (1 Thessalonians 4:12)

Losing to Gain

Remember, when we love material things and our own ambitions more than the gospel and the lost souls, we become quick-tempered, displaying folly and unchristian behavior. I am afraid this is what the non-Christians are witnessing in us in workplaces, on streets, in shopping malls, in our neighborhood and as they pass by our homes?

So, I suppose, it is better to become losers than react in a way that would disrepute the message of the gospel. Don't you think—when we lose our patience, we may lose a soul too?

Now this does not mean we have to always let others to step on us like a doormat and we have to simply lay silent. When misbehavior is manifested or when injustice is done, we can confront the offensive person or raise our voice towards injustice, but this is done not as the worldly people generally do—yelling, threatening and behaving violent. It should be done with appropriate Christian behavior and biblical standards. As we live in a crooked world where things do not occur according to our expectations, we must be careful about how we speak and behave with the worldly people. As much as possible, we ought to be kind and gentle. And, yes, I don't deny the fact of facing certain situations where we may have to be firm but without being fierce, bold but without being blunt and hard but without being harsh.

I have learned that when things go wrong, my response should be such that I should not be ashamed to preach the gospel later, although I fail at times and repent.

Carrying the Ark of the Gospel

Remember, folks, we carry the ark of the gospel wherever we go. Make sure we do not let it be disgraced by our ill conduct. Because we exist in this world, not for our desires and their fulfillment sake but for the glory of God, we need to know that our lifestyle has a stake in the spread of the gospel of Christ Jesus.

Therefore, let us be different and make a difference, even if it costs us to become losers for the sake of the gospel of Christ. And, I believe, we cannot become radical losers unless our passion grows and conforms to the passion of Paul who passionately said:

"I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." (Acts 20:24) "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Corinthians 9:22)

"Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God--even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved." (1 Corinthians 10:32-33)

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S. Mega Problem with Mega Churches - Part 1

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Not long back I had a shocking experience. I was speaking to a woman who was sharing with me about attending a mega church in my city. She is attending this church for many years and finds it exciting to be a part of its service. And then she shared with me that there is also a bible study being conducted every week in her house by another group. Do you know who they are? Jehovah's Witnesses.

I was shocked to hear this. I asked her whether she knows who Jehovah's Witnesses are. She has no idea about them. This woman is attending an evangelical mega church since many years, yet she didn't know that JW is a cult in which many sincere people are entangled by its false teachings. The members of JW have penetrated her house to digress this family from some of the cardinal truths of the Holy Bible. When I explained to her who JW's are, she was taken aback.

Now this woman is passionate for God and sincerely loves to follow Christ. But she is part of a mega church in which she could not have the opportunity to get disciplined by someone towards spiritual maturity, even finding help to get strongly rooted in the Word of God. She didn't even know that being disciplined is essential for Christian growth. This I find to be a mega problem with mega churches.

Mega Problem

Please don't get me wrong. I am not completely against mega churches. I am not saying there is nothing we can learn from them. I find the services of these churches quite exciting, which is good. They constantly conduct special programs and concerts, have exciting youth gatherings and provide good facilities for the attendees, which is helpful. I see there is a great emphasis on evangelism and church growth, which is wonderful. But here is a mega problem with mega churches—there is a great lack of personal attention and mentoring of those who are newly born-again. Even those who would like to grow more in the Lord, they lack proper guidance and motivation. And the equipping of the saints for ministry is largely absent, for the necessity of body ministry is not recognized by these churches.

What I have observed is—mega churches are more service and program oriented than focused on discipleship. For this reason, the faith of many members of these churches is found quite shallow. Much worse, there would be many having no salvation experience and I wonder what focus is given to personally lead them to Christ Jesus! Of course, this pathetic condition could also be found in micro-churches if believers are not properly nurtured and disciplined. Is it not our Lord's command to make disciples rather than have nice Sunday services and programs?

Need for Disciplining

I have observed that those who grow well in the Lord in a mega church setting are those who have a passion to grow in Christ with a self-disciplined spirit, taking initiative to stay on the cutting-edge.

And some who grow well in these churches are those who receive inspiration to grow from other fellowships or bible studies or ministries. An active member of a mega church agrees with me that, although the churches are mega in numbers, we find few people testifying their immense growth in the Lord and in depth understanding of His Word due to the contribution of these churches. But those who are not self-disciplined and have no proper guidance from outside and could not take initiative to find help—they remain in these churches for years without personal, evidential and influential growth. They may appear emotionally spiritual but show no true signs of solid biblical understanding and spiritual maturity. O, how such people can be wonderfully transformed and used by the Lord to impact the people around them if an initiative is taken to mentor them in the Lord! To resolve such problems, since it is practically impossible to pay attention to all the crowd in a mega church setting, some have adopted cell group method, appointing cell group leaders to lead. This is at least better and somewhat helpful, although there is a fear whether these cell groups may cut off from the mother church and become an independent church.

However, even to such cell groups many do not seem to consistently attend, for to them church is a Sunday service to attend, not a close-knit community to grow in the Lord and to impact the world. Such people may be more transformed through personal discipleship.

Don't you think there is a great need for disciple-makers in the churches today?

Early Church Model

Considering the ineffective issues and practical problems we observe in the mega church setting, if I am asked which is an effective model, I would simply point out to the early church. No doubt the early church grew in numbers, perhaps much more growth than what we witness today, if not in steady numbers (for we have more population than the first century), at least in rapid growth. But there are two things to consider:

First, the growth of the early church in numbers should not be understood in light of our modern day mega church growth. When church growth is mentioned, it is in relation to the overall growth of the church in a city or town or region. For example, when in Acts 9:31 it is mentioned that the church grew in numbers, it grew in Judea, Galilee and Samaria. This church growth is not about an individual church growing in a particular locality, eventually becoming a great crowd or a mega church. Indeed, the vast number of believers had split into local churches that gathered as small communities in informal places. It is obvious from the New Testament that the early churches gathered at homes as small communities (Acts 2:46; Acts 8:3; Acts 12:5; Acts 12:12; Acts 16:40; Acts 20:7-8; Romans 16:3; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:1-2; 2 John 1:10).

New Testament scholar, Ben Witherington III, mentions that the early churches gathered in homes, presumably well-do-homes, which could not likely hold more than 50 persons for a meeting. If there was a courtyard, up to 120 or so could be accommodated (The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary, pg. 211).

Take note of this: the issue here is not about gathering particularly in houses. A church can gather anywhere for its meeting and edification. The main point is how small communities can be effective, leading to the following point I am going to discuss.

Secondly, the early church not only grew in numbers but was also strengthened in the faith. In Acts 16:5, it is written, “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.” Also in Acts 9:31, “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.”

You see, these Scriptures testify that the early church not only grew in numbers, but also in faith and in fear of the Living God. Of course, there were problems in these communities, but the apostles were focused on strongly establishing the faith of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't you think the epistles of the New Testament are evident of such efforts?

One of the key elements for which the apostles constantly took effort—it is to strengthen the churches and make them solidly grounded in Christ Jesus. Paul and Barnabas “returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith” (Acts 14:22). Paul “went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches” (Acts 15:41). Paul “traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23).

If there is anything the apostles hated to see in the churches they planted—it is the shallow faith of believers. To see believers growing strong in faith, they took every effort to exhort and edify them—to live a holy life, to demonstrate love towards one another, to pray, to treasure God's word, to resist and refute false teachings, to speak and live differently from the world, to wait eagerly for our Lord's second coming and to seek to glorify the name of the Lord in everything.

You know one thing that really impresses me when I read the book of Acts? It is this—Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing” (Acts 15:36). Mark these words, “Let us go back...and see how they are doing.” We keep on preaching the word and having various programs, but do we say—let us see how our people are practically doing in their daily Christian life? Looking at the crowd of the church members, is this question asked—how can my people be disciplined to grow and to become more like Christ Jesus.

Remember, the apostles' passion was not simply to bring everyone for a church gathering, but in the words of Paul, “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Colossians 1:28).

Practical Applications for Today's Churches

Therefore, what can we learn from the early church model? What changes can we bring in our churches for the spiritual welfare of people? What makes it possible for the church to grow not only in numbers but also in faith? Here are my practical suggestions:

1) I believe, it is good for churches to gather as small communities. There are many advantages in doing so. Here are some of them:

gathering in inexpensive places (large house or a medium-sized hall)

paying more personal attention to all

creating more room for one-another intimacy
motivating body ministry or one-another ministry
holding believers accountable
having fellowship meals
doing both evangelism and good follow-up
making discipleship possible and effective
expending money wisely
preventing leaders from burn-out

building churches as a family community rather than like a formal company with CEO and officials

Can you see micro-churches are more effective than mega-churches? This is not a perfect model with no problems but an effective model creating more room to build quality fellowship and spirituality. It is good if mega churches too would focus on small communities with quality fellowship during the week than just on large gathering for Sunday service.

2) I believe that our God is a God who looks for growth. We have to grow, personally and corporately. So a local church ought to believe in growing and make all efforts by God's wisdom and power to grow. There is a terrible problem with any church that doesn't grow in numbers. But as the church grows beyond its capacity to provide personal attention and discipleship to its members, instead of steadily growing in one locale like a huge banyan tree, it is good for her to split and multiply in other locales like banana trees. In this way, more leaders would be raised as the churches multiply, expanding God's kingdom in a mighty way, than have just few leaders being confined to manage a mega church.

3) I believe, the leaders should make discipleship their passion, than church membership as their goal. They need to be making disciples to make other disciples, than just motivating one member of the church to bring other members to Sunday services. They should desire to see active growth of the church, not passive growth in which many members remain docile while only few being active. They must equip the saints for ministry, not just make them objects of ministry. The leaders should also focus more on strengthening the faith of believers than simply having a large crowd. They have to encourage believers and hold them accountable to have adequate personal and family devotions, making it their daily lifestyle, than simply have them listen to sermons Sunday after Sunday with no significant change in personal and family life. They must focus on raising obedient disciples for Christ, not mere church attendees.

Finally, dear leaders, we need to be kingdom-centered, seeing how the kingdom of God can be expanded through evangelism, discipleship and church multiplication, than church-centered, focusing on just Sunday services and bringing people to church fellowship.

If we do the above, I believe, we would witness the mega growth of God's kingdom, spreading His glory and reverence to the ends of the earth

S. More Faith

More Faith “Where is your faith?” He asked His disciples (Luke 8:25).

Imagine a person in crisis who kept on praying the whole night, worried and troubled about what may happen. The other person, stuck in the same situation, didn’t even say a word but just kept silent, trusting the Sovereign One and knowing that his Redeemer lives.

We who are often carried away by the outward appearances may appreciate the one who prayed the whole night and despise the seemingly prayerless person who didn’t even utter a word. But whom do you think God really commends? The one who prayed with fear, worry and unbelief or the one who sat quietly trusting in the Lord? What did Jesus reply when the disciples fervently prayed to Him amidst furious storm? He asked, “Where is your faith?” (Luke 8:25)

Now I am going to make a thoughtful statement. I haven’t found anywhere in the Holy Bible where God appreciated just prayer. But I do know surplus evidences where God commended faith in Him. To share a few, about the centurion, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith” (Matthew 8:10). To the Canaanite woman, Jesus responded, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted” (Matthew 15:28). Finally, the whole chapter of Hebrews 11:1-40 marvelously describes the importance of faith. God takes great delight in those who have great faith in Him! Of course, there were men and women of prayer in the Holy Bible who persisted in prayer and no doubt were responded by God. However, please make a note—their prayers were effective not because of the words they offered; it is because of their great faith in God (Hebrews 11:1-40). Moreover, Jesus rebuked people who pray and yet put no faith in Him (Matthew 8:26). The parable of Jesus on persistent prayer recorded in Luke 18:1-8 actually speaks about faith in God. At the conclusion of the parable, did not Jesus regret, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8)

It is our faith in God which is of utmost importance than mere prayer. God is far more concerned about our wordless faith than worded prayers. Jesus Himself said, “Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mark 11:24). Agreed, there are times God does answer our prayer out of His grace in spite of our weak faith but that is not the way He usually works. He wants us to grow in faith for He does not take delight in faithless prayers.

Many times, I suppose, prayer is far easier than trusting God. I know what it is to pray and later follow my own inclinations. I know what it is to pray and then keep on worrying. I know what it is to pray and yet remain in disappointment and depression. I know what it is to pray and still live in great fear. I know what it is to pray and renounce to trust in God alone.

I may appear a little blunt in saying—I would rather be a man of faith than a man of prayer. The Holy Bible doesn’t say that it is impossible to please God without prayer; it is written, “It is impossible to please God without faith” (Hebrews 11:6). The Holy Bible doesn’t say that through prayer we can do great things; it is written, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the

Father” (John 4:12).

Furthermore, the Holy Bible doesn't say that by prayer you are healed; it is written, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:19). The Holy Bible doesn't say that through prayer we are saved; it is written, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). The Holy Bible doesn't say that it is just by prayer we move the mountain; it is written that we move the mountain by faith (Mark 11:22-23). The Holy Bible doesn't say that by prayer everything is possible; it is written, "Everything is possible for him who believes" (Mark 9:23). Finally, the Holy Bible doesn't say that the righteous will live by prayer; it is written, "The righteous will live by faith" (Romans 1:17).

Kindly don't misunderstand me. I am not at all nullifying the significance of prayer. My concern is that we are encircled by so much emphasis on prayer (though not with its practice) that we have missed the greater importance of a life of faith. Yes, we need more prayer, but more needful than that—we need more faith, not to get every personal whim, but amidst storms and thorns to live a mighty life for Him who taught us, "Thy kingdom come and thy will be done."

“ “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8)."

Contact: friendsofchrist@gmail.com

S. More Precious Than Jewels

More Precious Than Jewels

"Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

Everytime I connect my laptop to Internet, the home page of the company that offers Internet automatically pops up. I generally ignore viewing it, but recently, when I was about to close the home page, my eyes fell on the title, "Celebs without Make-up." Being curious to know how they would appear, I clicked the link and saw the pictures of the top admired Indian actresses who makes hearts flutter. To my surprise, I found a world of difference in how these celebrities looked with and without make-up. I realized, much of their beauty projected in movies and ads is superficial.

Granted that the beauty of these women is authentic, but does it not still fade away over the years? Are you aware of the beauty which is genuine and that which never fades off but shines even brighter?

Physical beauty comes and fades away, just like the flower which blossoms and withers. But the inner beauty of a woman, that godly character, is far more attractive and lasts forever, just like gold that does not fade or lose its lustre.

It is good to witness the advancement of women today. Unlike the past, the modern woman is more educated, more talented, got into more top positions, earns more money, has more freedom and proven more accomplished. However, women who are more beautiful in their inner character, manifesting that gentle and gracious spirit as mentioned in 1 Peter 3:1-6, are rarely found.

It is to motivate such unfading beauty in women, Mrs. Clarice Joy David has written a book "More Precious Than Jewels: A Wise Woman In Building Her Home." Based on biblical foundations, she wrote how a wise woman could cultivate beautiful character, which is more precious than jewels and more lasting than a beautiful flower, resulting in being a blessing to husband, children and others around.

Well, I love reading biographies and I read them in two ways: one by reading books and the other by watching live examples. I know Mrs. Clarice in person, whom I call 'aunty', and have the privilege of being close to her family. After years of observing her life, I think I can fairly make this statement—what she has written in the book is very much in consistent with how she lives. In order to testify what God's amazing grace can accomplish in a person, I would like to share for your encouragement few things about Mrs. Clarice. A Woman of Hospitality: When I think of Mrs. Clarice, the very first thought that comes into my mind is her spirit of hospitality. How joyfully she invites people to her home, how varieties of dishes she prepares and how kindly she serves people! And what a blessing she is to women, particularly to young girls! Many of them would testify of how often they have been invited to her house and how gladly she served them good

food, cared for them and disciplined them.

Now you need to know she is not that young and energetic to manifest such hospitality. She is 65 years old and still serves people with great enthusiasm. My family had been to her house many times and we can admit of being blessed by her love and hospitality, both in our body and spirit. Do we find the young women of our day having that heart and patience to serve people? A Woman of Encouragement: Another character I can think of Mrs. Clarice is her spirit of encouragement. She is not only an encouragement to those outside but also to her own family. Since her husband, Mr. Joy David, is a missionary, traveling to various places and ministering to people, she took time to teach and encourage her children to walk in the ways of God. Her labor in the grace of God has reaped life-changing results in her children. Today, they all love the Lord and have blessed families.

How many women do we observe these days who are deeply devoted to pray and bring up their children in the fear of God?

Let me point out that Mrs. Clarice is not a preacher or teacher. She is a simple house wife. But she is a great encouragement to her husband. What a delight to watch her encouraging her husband in prayer, in evangelism and in ministry to people! Her presence is such an encouragement to people that Mr. Joy David himself testifies that when they go together for ministry, people crowd her more than him.

O, how many husbands lack such encouraging wives and what great things they might have achieved had they had such encouragement from their wives!

I think, Mr. Joy David would not hesitate for a moment to confess—had it not been for her support and encouragement, which is God's gracious providence to him, it would have been quite hard for his ministry to have had a wider influence on people. A Woman who loves Jesus: I know Mrs. Clarice is what she is only because of Jesus who saved her. And because He loves her, she loves her Lord passionately. Because she has tasted the goodness of the Lord, she manifests that goodness to others. People are touched by her life because she is in constant touch with her heavenly Father.

Anyone who comes in contact with her will not take long to see her burning heart for God. Her passion for Jesus is quite noticeable.

She loves to talk with her Lord, even standing in the gap and interceding for people. She loves to hear her Lord through His unchanging Word. She loves worshiping her Savior. In this short life lived on earth, she loves to live a fruitful life for the glory of God. And because she has consecrated herself to the Lord, she has been a blessing to many people. In my talk with Mr. Joy David, I candidly asked him, "Uncle, did you ever regret in your marital life about not getting a better wife, wishing in your heart for a better woman?" He replied that in their 38 years of life together, he never regretted for marrying Mrs. Clarice and never thought, "I wish I had a better wife."

What a blessed testimony! But this does not mean she is a perfect woman, expressed Mr. Joy David, and desired for her to constantly improve her godly qualities.

Finally, because of her rich experience in the Lord and godly example, I suppose, a woman would be richly benefited to read and apply the principles Mrs. Clarice shares in her book “More Precious Than Jewels.”

“More Precious Than Jewels” is published by Authentic Books and can be ordered online at a very low price: <http://christianstore.in/product.php?productid=20868&cat=0&hm=BK> You may also write to the following e-mail address for a copy: cstephendavid@gmail.com (or) stephen@tents-india.org

S. Mothers, Respect Your Children's Father

Mothers, Respect Your Children's Father

Note: The following message is a continuation of the previous topic: "Fathers, Love Your Children's Mother" The word 'woman' isn't a sign of weakness but a living example of meekness. She is not a reflection of inferiority but of humility. She has been created by the Living God, not to manifest either smallness or haughtiness, but gentleness and kindness. What's more, she has been blessed with a grand privilege to exemplify submissiveness. Therefore, is it not unfitting for a mother to behave disrespectfully towards her children's father?

Disrespect

One major problem husbands have with their wives is - DISRESPECT. And this problem had jeopardized many families, including the lives of children.

I once came across a true incident of a successful doctor who had an affair with an office secretary who wasn't nearly as good looking as his wife. When asked by the counselor, "What did you see in her?" he replied, "She made me feel more comfortable." "Whenever I went home, my wife would belittle me and talk down to me." [1]

Although his adulterous action cannot be justified, the triggering factor, which is lack of respect that he got from his wife which drove him away from her, cannot be ignored. O, how many husbands have been driven into illicit relationship with other women because of their wives improper conduct towards them!

Men cannot endure disrespect from their wives, but they have great admiration towards a woman who is respectful. So terrible is the disorder and disturbance in the house caused by a disrespectful woman that it is written, "Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife." (Proverbs 21:19) For this reason it is exhorted, "Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:33).

Emerson Eggerichs wrote a good book titled, "Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs." Sharing about his unhappy home built by his parents, he painfully writes: My childhood years were filled with memories of yelling and unsettling tension. I saw and heard things that are permanently etched in my soul, and I would cry myself to sleep at times. I remember feeling a deep sadness. I wet the bed until age eleven and was set off to military school at age thirteen, where I stayed until I graduated. As I look back on how my parents lived a life of almost constant conflict, I can see the root issue of their unhappiness. It wasn't hard to see that my mom was crying out for love and my dad desperately wanted respect. [2]

Unconditional Respect

There may be a reaction, "I am not going to respect my husband until he behaves in a way I expect him to be." While the problem with men is to treat wives like slaves and dominate over them, the issue with women is to treat their husbands like kids and often grumble, nag, yell and

unkindly correct them, even in little issues. Is it not unwise for a woman to try to “mother” her husband? Men mightily resent being mothered, especially by their wives.[3] She need to understand the difference between being a wife to her husband and mother to her children and conduct herself accordingly. In “mothering” their husbands, wives cannot make a difference in their family life; in fact, they worsen the atmosphere in the house - all with good intentions to change their husbands. There is a great hope of change to occur in your husband when there is initiation on your part to be a model and show unconditional respect. As Emerson Eggerichs writes, “Such respect lets him feel his wife’s love for him and ignites in him feelings of love for his wife.”[4]

Now, respecting your husband does not mean nodding your head to everything he says. But even when you disagree with him or express your hurt, you do so with respect. Remember, your quality of character should not be changed by the behavior of your husband. Character is a state of your being, not a situation. You don’t have to change for worse when you cannot change your partner for better. The Holy Scripture counsels, “Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands, so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives” (1 Peter 3:1-2).

Unfading Beauty

It is commonly known that women are most concerned about how beautiful they appear, just as men who are most cautious about how strong they show up. The cosmetic industry thrives on the feelings of women’s insecurity to appear more beautiful. Although it is good for women to appear beautiful (and men like it), the bottom line is that the ultimate beauty of a woman is not how glamorous she looks but how well she adorns herself with gentleness and excellence. The Holy Scripture exhorts, “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (1 Peter 3:3-4). How hard it is these days to find wonderful women with such unfading beauty!

It is rightly written, “An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels” (Proverbs 31:10). To such an excellent woman, “Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her” (Proverbs 31:28). The appreciation a woman seeks to receive is dependent on the kind of woman she is. It is written, “A kindhearted woman gains respect” (Proverbs 11:16). A woman whose speech is gracious and whose conduct is respectful towards her husband is appreciated by all and causes envy in other women to become like her.

If the reader is a wife and a mother, I courteously ask you these questions: Do you conduct yourself in such a way that your husband praises you and your children call you blessed? Do you speak respectfully to your husband, even during conflicts? Do you respect your husband in a manner that your children would love to imitate you and your daughters wish to become respectful wives like you? Are you aware that your respect towards your husband has an incredible influence on how your children respect their fathers?

Mother’s Influence on the Children’s View of their Father

Children learn to honor their father from their mother’s respect towards him. They even honor the mother who is respectful towards their father. So if a woman has anything negative to talk about

her husband, it is unwise for her to do that with or before her children. Doing so would create a bad image in the minds of the children about their father. Isn't this practically noticeable in many families? In case of conflicts with her husband, it is better for a wife to discuss her problems directly with him or share her hurtful feelings with some elders who would offer good wisdom and help, but it is unhealthy to complain to children and expect from them to fill her emotional needs.[5]

Research has shown that mothers are the basic filter through which children view their father's personality, character, and integrity.[6] James Dobson made this observation, "Children interpret their father the way their mother thinks and feels about him. If she respects her husband, they will respect their father." [7] A woman who is domineering, disrespectful and unsubmitive to her husband has a harmful impact on her children.

Mother's Impact on Children

It is also true that a disrespectful and quarrelsome mother is most likely to produce disrespectful and quarrelsome daughters. Charles Swindoll says, "Often a daughter is contentious because her mother is contentious. Like begets like, all things being equal." [8] I know a woman who used to always scream at her husband when something went wrong. She didn't know how to speak politely and respectfully with her husband in spite of his weaknesses. Later, I have observed that her conduct is nothing but an exact reflection of her mother's behavior towards her husband. Since she grew up observing her mother often screaming at her father, she too learned to manifest the same attitude towards her husband.

If mothers understand how profoundly they can influence their daughters' marital life and if they are concerned about the welfare of their children, there would be a considerable difference in the manner they behave with their husbands.

Notes:

[1] Tim & Beverly LaHaye, Mike Yorkey, *The Act of Marriage After 40* (Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 163

[2] Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2004), 7-8

[3] Tim & Beverly LaHaye, Mike Yorkey, *The Act of Marriage After 40* (Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 163

[4] *Ibid.*, 19

[5] Of course, she may share her feelings with her children if they are older and mature enough to guide her to cope with problems she has with her husband rather than stir up her bitterness.

[6] Cleveland McDonald and Philip M. McDonald, *Creating a Successful Christian Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Bakers Book House, 1981), 196

[7] *Ibid.*, 12 [8] Charles Swindoll, *You are Your Child* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 125
Related Article: "Fathers, Love Your Children's Mother"

ENQUIRIES:

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S. My Name Is Pride

My Name Is Pride No other topic evokes my attention as the subject of pride. This may be because the Lord has caused me to become more aware of its vicious activity within me. Praise be to the Lord of mercy! The worst nature of pride is that it is best visible in others than in oneself, unless the Lord mercifully opens our eyes to see its merciless destructive work within us and through us in others.

“Father in Heaven, enlighten our eyes to clearly see that arrogance within us and deliver us for this evil. Humble us, O God of humility, to walk with you intimately and to get along with people peacefully.”

It’s always humbling to read on pride. In my personal study on this pathetic topic, I recently came across an intriguing description on pride penned by Beth Moore. May the Lord use this to help us know the deceptive nature of pride within us.

Remember, pride is no friend of us; it is a deadly foe. The more we nourish it, the more it ruins us from within and without. It gives a good feeling of yourself while degrading you before others.

So, here is pride personified: My name is Pride. I am a cheater.

I cheat you of your God-given destiny...because you demand your own way.

I cheat you of contentment...because you “deserve better than this.”

I cheat you of knowledge...because you already know it all.

I cheat you of healing...because you are too full of me to forgive.

I cheat you of holiness...because you refuse to admit when you are wrong.

I cheat you of genuine friendship...because nobody’s going to know the real you.

I cheat you of love...because real romance demands sacrifice.

I cheat you of greatness in heaven...because you refuse to wash another’s feet on earth.

I cheat you of God’s glory...because I convince you to seek your own. My name is Pride. I am a cheater.

You like me because you think I’m always looking out for you.

Untrue! I’m looking to make a fool of you.

God has much for you, I admit, but don’t worry...

If you stick with me, you’ll never know.[1]

Note:

[1] Beth Moore, Praying God's Word (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2009), pg. 59

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below (or) write to E-mail: friendsofchrist@gmail.com

S. Myths About Suicide

Myths About Suicide

Suicide is one of the tragic choices many are opting in our day. It is not only a painful choice to the one who opts for it but also agonizing to those left behind.

If the one who attempted or committed suicide is a person close to us, the pain is unbearable. Our mind is often haunted with these thoughts, "Why did he/she take such a drastic decision?; I wish I had done something to save him/her?" As important as it is to discern the symptoms of those attempting or committing suicide in order to save them, it is helpful to have an understanding about some of the myths on suicide. Knowing these myths will assist us to better understand the signs of suicide. H. Norman Wright, in his book *Crisis Counseling*,^[1] describes some of the common myths which I believe people must extract from their mind.

Myth 1: Suicide and attempted suicide are the same class of behavior. Norman clarifies that suicide is committed usually by one who wants to die, whereas attempted suicide is carried out usually by one who has some desire to live.^[2] Isn't it deeply moving to know that people who are attempting suicide are actually crying out for help, hoping to be rescued?

Myth 2: Suicide is a problem of a specific class of people. One of the mystifying things about suicide is this—it is no respecter of people. It can knock any person of any class at any age. Norman states that suicide is neither the curse of the rich nor the disease of the poor.^[3] Any person—from whatever, culture, class or creed—may opt for suicide.

Suicide attempts and suicide can be found among any group—rich or poor, beauty or ugly, literate or illiterate, young or old, successful or failure, prominent or notorious, employer or employee—anyone is vulnerable to commit suicide. As a response to life's crises, suicide and self-destructive behaviors are among people of every age, sex, race, religion, and economic and social class.^[4] Although suicide rate is high among some age group (especially among youth), one cannot underestimate the possibility of committing suicide at any age. Doesn't reading the daily news show us how people from various backgrounds are committing suicide?

Myth 3: People who talk about suicide don't commit suicide. Norman brings an eye-opening fact that about 80 percent of those who take their own lives have communicated their intention to someone prior to the act.^[5] People, who reveal their desire to commit suicide, either indirectly or directly, are in reality seeking someone's attention to help them. Therefore, shouldn't we take any threats and hints about suicide seriously?

Myth 4: Once a person is suicidal, he is suicidal forever. Norman writes that many who have thought of or attempted suicide have discovered the answers to their problems, and they are no longer suicidal.^[6] Studies also disclose the fact that individuals who wish to kill themselves are suicidal only for a limited period of time.^[7] Although there is still possibility (perhaps greater), we cannot justify our sense of apprehensiveness by assuming that once a person who attempted

suicide he or she is suicidal all the time.

Myth 5: Suicide is inherited or runs in families. Another myth Norman deals is—if another family member has committed suicide, this fact could cause a person to be fearful of his own future behavior. He asserts that being suicidal isn't an inherited tendency but a learned behavior upon which family environment and examples of others may be influencing factors.[8] In his book *Suicide*, French sociologist Emile Durkheim disputed the claim that suicide is hereditary.[9] Similarly, Gordon Edlin and Eric Golanty have observed:

Suicide is not a disease, nor is it a disorder that can be inherited. Suicides are not caused by the weather or a full moon. Generally people consider suicide because they feel overwhelmed and painfully distressed by life and they believe suicide to be their only option.[10]

I always wondered why numerous people in India, especially women, commit suicide via self-immolation. The thought of killing oneself by burning is too daunting to me. In 1998, India was the only country in the world where fire (burns) was classified among the 15 leading causes of death.[11] In all female suicides, burns was the commonest method adopted by over 60% females.[12] This could be because of its likeness to the culturally approved practice of sati [13] in the past. My study of this act taught me how a sociocultural environment can tragically impact a person.

Myth 6: Suicide and depression are synonymous. Everyone who either attempts or commits suicide is in some way depressed but not every person who is depressed is suicidal. Norman shares, "Most people who attempt suicide are experiencing stress, and yet others experience stress without thoughts of suicide." [14] Although depression is not certainly a sign of suicidal thoughts, whenever a person is depressed we should be on the lookout for any thoughts or indications of the possibility of suicide.

Myth 7: Improvement after a suicidal crisis means that the risk of suicide is over. A person immediately overcoming a suicidal crisis isn't at once free from the risk of suicide, just as once a person is suicidal he or she isn't suicidal forever. Norman cites an indication which is based on a particular research—almost half the persons who were in a suicidal crisis and later actually committed suicide did so within three months of having passed through their first crisis.[15] Therefore, we must still be concerned and cautious when a suicide attempt person talks about straight away solving his problems with high emotional excitement.

Myth 8: If a person is a Christian, he/she will not commit suicide. This myth is quite prevailing and requires careful consideration. There are people who falsely assume that a true Christian cannot commit suicide. Well, does the Holy Bible guarantee that Christian life is always bubbly and jolly? Some of the people I have seen committing suicide were nice Christians. I have even witnessed those who are active in ministry attempting suicide.

Some may question, "How can a person believe in Christ Jesus who delivers people from sin and misery and yet attempt or commit suicide? Is Jesus incompetent to help people in their crisis?" I wish to ask a question in response to this, "How can a Christian suffer from worry, disappointment and fear when situations seem to be overwhelming with troubles? Does that mean Christ is impotent to help them?" It is important to note that a person believing in Christ can still lack faith and knowledge about how to deal with certain challenges of life in the light of God's Sovereignty.

It is also true that a Christian may still possess some distorted views about God, themselves and life because of their ignorance or lack of wholehearted acceptance about what the Holy Bible asserts about such things. So, there is a difference between trusting Christ for the forgiveness of sins and believing Christ to help us overcome a particular problem.

Although a Christian's act of suicide cannot be justified as a valid decision, just like any non-Christians, he or she is nevertheless not free from the temptation to commit suicide.[16] Says Norman, "Christians as well as non-Christians experience all kinds of physical and emotional disorders. Because of the many factors that could cause a person to consider suicide, we need to remember that none of us is immune." [17]

Notes:

[1] H. Norman Wright, *Crisis Counseling*(San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1985)

[2] *Ibid.*, 100.

[3] *Ibid.*, 100.

[4] David A. Jobes et. al, [ed] Albert R. Roberts, *Crisis Intervention Handbook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 396 [5] *Crisis Counseling*, 100.

[6] *Ibid.*, 100.

[7] Antoon A. Leenaars, [eds] Hannelore Wass and Robert A. Neimeyer, *Dying: Facing The Facts* (Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Francis, 1995),150 [8] H. Norman Wright, *Crisis Counseling*(San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1985), 100-101

[9] Steve Lukes, *Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work: A Historical and Critical Study*(Stanford University Press, 1985), 203-203 [10] Gordon Edlin and Eric Golanty, *Health and Wellness* (Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett Publishers, 2007), 78

[11] Anil K. Batra, "Burn mortality: Recent Trends and Sociocultural Determinants in Rural India." *Burns* Volume 29, Issue 3, May 2003, Pages 270-275 [12]*Crisis Counseling*, 100-101

[13] Sati was the traditional Hindu practice of a widow immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre. It is now illegal and considered a crime.

[14] *Crisis Counseling*, 101

[15] *Ibid.*, 101

[16] Will a Christian go to hell if he or she commits suicide? The Holy Bible doesn't clearly pronounce any judgment on such an act and I think it isn't wise on my part to attempt to do so. Although I neither condone nor condemn the act of suicide one thing I can certainly say—God wants you to live by His all-sufficient grace.

[17]*Crisis Counseling* , 101

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below

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S. Nelson David - My Brother, My Pride

Nelson David - My Brother, My Pride

Recollecting the past, Paul, a former persecutor of the church turned a disciple of Christ Jesus, writes to the church in Galatia, "And they (churches) praised God because of me (Paul)." (Galatians 1:24)

There are amazing people God brings in our life and when we think about them we just want to thank God for such beautiful lives. There are such wonderful people around us that even though they speak less their lives are so radiant that we cannot help but praise God for them. One such person for whom I want to thank God is Nelson David. He is none other but my elder brother.

If you read my testimony, you will come across my brother Nelson, a once great devotee of 'Shirdi Sai Baba' (one of the familiar deities of India). He was the one who won me over to become Baba's devotee. After some series of tragic events, miraculously, he came to know that Jesus Christ is the only God and Savior of the world. And after committing his life to Jesus, he had that untold burden for my salvation. I was a rebellious young brat, untamed by anyone. My life was swiftly heading towards destruction.

I think it was John Wesley who said, "No one is saved unless someone has prayed." Nelson continuously poured out his heart before God for my salvation. He even used to request many God's people to intercede for me. I must honestly acknowledge that God in His grace used his fervent prayers to save me from a life filled with wickedness and rebellion. I am grateful to the Living God for using Nelson to save me from perishing in sin.

Besides, I praise God for my brother's life in Christ which is a great inspiration to me and to others. As his younger brother, I know Nelson quite well personally. Reflecting on his life, I take this opportunity to share few things through which, I hope, the readers would be blessed and encouraged. May I mention that the things I am going to share are not what he taught me verbally; these are just observations from his practical life. A Family Man: I have seldom seen a person so committed to his family as my brother Nelson. In spite of fierce storms that he faced, he stayed committed to his wife and children. He loves them greatly. He gave up many good things he relished, just for the sake of his family. His care for his wife and children is very impressive. His patience is stunning. If you stay in his house and watch him closely, you may leave with guilt that you may not be functioning as caring a husband and father as you ought to be. Although he is a busy man, he labors in household chores and for the well-being of his family.

There are many I know whose life in the family is not as impressive as they appear outside. Nelson's life is unusual. My family considers him as a great family man. What he is outside is what he is inside the house. I wish to be like him, a caring husband and father. A Passionate Man: Whenever I speak to him, I rarely hear him without sensing his passion. He has a tremendous passion for God, for his church and for the lost. I know him for years and his passion is still the same, even increasing. His love for God is indescribable. He is a great pastor, passionate to build

his church and to equip them. The burden that he has for his people cannot be exaggerated.

He is a man who is also known for his passion for the lost souls. Under his ministry, the Lord changed many young people who were fornicators, adulterers, deceivers and rebels. How they thank God for his life!

Wherever he goes for ministry, he leaves a powerful impact upon the lives of people. Wherever he worked, they miss him greatly. He is such a sincere and passionate man with whom people cherish to work. Truly, he is a man on fire for God. How seldom do we find such passionate people in God's Kingdom work these days! A Humble Man: There are many people about whom we may testify as good, but among them there are so few known for humility. When it comes to Nelson, I do not hesitate to say he is not only a good man, but a humble person too. He is simple, humble and teachable. There is one example that I would like to share which may speak volumes about his humility. As I said earlier, he is my elder brother and the first person in my family to become a disciple of Christ Jesus. This means he is elder to me both physically and spiritually. However, I had the opportunity to join the Bible College first. He joined sometime later. By the time he was in the last year, I became a lecturer in the College. So, he had to sit in my class.

I don't know about other cultures, but in India, there is a great sense of superiority among the elders towards the younger ones. Yet, Nelson never behaved as an elder brother, with a sense of superiority, in the class. He used to humbly address me as "sir" and asked honest questions as a student. Even now he candidly shares his doubts, weaknesses and struggles. Although I am younger to him, he honors me higher than himself. I am amazed at his humble spirit. May the Lord raise many such wonderful people on this earth who make a difference for His glory.

Thank you, Nelson, for being an instrument in God's hand to be a blessing in my life. I am proud in Christ to be your younger brother. Your love for me excites me. I praise and thank God for sending you in this world on this special day, November 29th. Wish You Happy Birthday!

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Never Give Up in Pain!

Never Give Up in Pain!

(This week's article is dedicated to my eldest son "Joy". On June 10th, 2011, he turned 7 years old. We had the privilege of celebrating his birthday in HOPE's orphanage at Secunderabad. Anyone who is willing to be a blessing to orphans, I heartily recommend to support HOPE where children are properly nurtured with God's love. Pradeep leads this orphanage and I testify that he is a man of integrity and the resources are rightly used for the welfare of children. You may write to: pradeepmanchala@yahoo.com)

These days I am teaching my son to type on the computer system without looking at the keyboard. He has to position his little fingers on the keyboard and slowly learn to type without seeing. Believe me, it is painful and so tedious, especially for a kid of 7 years.

Initially, he was reluctant to learn, but I motivated him to do so without giving up on him. His face was downcast and with great difficulty he began to learn and move his fingers. He started to type letter after letter and pages after pages.

Few days later, as he made some improvement, I began to speak to him some simple words and have him type without looking at the keyboard. My wife and I were present to see his work. To our amazement, he typed flawlessly every word without seeing. You can see that sense of excitement as he typed. After he passed his first test, he was overwhelmed with joy for his accomplishment.

After having him enjoy his achievement, I called him near, looked at his eyes and said, "It was so painful for you to begin and learn but do you now see how exciting it is to see the fruit of your labor (pain)!"

Having said those words, my thoughts went around God's discipline in our life. Is it not written, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11)?

- Are you discouraged in your tough times?
- Are you disappointed in your battle with sin and temptations?
- Are you troubled by looking at the situations around you?
- Do you find it painful to live a life of obedience in this sinful world?
- Are you sick of trials in your life?
- Do you feel like giving up your faith?

James reminds us, "You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy" (James 5:11). Note those words, "What the Lord finally brought about." Let's be patient in times of affliction and wait till the end—to see

what the Lord would finally bring about. It is unwise to conclude anything in the process. One great fruit the Lord produces in our life through trials is this – “You know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:3-4).

Just think—if our Lord Jesus, while on earth, learned obedience from what he suffered (Hebrews 5:8), how can we choose a comfortable path in order to become obedient and mature? Remember, even Christ came to the point of utmost stress and uttered, ““Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me” (Luke 22:42 a). There wouldn’t have been hope to mankind if there was no “yet” thereafter. He said, “YET not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42 b). You know, the fruit of Christ’s suffering brought great salvation to those who would believe in Him.

Paul too understood the ultimate result of suffering and wrote, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Because of this hope, Paul didn’t give up in pain and said at the end, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (1 Timothy 4:7). How encouraging—the present pain is not even worthy of comparison with the glory we are about to receive! If one can understand this, no suffering can make a person give up his faith.

Cheer up, my friend, for it is written, “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (1 Peter 5:10). Make note of those words - our suffering on this earth is only for a little while. Therefore, may we fight the good fight of faith and finish the race. Let us live such a life by God’s efficient grace that when we get to our eternal home, may we be blessed to hear these revitalizing words from our Lord, “Good and faithful servant. Come and share your master’s happiness!”

"No Pain, No Gain. No Cross, No Crown. No Gall, No Glory."

-- William Penn

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below

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S. No Greater Attitude Like Gratitude

No Greater Attitude Like Gratitude "The best giving is thanksgiving" – G.K. Chesterton

Last week, my youngest son, Joe (now 4 years), spoke an unacceptable word to my eldest son, Joy (now 6 years). When I came to know what Joe spoke, I became upset. I was going out and told Joy to come along with me. Now, Joe always loves to go out with me, but as an act of discipline, I did not take him. So he went to his mom to have her tell me to take him but she did not yield to his nagging. As I was about to start my bike, my eldest son, Joy, sitting at my back, asked, "Papa, shall we take Joe along with us?" I told him, "No! He spoke to you using an unacceptable word." Then Joy said, "It's okay, Papa. Forgive him." He got down from the bike, ran up to my house and brought Joe down. When Joe came, I didn't speak to him. Deliberating ignoring his presence, as I was about to start the bike, Joy said again, "Papa, let's take Joe. Forgive him." I said, "He didn't repent of his mistake. I will forgive him but he has to feel sorry for what he did." Joy spoke to Joe to ask for an apology. And Joe, with all unhappiness on his face, looked unto me and said, "I am sorry." When it comes to ask an apology, I make sure that my children apologize specifically, for I want them to clearly know what they violated. Joe said again, "I am sorry. I will not use that word again." Forgiving him, we all went out. As I was on the way, Joy nudged me and said, "Papa, you know, Joe did not thank me for what I did to him."

Expressing Gratitude

I know Joy did not help Joe for the sake of receiving thanks, but shouldn't we express gratitude to those who have been a blessing to us? Although people may do good to us without an intention to gain our gratitude, will not ingratitude hurt them when we do not have a grateful heart? And how wicked is such attitude when we think ill and speak evil of those who have helped us! And how quickly we forget all the good people did unto us when we are just hurt by them! When I think about all the hurt certain people left on my heart, one most offensive thing I had to confront is ungratefulness from them. And I suppose it hurts others too when I don't express my gratitude to them. Elie Wiesel said it right, "When a person doesn't have gratitude, something is missing in his or her humanity. A person can almost be defined by his or her attitude toward gratitude."

Gratitude – Towards God and People

I have learned this most important lesson – we need to express our gratitude, both to God and to people. John, an apostle of Christ, wrote, "For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). In light of this Scripture, I suppose, anyone who is not grateful to his brother, whom he has seen, cannot be grateful to God, whom he has not seen!

Well, it is important to note here that living a life of gratitude is not just offering the word 'thanks'; it goes beyond words. In view of God's mercy, it is upholding the people (who helped us) in our hearts with great respect and being a blessing to them when necessary. Said John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States – "As we express our gratitude, we must never

forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them." How few live a life of such gratefulness!

I always believed and often say, "There is no greater attitude like gratitude." I agree with Marcus Cicero, "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others."

Obstacle to Gratitude

There is one great hindrance to gratitude and it is pride. An arrogant person cannot live a life of gratitude, for to him it is like lowering himself before others. Someone said it true, "Ingratitude produces pride while gratitude produces humility." And Henry Ward Beecher rightly pointed out, "Pride slays thanksgiving, but a humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grow. A proud man is seldom a grateful man."

One risk generous people have to face in helping others is ingratitude from those who received help. In spite of such ungrateful people, the good news from God's word is this: "God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped His people and continue to help them" (Hebrews 6:10). By the way, Joe at last thanked Joy for kindly helping him.

"In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer , German Lutheran pastor, theologian

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S. Parents, Change Yourself First

Parents, Change Yourself First "In everything set them an example by doing what is good." The Holy Bible (Titus 2:7)

Once a mother approached Mahatma Gandhi with her son. She said, "Mahatma-ji, tell my little boy to stop eating sugar." Gandhi then told her to come back with the boy in three days. When the mother returned, Gandhi said to the boy, "Stop eating sugar." The mother curiously asked, "Why was it necessary for us to return after three days just to tell my little boy that?"

Gandhi replied, "Three days ago I had not stopped eating sugar." [1] Dear parents, here is the point: If we want to change our children, we need to change ourselves first.

There was a word that I warned my son Joe not to use, but he could not give up. I realized that I have to change first to see my child change, for I have used the same word often before him. I changed and he too.

Children get fretful when we tell them to do a particular thing while we do the contrary. They hate hypocrisy—telling them to obey that which we ourselves don't practice. Don H. Highlander pointed out, "If our children are disrespectful, perhaps we need to examine our own attitudes and examples. They may be responding to our inconsistency; we may be breaking our own rules." [2]

I recollect watching a story in which a young man was continuously absent from the college. The authorities of the college decided that he should get his father, or else he will be removed from the institute. He then goes and informs his father that he should visit the college while concealing the actual fact. The father, unaware of the cause, assumes it is for some formality's sake and encourages his son to lie to the authorities that he is sick and thus cannot visit. However, when the father eventually comes to know that his son was indeed lying to him and bunked off college, his heart was shattered.

How easy it is for parents to encourage their children to lie to others, but when the children lie to them, how painful for them to endure!

What are we teaching to our children? Do you think your children are not learning to speak lies from you when you are conversing with your spouse to tell a lie at your office about being sick, only to do some personal work? How absurd it is when we teach our children to lie by our example, but when we are lied to, we get angry and either scold or spank them! Who actually deserves to be scolded or spanked—parents or children? Beware - Do not let your own exhortations to your children cut your own throat.

I am reminded of a teacher who complained to the father about how his son kept stealing things from the other kids. His son took their pens, their paper, their tape, and the teacher couldn't figure out why. Surprised to hear what his son has been doing, the father responded, "Why is my son stealing other kids' things when I am able to get all the supplies he needed from my office?" The teacher then figured out why his son steals. No wonder, the one who steals begets alike. The one

who speak lies begets alike. The one who is short-tempered begets alike. The one who is addicted to television begets alike. The one who is irreverent begets alike. The one who is ungodly begets alike.[3]

Parents, do we realize that our children are continuously watching us and following our example? Do we feel glad if they imitate us or be ashamed? For this reason, I believe, God exhorted to treasure His commands in our hearts before impressing them upon our children: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

Notes:

[1] Cited in *The Complete Idiot's Guide to World Religions* (Alpha Books, 2004), 345 [2] Don H. Highlander, *Positive Parenting* (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1980), 59

[3] Of course, exceptions considered, but the impact of our parenting, whether for good or for bad, cannot be undermined.

"In everything set them an example by doing what is good." *The Holy Bible* (Titus 2:7)

Famous are the words of Gandhi, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Applying this to parents, it can rightly be said, "Be the change you wish to see in your children." If I want to change my children from watching TV excessively, then I myself must exercise self-control. If I desire that my children should pray and regularly study God's Word, then I myself should first practice in front of them. If I expect my children to always speak the truth unto me, then I myself ought to be a man of truth. If I want my children not to speak foul language or communicate in an improper manner, then I myself must abstain from such talk.

One father was upset when his son got into trouble for foul language at school. "But, Dad," the son replied, "I heard you use these same words last week." Not many children are bold in challenging their parents this way, for they may be scared of their reaction. But many do the self-talk and question their parents' example. Examine yourself, "Do my children question my lifestyle when I lay my expectations before them?"

If I don't model my expectations I have for my children they won't be able to joyfully fulfill them. After all, what good does it do if parents have good intentions and expectations for their children when they are not good models. Children generally look into the lives of their parents the kind of life their parents expect from them. What an inspiration to children when they find beautiful exemplary parents who are worth imitating! The following is an example of that excitement, shared by a daughter about her father:

He has been an amazing role model. He inspires me to work hard, treat people fairly, to love God, and to enjoy life. The life he made for my family is one which I hope to be able to provide for a family of my own someday. My father instilled a foundation of faith within me since I was a child that has carried me through difficult years and allowed me to become the person I am today, and to have the relationship I have with God today.[1]

If our children are going the wrong way, pause and examine to see whether they are following our own behavior. If you see your children fighting with each other, perhaps they are following their

parents who often quarrel. If you watch your married children having disruptive arguments before you, may be they are following their parents who did the same before them while they were young. It is said that one of the greatest things a father and a mother can do for their children is to model a healthy marriage.

Therefore, let's be an example to our children because they live what they learn from their parents. If we haven't been a good model, it is not too late for us to apologize to them for being a bad example and start living an exemplary life. The apostle Paul said to the Thessalonians, we made "ourselves a model for you to follow" (2 Thessalonians 3:9). I believe, this should be the aim of every parent, "I will make myself a model for my children to follow."

Here is the golden rule of parenting: Be before them what you expect them to live behind you. The Puritans' exhortation to parents on living an exemplary life before children is worth of our consideration: Be sure to set good example before your children. . . . Other methods of instruction probably will not do much good, if you don't teach them by a good example. Don't think your children will mind the good rules you give them if you act contrary to those rules yourselves. . . . If your counsels are good, and your examples evil, your children will be more like to be hurt by the latter, than benefited by the former.[2]

Note: I do not mean our exemplary life is an iron-clad assurance of our children's imitation of us. But there is a high possibility for our children to be influenced by us when we seek to be a model of the standards God had given to us. And despite living a life worth imitating by our children, if our children yet turn their back on God and on us, in that case we need not condemn ourselves but prayerfully commit them to God to lead them to repentance.

Notes:

[1] Cited by H. Norman Wright, *A Dad-Shaped Hole in My Heart* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 56 [2] Cited by Kent and Barbara Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 61

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S. Parents, Do You Honor Your Parents?

Parents, Do You Honor Your Parents?

Last Saturday, i.e. on 13th March, a seminar was held on “Healthy Family Dynamics”, addressing especially on parenting. Although being in an embryonic stage in the field of parenting, the Lord has blessed me with the gracious privilege to speak on this topic. After uncle Joy David and sister Hazel delivered their lecture, encouraging the participants on healthy parenting, I was left with only few minutes to share my message. Considering the short time I had, I gave up the message I had prepared and was inspired in my heart to speak to parents on honoring their parents. In my extensive study on parenting, I have observed that this aspect is mostly unaddressed by many.

One of the instructions we find in Ten Commandments is to “honor your father and mother” (Exodus 20:12). This is also cited by Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother—which is the first commandment with a promise—that all may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” (Ephesians 6:1-3)

We often suppose this commandment applies only to little children, teenagers and unmarried young adults. However, this commandment is as important to parents as it is to children. Parents have parents too. We are still children to our parents even after becoming parents. Having children of our own doesn’t obliterate us from being children to our own parents. Mind you, we do not retire from honoring our parents once we have children. No matter what our age and stage, we ought to honor our parents in the following aspects: a) Speak with respect: In our prospering age in technology, there runs one prospering tendency towards parents, and that is disrespect. As people are growing and aging, respect towards parents is also declining. I seldom witness parents speaking to their parents with respect, and much worse, the way they speak to their parents before their children leaves a pathetic example.

We people may earn more than our parents, get more education than our parents, thrive more than our parents, but remember—they are still our parents, those who gave us birth, and we need to honor them. Dishonoring them is to dishonor God, the Father of all creation. The Lord has convicted me of my own sin when I used to speak with disrespect to my mother. I have learned in the Lord the value and necessity of speaking to my parent with respect.

Even when our parents commit mistakes, it is our responsibility to correct them with respect, not to discipline them like children.

Besides, I cannot see my parents being disrespected by others and would offer a word of correction to treat them with respect. Honoring parents includes respecting them and protecting their respect.

Well, how do we speak to our parents? Do we converse with them with respect? Are we polite in our talk with them? Do we yell, sound harsh, and behave inappropriately with them? Do our

children learn from us the right manner about how to speak to parents? How unfair it is for parents to expect from their children to treat them with respect while they themselves behave disrespectfully with their parents! b) Stay in touch: In our transition from dependency to independence, particularly after marriage and bearing children, we are not free from the obligation of honoring our parents. The fact that “a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife” (Genesis 2:24) doesn’t mean abandoning them. It reveals the transition of that close attachment from parents to wife. Although his/her own family becomes priority, children (adult parents) must forever be grateful to their parents, stay in touch with them and care for them as they age. No matter where we are and what we do, staying in touch with our parents and inquiring and caring for their well-being is an important aspect in honoring our parents. In our busy world with too many activities, parents are often ignored and are left alone without proper attention. Loneliness is one of the toughest times aging parents undergo. They are not just disrespected but also are neglected. When I go out of station on a ministry trip, I make sure to daily call my children and speak to them. My heart yearns to hear their voice, as they call me with excitement “Papa”. One day I was convicted in my heart about how much my mother longs to hear me when she doesn’t see me for a while (my papa passed away in 2003). Shouldn’t I call her and speak to her too? What a joy she gets when hearing my voice! The way we long for our children should be a reminder to us about our parents yearning for us. Are we honoring our parents by staying in touch with them? Do we visit them occasionally and spend time with them? Do we call them frequently and find about their well-being? What example are we setting to our children about caring for the emotional well-being of parents? Neglect our parents and we will have our children grow by neglecting us. c) Support: To the tradition-centered people of His day, Jesus rebuked them for withdrawing material support from their needy parents and justified their sin by offering gift (Corban) to the temple. They nullified the word of God for the sake of tradition (Matthew 15:3-6). In His rebuke to them, Jesus implied that honoring parents include supporting them physically.

If parents are not in a position to support themselves, it is the responsibility of children to contribute in helping them. Doing so is not a burden but a blessing. God is pleased with such honor. Of course, we may have our own pressures and responsibilities, yet we should make every effort possible to help our parents – after all, haven’t they took pain to bring us up in this world?

It breaks my heart to see some parents being abandoned by their children. After squeezing all that their parents have earned and possessed, they are thrown away by children who are morons. They are left to live by themselves in their old age. They suffer without material help while their children enjoy living with their own family. God will judge such self-centered children. Let us not neglect to carry the burden of our parents who carried us in their arms and our burdens on their shoulders.

Finally, may I let you know that how we honor our parents is how our children are going to honor us. The way children learn to treat us is by their observation of how we treat our parents. Remember, our children are constantly watching us—our words and our deeds. What we are to our parents is what our children are going to become for us. Would we be proud to have our children become like us in honoring parents? Is our life worth imitating by our children in obeying the command of God, “Honor your father and mother”?

Father in heaven, forgive us our sin of dishonoring parents. Have mercy on us and transform us to honor our father and mother. May our children learn from us about what it is to honor parents. In honoring our parents may we realize that we honor You and glorify your Holy Name. In Jesus Name. Amen.

(The seminar really did go well. People were convicted and touched by the Spirit of God. Some have come and shared how the message was a blessing to their hearts. Soli Deo Gloria!)

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below (or) write to E-mail: friendsofchrist@gmail.com

S. Prince of the Poor vs Preachers of Prosperity

Prince of the Poor vs Preachers of Prosperity

One of the fascinating and thriving teachings in the contemporary Christendom, towards which multitudes are drawn, is “prosperity.” Never before in the history of the church has there been a greater emphasis on this topic as it is in the present age. There are many prosperity preachers emerging in our time, most of them found on television. Regretfully, many are excitedly receiving this teaching without careful examination.

Preachers of Prosperity Basically, there are two piteous elements found in prosperity teaching: a) One of the famous clichés of prosperity is this – sow a seed (money). Prosperity teachers motivate people to sow a seed (money), thereby reaping a great harvest (material blessings) from the Lord. Even if someone doesn’t have sufficient money or living in debts, they can still sow a seed of faith (whatever little money they have) and reap abundant financial prosperity. Obviously, there is an immense emphasis on giving in their teachings. Of course, the Holy Bible too teaches a lot about generous giving. But what do the promoters of prosperity teach about where to give money? The focus is on giving to them. When they teach on sowing your offering, the prime focus is to draw your attention toward themselves. They generally link financial prosperity to giving to their ministries. The multiplication of finances is dependent upon your pledge to bless them with your offerings. And to convince people, they widely quote the Holy Scriptures, often distorting its intended meaning.

Now, I am not trying to say that it is wrong to present ministry needs with a genuine heart and let people to think and pray about giving cheerfully. However, to pressurize people through constant fund-raising appeals, giving utmost focus in messages on financial giving by people (in order to receive generously), and to teach people’s prosperity being dependent on their financial pledge to “our” ministries—this is something which reflects self-centered ministry, not God-centered service. b) Another element of prosperity teaching is promising earthly riches. Its proponents claim that God wants every believer to become rich (but this is connected to your giving to them). According to them, whosoever is not living a wealthy life is out of God’s intended will for them. They assert in their teachings that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the “sowing of seeds” through the loyal payments of tithes and offerings.

Prince of the Poor

Well, let us compare the teachings of prosperity preachers with what our Prince of the poor, Lord Jesus Christ, taught and emphasized: a) If there is any topic that Jesus Christ discussed a lot in the gospels – it is on money. It is said that it was his second most addressed topic, second only to the Kingdom of God/heaven. But when it came to giving, where did He emphasize to give? When the rich young man confidently said he had been obeying the commandments of God from his boyhood, what did Jesus tell him? Did He not say to him, “Go, sell everything you have and give to

the poor...then come and follow me?" (Mark 10:21) Did He exhort, "Go, sell what you have and give that money to me; sow in my ministry."

Furthermore, when teaching about storing eternal riches, He told His disciples, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys" (Luke 12:33). What about the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), not to mention the division of the Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25:31-46)? In these parables, did not Jesus teach about the necessity to help the needy?

Unlike the preachers of prosperity, Jesus Christ was the Prince of poor. Although He taught on generous giving, the focus of giving was directed towards helping the needy. He did not live a prosperous and luxurious life by extracting money from people in the name of 'sow and reap'. He did not attempt to thrive on the offerings of His followers. He lived for the best of others, offering Himself as a servant of all. O, how I wish today's prosperity teachers to reflect on this aspect of Christ-likeness! b) Secondly, Jesus did teach on gaining treasure, but He promised heavenly treasure for all who are generous. To the rich young man, Jesus said, ""Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Mark 10:21). Again, He said to the disciples, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys" (Luke 12:33). Jesus guaranteed eternal treasure, not earthly prosperity for all. He did not teach "sow and reap" as a means for gaining more and more material prosperity on earth.

True, I believe, without any doubt, God abundantly prospers certain people materially in order to be a blessing to others. There is no denying of the fact that the Lord will provide all of our needs (not wants) according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. I admit fully that we are required to pray to our Heavenly Father for our daily bread (essential needs of life). I even declare strongly that God desires everyone to prosper spiritually so that we would be conformed to the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ. But when it is said that material prosperity is God's will and purpose for everyone and that financial prosperity is dependent on giving to these prosperity teachers, I assert that it violates the sacred teachings of the Holy Scripture. As we are living in these last days, we are warned from the Scriptures that there will be enormous teachings that are false and unsound (2 Timothy 4:3-4; 1 Timothy 4:1-2). We are strongly exhorted to test everything (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and should not be quick to believe anything (Proverbs 14:15).

Therefore, I encourage the believers to carefully examine the teachings of today's preachers with a discerning heart, just like the Bereans who "received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). If the teachings of Paul were examined and the Bereans were commended for doing so, how much wise we need to be and scrutinize the teachings of numerous modern day preachers and teachers, who are unlike the Prince of poor!

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Radical

Radical

Last month, a wonderful brother in the Lord gifted me a book *Radical* by David Platt. It is one of the few books in my life that I read in its entirety with great earnestness, even planning to read again. As I read through the pages, I was deeply convicted and challenged to live a different life as a disciple of Christ Jesus. O, how I wished in my heart to buy as many copies of this book and give to as many Christians as possible, so that they would read and learn to live a crucified Christian life in this self-indulgent world!

Well, when we look at the contemporary Christianity, don't you suppose many of us who claim to be disciples of Christ seem to live a self-elevated rather than self-denial life, comfort zone rather than crucified life, earthly-minded rather than heavenly-focused life, world-like rather than Christ-like life and religious rather than radical Christian life? The aim of many who claim to believe in Christ appears to be this—earn a nice educational degree, find a great job or business, get married, have children and settle on earth with family by acquiring material things and possessions and dream to live with all the comforts of life. And to help us fulfill our ambitions, we seek God as if He exists to serve us as our guardian.

Besides, because of what Christ had done on the cross and the eternal life He earned for us, we think of doing little favors to God by going to church once in a week, give little time for prayer and study of God's word, donate small amount of money to church and occasionally worship Him for the blessings He has bestowed upon us. Is this what Christian life is all about?

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, makes it quite obvious—"And He [Christ] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again" [2 Corinthians 5:15].

Honestly, do you suppose many of us are living for Christ? Are we studying, working and living our life on earth for Christ and for His kingdom? If we think we are, then, are we passionate to know Christ more and more? Do we hunger and thirst for His holiness and love? Do we long for Christ's second coming? Are we living our brief earthly life in light of eternity?

Further, are we burdened to spread the gospel of our Lord Jesus? Are we compassionate towards poor and needy? Are we concerned for God's revival in the churches? Do we possess the consuming desire to spread the glory of God among all nations? Are we living a sacrificial life, giving up our comforts in order to bless others? Are our prayers marked with this cry, "Your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"?

I am afraid we lack the above qualities, not in iota but in tons. O, how much joy we miss in living a life for ourselves rather than for Christ and for the glory of God! Therefore, shall we ask God, believingly and persistently, to bring revival in our lives, so that we would live a Christ-centered and kingdom-minded life on earth and impact the lives around us for God's glory?

Let me leave you with this following excerpt from the last paragraph of the book Radical:

You and I have an average of about seventy or eighty years on this earth. During these years we are bombarded with the temporary. Make money. Get stuff. Be comfortable. Live well. Have fun. In the middle of it all, we get blinded to the eternal. But it's there. You and I stand on the porch of eternity. Both of us will soon stand before God to give an account for our stewardship of the time, the resources, the gifts, and ultimately the gospel he has entrusted to us. When that day comes, we are convinced we will not wish we had given more of ourselves to living the American Dream. We will not wish we had made more money, acquired more stuff, lived more comfortably, taken more vacations, watched more television, pursued greater retirement, or been more successful in the eyes of this world. Instead we will wish we had given more of ourselves to living for the day when every nation, tribe, people, and language will bow around the throne and sing the praises of the Savior who delights in radical obedience and the God who deserves eternal worship. Are you ready to live for that dream? Let's not waver any longer.

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Recitation from Memory of the Book of James

Recitation from Memory of the Book of James

One of the significant disciplines I have put on my life, by God's grace, is memorizing Scriptures. Last year, I was challenged to see John Piper reciting the entire book of Philippians. I thought, "If Piper could do as an old man, why can't I inculcate this discipline as a young man."

So, for the first time in my life, I have seen its importance and committed myself to memorizing the Scriptures. I am amazed at how little things, like memorizing one verse a day or few verses in a week, would make a great difference. Within a year, I memorized a couple of chapters from the Bible without forgetting any of them [memorizing without forgetting is an art that can be learned].

One of my greatest weaknesses is forgetfulness. However, memorizing Scriptures is not an impossible task for slow learners like me. I have learned that memorizing Scriptures is not a talent or a gift; it is a discipline. Anyone sane in his mind can memorize the Scriptures and affirm with the Psalmist, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalms 119:11). The following video is the recitation from memory of the book of James (NIV). This was delivered at Church at Gachibowli's camp. I hope this would be an encouragement to the viewers to memorize the Scriptures.

Note: It is no great thing to just memorize the Scriptures. Memorization of Scriptures should be done with a heart to obey God's word. We should treasure God's word within us so that we can measure our lives constantly by it.

It is our desire to help people memorize the Scriptures and enjoy its benefits. We do one-day seminar on this. We share about the exhortations from Scriptures to treasure God's word in heart, the excuses people give for not memorizing Scriptures, the cautions for memorizing Scriptures without obedience, the historical examples of those who memorized Scriptures, the benefits of memorizing Scriptures and finally, how to practice memorizing the Scriptures without forgetting, not just individual verses but also chapters and books. You may stay in touch to update you about our next seminar on Treasuring God's Word in Heart.

"I am convinced that one of the greatest things we can do is to memorize Scripture."

— Billy Graham

"This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That's where you need it! How does it get in your mouth? Memorization."

— Dallas Willard

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S. Resolutions in Regard to Money

Resolutions in Regard to Money

Money—who doesn't want it? Both the good and the bad want it—the former out of need and the latter out of greed. As needful and useful money is, I have learned, it is also a dangerous asset. Many Christian leaders have wrecked their reputation and ministry because of money. Thus, if there is any area wherein we have to build some strong principles, I suppose, it should be in the area of money.

I have been in Christian ministry for twelve years. I have committed so many blunders and learned so many lessons that eventually led me to make some wise resolutions in the Lord, particularly pertaining to finance.

There is a reason why I want to share these resolutions—it may encourage others to be careful in the area of money matters, bringing glory to God. Also, sharing this puts me in accountability to all the readers regarding my commitment [if I go astray in my resolutions, please feel free to correct me]. Anything beyond this, may the Lord give me the grace to overcome all the temptations of the evil one!

Before I share these, I want to mention few points: i. I didn't make these resolutions on New Years. I believe, true change does not wait for a specific date or a moment. You change right at the moment when you get a personal conviction. Also, I didn't make all these resolutions at once; these were made as I keep growing in the Lord. ii. Just because I am strong in one area does not mean that I am strong in all the areas of life. There are worse things that I struggle with in my life and by God's grace I have to change more and become a better person. iii. All the good resolutions and change that happens in my life is solely due to God's gracious work within me. There is nothing great about me. Left to myself, I am a worst beast. Glory be to God who works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. (Php 2:13) Here are my three resolutions in regard to money which I strive by God's grace to live accordingly:

Resolution 1 As I am involved in Christian ministry, one major resolution I have made in my life is this—I should not make my personal or family needs known to any, not even indirectly through prayer requests. I resolved not to ask anyone but to pray and seek the Lord to meet my needs. And I testify that my Father in heaven has been faithful to meet all my needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. As God meets my needs, I have learned to seek His face to give me the grace to use money wisely and seek to live a simple lifestyle.

Now this doesn't mean I live by faith. I don't think my faith is so great. But I can say boldly that I live only by the grace of God. It is one thing not to ask anyone and another thing not to expect anything from any. May the Lord enable me to completely conquer the latter temptation too!

Further, I resolved that if there is no providence for a prolonged time, I would rather take up a job and work to earn to support my family than ask others for money. I will assume this is how the Lord

wants me to serve Him, working in the marketplace and earning my living. But so far the Lord has given me the grace to be active in extensive [full-time] ministry and may He continue to guide me to finish the task He has for me.

Yet when it comes to meet the dire needs of other people, I don't hesitate to ask those who trust me to help others.

Resolution 2

Coming to ministry needs, I have resolved not to publicize them. Although the ministry that I do is good and the needs may be reasonable, I have found that it is an unhealthy habit to make public appeals for money. Because of this unhealthy practice, there is more disgrace coming to God's name and ministry than glory.

However, if anyone has given the freedom to share the ministry needs with them or personally interested to know the specific needs of ministry in order to make a contribution, I think it is fine to share with them.

Moreover, I have resolved to do only that which the Lord gives me the grace to do and not take up too many things, thereby coming under financial pressure and helplessly beg others to support the ministerial activities. By God's grace, let us do God's work in God's way because that alone brings glory to God.

Resolution 3 The Holy Bible warns, "The love of money [not money itself] is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). I have learned that one way to overcome this love for money is to give away money. The antidote for greed is generosity.

Richard J. Foster suggests, "If money has a grip on your heart, give some away and feel the inner release." The English writer, Thomas Browne (1605-1682), exhorted, "Be charitable before wealth makes you covetous." John Wesley (1703-1791) said, "Money never stays with me. It would burn me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible, lest it should find its way into my heart."

Therefore, from the providence of God to me, by God's grace, I have resolved to give away more than twenty percent of the money every month. I don't do this because I have plenty. To be frank, generally every month begins with zero balance in my account. Despite all the challenges, God is faithful to provide me my daily bread and it is a delight to share it with others too.

I don't believe the New Testament teaches the Old Testament tithing system. In fact, it teaches—generous giving (2 Corinthians 9:6). And I don't think that giving away more than twenty percent is generous giving. As God gives me grace, I would love to give away not less than forty or fifty percent for His glory and I think that is generous giving.

It is amazing how God transforms people. Before Christ, I was robbing money from people and now He is changing me to give away money to people. He is able to transform a thief into a philanthropist:-) And I have learned to give not with an intention to receive more [sowing and reaping business] but with an attitude of gratitude to God's faithfulness in my life.

Soli Deo Gloria!

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Rewards of Suffering

Rewards of Suffering The other day, my dear friend Kamal and I were traveling back home after having our ministry meeting. As we were conversing on our way, he made an insightful comment. When we go through suffering, we generally tend to comfort ourselves and others by reviving the focus on the reward that we would be receiving in heaven. True, we do receive a great reward on the Last Day when we endure trials, for it is written, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12). But then, why don't we also realize the rewards that we get here on earth because of afflictions? Kamal further talked about the blessings that we receive as a result of suffering in this world. What could be those rewards? As I was reflecting on our conversation, the following Scriptures come into mind.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. (Romans 5:3)

As the Holy Scripture reveals, we learn patience under pressure and get maturity under adversity. There are no shortcuts or smooth paths to attain these virtues. The plain truth is - without going through affliction, we cannot attain perfection (maturity). Our character is shaped under crisis. So, aren't patience and maturity, which are developed as a result of suffering, a great blessing in our lives? Should we not rejoice, as Paul says in Romans 5:3 and even James in James 1:2, for what suffering produces in our lives? Isn't this a great reward on earth?

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Significance of Having Family Meals Together

Significance of Having Family Meals Together In our busy and fast paced culture, finding time for family togetherness, particularly for children, has become a great challenge. One of the best ways I have discovered in spending time with our children is at the dining table. Research shows that the presence of parents is very beneficial at four key times of the day—early morning, after school, dinnertime, and bedtime.[1] As the day begins with the members of the family scattering to various activities of the day—children to study and parents to work—the supper time provides the best opportunity for the family to gather together for meaningful fellowship. It is a sad witness that families having meals together is not the norm of our day. Even if they have meals together occasionally, that would be in front of the television. Our generation seems to be valuing only eating, not fellowship.

Benefits of Eating Together The advantages of spending meal times together as a family cannot be overemphasized. In November 2004, CBS News cited a study showing that children who ate regular meals with their parents were less likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, take drugs, get depressed, or commit suicide.[2] The access to parents that the family meal gives children has been shown to reduce stress and to improve the emotional and therefore the physical well-being of children.[3] In another study of eighty-six families, half of whom included asthmatic children, researchers found that families who used family routines, specifically mealtimes together, had lower levels of anxiety, which correlated with fewer school absences, fewer hospitalizations, and fewer medicinal interventions.[4] Do you realize how important it is for your family to have meals together? This does two things: a) It brings all the family members together and b) It paves way for fellowship and sharing, strengthening the family bond.

We need to know that the purpose of eating together is not just eating; it is talking to each other, particularly about things that matters for eternity. [I have learned that no matter what we talk, if we don't teach our children to revere God and to live according to His will revealed in the Holy Bible, all our talking and spending time with them is in vain for the eternal welfare of their soul.] When we study the Holy Scripture, we observe that dining table was a place where Christ Jesus had had his wonderful ministry. What did Christ do when He had mealtimes with Lazarus, Mary and Martha (John 12:2 ff), Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36 ff), a Pharisee (Luke 11:37 ff), a prominent Pharisee (Luke 14:1 ff), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2 ff) and with the twelve on Passover night (Luke 22:14 ff)? He had meaningful conversations, imparting to them the wisdom from above, teaching great truths about the kingdom of God and sharing His life with them. I have found dining table to be a great pulpit to be used in impacting lives for the glory of God.

Eat Together and Stay Knit Together

Speaking about my upbringing, it was not the discipline of our family to eat meals together. And even if we had at times, my father made it a strict rule not to speak while eating. He considered it as an improper manner and harbored a myth that it hinders the digestion of food. As you can well guess, I carried this pattern of not eating meals together in my family too. When I was hungry, I

was known for eating without waiting for anyone. I also coined this phrase, “When it comes to eating, time and Stephen wait for none.” For years I didn’t realize the importance of having family meals.

However, though late, I have learned how important it is to eat with my wife and children, having a time of sharing with them. While there are exceptions, I have resolved not to miss family fellowship meal, for I have realized that just as the family that prays together stays together, so is the family that eats together knits together. I found it to be a great joy to listen, talk and teach my children during our family meals. I am sure my children would carry this sacred habit when they grow up and have their own family.

Other Options for Busy Families

I understand that having family meals together may be found quite difficult by some. They may have such working shifts which may not allow them to be with their families during supper. To some, the boss may require more time from them and often leave them late to home. The usual traffic jams at the evening is another hindrance not to reach home on time. In such situations, the following are some suggestions which may be helpful:

In your absence during supper time, your spouse can still spend time with the children and carry on the healthy habit of eating together. Two are better than one but when two are not available together, one is better than none.

If having supper together is not possible during the week, how about having it at least in the weekend, including holidays?

Something is better than nothing, right? Although it is a hurry time, having a planned breakfast together as a family is a good idea. “Relaxation, communication and a measure of beauty and pleasure should be part of even the shortest of meal breaks,” said Edith Scaeffler.[5]

Tips for Meaningful Family Meals

I have mentioned how mealtime is a good opportunity to teach and train children in the knowledge of God’s word. Also, they learn appropriate behavior, disclose their minds and improve communication skills. How pleasant it would be in your family when you have discussions and sharing during meals together with your children! But how can we have fruitful mealtime conversation? Here are some tips, offered by Kent and Barbara Hughes, to help your children learn how to participate in conversation with both family and guests.

Listen. When you are at the table, be fully there. You can’t contribute to a conversation you haven’t been listening to.

Learn to ask questions. Don’t wait for someone to direct the conversation toward you.

Don’t talk while chewing.

Has a family member had a bad day? Give a word of encouragement.

Don’t “hold court” or hog the conversation. (i.e. don’t dominate the conversation, thereby not letting other members to talk)

Draw out the quiet person.

If conversation is lagging, bring up a new topic.

Don't interrupt.

Thank the cook![6]

Recipe for Better Mealtimes

I ought to tell you that having family meals together requires discipline. Without proper planning and commitment this is not going to work. Moreover, to avoid supper time to become either a boring or tedious thing, it is helpful to have proper boundaries, so that having meals together would be an interesting family activity to which all members would look forward to participate every day. The following is a recipe for better mealtimes:

Plan ahead. While some take the responsibility in cooking the food, others should assist in setting up the dinner table and cleaning thereafter.

Insist on prompt attendants when called. It is good to have a fixed time for supper. Let everyone arrange their schedule in a way that they would be present during the dinner time. Don't allow a come-when-you-feel-like-it habit.

Turn off the TV. This is a great distraction and stealer of family togetherness.

Turn off the radio/CD player. The point is to listen to each other, not to songs or to music. An instrumental music, with low volume, is not a bad idea though.

Start with a table prayer, genuinely expressed. Call on a different family member to lead each time. But keep it short.

Keep the atmosphere positive by encouraging pleasant talk. Don't allow "attacks" on the food quality or one another. Do not entertain negative, sarcastic and complaining talk.

Don't fight over quantities, especially with preschoolers, who often go on feast-or-famine jags. Hunger will prevail over time. However, if for social reasons you want to require that children "try some of everything on the table," fine.

Involve everyone in conversation. Begin your conversation about the affairs of the day and see how all can be edified from the wisdom of God's word.[7]

Switch off your mobile phone. If you expect an important call, put it on silent mode so that you can call back later after the mealtime.

Don't encourage neighborhood children to join regularly during family meals. Children often get distracted in the presence of other children. So make best use of mealtime to foster your relationship with your children, listen to them, train and teach them. O, sure, make it a fun time too.

Therefore, if you don't have the habit of having family meals together, why can't you commit yourself to start practicing this good habit right away, both for the welfare of your spouse and of your children, not to mention of your own soul?

End Notes:

1. Cited by Dr. James Dobson, *Brining up Boys* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2001), 91.
2. Cited by Ray Comfort, *How to Bring Your Children to Christ* (Bartlesville: Genesis Publishing Group, 2005), 42
3. Jenn Berman and Donna Corwin, *The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy, Confident Kids* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2007), 134
4. *Ibid.*, 135 5. Edith Schaeffer, *Hidden Art* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1971), 123 6. Kent and Barbara Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 130
7. These advices have been adapted from Dean Merrill, [ed] Mike Yorkey, *The Christian Dad's Answer Book* (Colorado Springs, Co: Faith Parenting, 1997), 121, with few additions of mine.

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S. Spiritual Maturity

Spiritual Maturity “And now I will show you the most excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

Ever since I became a Christian, I often heard five important steps on how to grow in spiritual life. It has been emphasized that this is how one can excel towards spiritual maturity. The five steps are – prayer, bible study, church fellowship, tithing and witnessing. However, it was later I happened to learn that one could practice all these things and yet live an unspiritual and immature life. As important as they are, nowhere in the Holy Scripture do we find that these are the signs of spiritual maturity. What then is the sign of spiritual maturity? The Important Ingredient

These days the Lord has been drawing my attention to ponder over the most significant ingredient of my life and ministry. It is something without which I cannot become spiritually mature. He has shown me how greatly I am missing and neglecting it in my life. I was convicted that my Christian life is shallow, my spirituality is a sham, my preaching is dead and my ministry is unproductive without excelling in this exceptional virtue. Indeed, I was enlightened to the fact that I cannot be a true disciple of Christ Jesus without this most important thing. What is it?

What I am sharing is not something new or mysterious. Almost everyone knows its importance and yet fail to live accordingly. It is something that is spoken and written about much but practiced and exemplified least. Now then, what do you think Paul would have answered if he were asked, “How to become a person of spiritual maturity?” He wrote to the Corinthians, “And now I will show you the most excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31). What is the most excellent way to excel in spiritual life? It is LOVE. The Lord spoke to my heart that without love I can neither live a Christian life nor can I serve Him in His way. I have learned that I must not only be emphatic on God’s love towards me but also on my love toward others. I am reminded of the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 which describes the most excellent way of towards spiritual maturity. It is written:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

It is truly astounding to read what Paul wrote in the above Scripture, revealing what true spirituality is all about. I would certainly be amazed to hear someone speaking in the languages of men and angels. I would be moved in my spirit to hear someone prophesying. I would be fascinated to know a person who is full of knowledge and insights. I would be awed to see someone having faith that can move mountains. I would be greatly impressed to witness someone giving all he possesses to the poor. Well, these are spectacular deeds and any normal person would ascribe them to spiritual maturity. Yet Paul says that all these things are nothing and worthless without love.

I have observed that it is terrifyingly possible to perform amazing miracles, to prophesy accurately, pray fervently, preach and teach effectively, endure suffering, to work diligently, have strong faith,

do good works and yet lack love, which writes me off still as spiritually immature. I may even possess great theological and practical knowledge but what does it profit if I do not have love. It is written, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Corinthians 8:1). When the Holy Bible exhorts to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), how easy it is to passionately speak the truth, counter false teachings, answer tough questions and get puffed up without any love and concern for people! An illiterate and unskillful person with love is much better than the most literate and genius without love. How deceptive it is to have a great reputation of being spiritually mature before others while being spiritually barren before God! A person who has the fruit of love is well pleased before God than the most gifted person. The impact of a loving person is much more fruitful and unforgettable than an ingenious person.

Description of Love

I have witnessed many times how quickly I can be deceived presuming myself to be loving towards others while neglecting to manifest its characteristics in my life. Having a good feeling toward others does not necessarily mean I am a loving person. Good works can also be done out of duty or pity than with genuine love. Disciplining others can be practiced out of fretful spirit than with a loving heart.

Moreover, I can even be a principle-centered and ethical person without any love. Anyone who claims to be loving must examine himself against the description presented by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. This is the criterion by which spiritual maturity is measured.

Love is patient, i.e. it endures the weaknesses and differences of others.

Love is kind, i.e. it is tender and compassionate toward others.

Love does not envy, i.e. it is not jealous if someone is better but rejoices at the success of others.

Love does not boast, i.e. it is not pompous in its talk or boastful to give an appearance of 'greatness' but rather seeks to walk in humility.

Love is not proud, i.e. it does not consider itself better than others but rather honors others above itself.

Love is not rude, i.e. it is not harsh in its attitude, speech and behavior with others but rather gentle and gracious. It is mild and not wild. It is hard but not harsh, tough but not rough, strong but does no wrong.

Love is not self-seeking, i.e. it does not seek its own benefit alone in everything but rather concerns itself with being a blessing to others.

Love is not easily angered, i.e. it is not hot-tempered, short-tempered or reacts suddenly in an unpleasant manner but rather responds with patience.

Love keeps no record of wrongs, i.e. it does not harbor bitterness by reflecting on the hurt given by others but rather forgives them.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth, i.e. it does not compromise with sin and evil ways but always encourages, corrects and leads others in the path of truth.

Love always protects, i.e. it covers the sins of others and does not give itself to wayward gossip.

Love always trusts, i.e. it does not subject itself to foolish assumptions and false witnesses but rather trusts that which is true about others.

Love always hopes, i.e. it is not critical about others but rather hopes the best for them.

Love always perseveres, i.e. bears up the injuries of the heart caused by others without any retaliation.

Love never fails, i.e. it neither gives up nor does it end.

Honestly admitting, it is humanly impossible to live according to the above traits of love, yet with God nothing is impossible. He is able to conform us into His image if we allow Him to transform our lives. Paul exhorted, above all else, to eagerly desire this love in our lives (1 Corinthians 12:31). Am I earnestly seeking to be filled with God's love in my life? Am I desperately praying and making every effort to love others? Do I love others as much as I expect them to love me? Am I confessing my sin of unloving heart? "O Lord teach me to love others as you love me!"

Penetrating Truth As I contemplated on the splendor of love, I realized that love is not the priority of my life. I was passionate to do great things but not eager to love people. I was asking God to bless me, to fill me with His power and to use me mightily in His service but did not pray fervently to be filled with His love. I questioned myself, "What is my life and ministry if it is not built on love?" It is nothing and gains nothing. I would rather have love and have nothing than have everything and have not love.

I have keenly observed the difference between loving 'ministry' and loving 'people'. Now I am learning, even though I am far from living up to its perfection, that living a Christian life and doing ministry is just loving people and serving them. I don't want to do a 'great' ministry but a 'loving' ministry. Is this not what ministry is all about? Three times Jesus said to Peter, "If you truly love me then take care of my sheep" (John 20:15-17). In other words, "If you truly love me then love my people." How hypocritical it is to do ministry without having love for the people!

I stood in awe when I read few Scriptures that pierced my heart. I may claim to believe in Christ; I may appear as a prominent person and known well for my achievements; I may claim to be a child and a servant of God; I may preach and teach mightily with excellent knowledge; I may claim to know God; I may have all the theological degrees and possess astounding knowledge about the doctrines of the Holy Bible; I may claim to have great experience in the ministry - yet if I do not have love, the Holy Scripture reveals seven penetrating facts just in one epistle. a) If I do not love my brother and hate him, I am still in the darkness. It is written in 1 John 2:9-11 :

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. b) If I do not love my brother, my prayers are ineffective. It is written in 1 John 3:21-23 :

We have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son,

Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. c) If I do not love my brother, I am not a child of God. It is written in 1 John 3:10 : This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. d) If I do not love my brother, I am not born of God. It is written in 1 John 4:7 :

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. e) If I do not love my brother, I do not know God. It is written in 1 John 4:8 :

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. f) If I do not love my brother, I do not live in God and God in me. It is written in 1 John 4:16 :

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. g) If I hate my brother rather than love him, I remain in death and do not have eternal life. It is written in 1 John 3:14-15 :

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, let us stop hating and backbiting each other and start loving and help one another. Life is not about two perfect people walking together; it is about two imperfect people getting along together, encouraging, adjusting and helping each other on the way towards perfection. Paul warned the Galatians, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other" (Galatians 5:14-16).

Mark of Christ's Disciples

Well, I share this message with a broken heart. I know I cannot be a friend of Christ if I do not possess love. Jesus said, "You are my friends if you do what I command" (John 15:14). What is His command? It is written, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

I feel ashamed of my unloving life and am grateful to God for allowing me to see myself in His light so that I can become what He wants me to be. I may still fail many times in loving people but I trust in God's ability to make me a person filled with His love. We don't become a loving person overnight but blessed are those who hunger and thirst for love for they shall be completely filled and satisfied.

Jesus commanded His disciples in John 13:34-35, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, IF you love one another". The disciples of Christ Jesus are known not primarily by their appearance, knowledge, rituals, doctrines, preaching, skills and feats but by their LOVE for one another. Don't we feel that great lack of love between one another? No doubt, I suppose, even the world feels that lack of love between one another among the professed disciples of Christ.

All of us are familiar with John 3:16 but most of us are ignorant about 1 John 3:16, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." Wonderful! John 3:16 speaks to us that Christ laid His life for us and 1 John 3:16 exhorts us that we have to lay our lives for our brothers. The reason we are supposed to love our fellow brothers is because Christ loves us and laid His life for undeserving people like us. The major cause for us to fail in loving others is that we try to love them because of who they are rather than as a response to God's love for us. May we repent of our sin and learn to walk and grow in LOVE for each other. Life is worthless without Christ's love flowing in and through us.

"O Lord, have mercy on me and help me to know you and share about you by enabling me to walk in love!"

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S. Stewards and Consumerists

Stewards and Consumerists

Last night, I had the privilege of personally listening to mission-centered testimonies shared by a wonderful couple. The interesting thing is, this brother is neither a full-time Christian worker nor a pastor or a preacher, not even a bi-vocational worker leading a church. He, along with his wife, is a simple believer but devoted to God's mission. This young brother is working in a Muslim populated and prosperous country. He works for an automobile company and is living in this rich nation for a couple of years. Multitudes of people, including Christians, particularly from the Asian countries, leave their hometown and go to this country. Do you know why? To earn wealth, acquire material possessions, buy good property in their hometown and then return back to their native place at their convenient time to settle comfortably with their family. But this brother is quite different. He is not material-centered, earthly-minded and comfort-oriented. His passion is, as he works, he wants to support his family and get engaged in the spread of the kingdom of God. He seeks to win the lost. He is burdened to make disciples. He loves to build the body of Christ. And to do all these in a hostile nation, he is utterly dependent on God, has given himself to prayer and uses God given opportunities to share his faith and to make disciples. He does this out of personal burden in the Lord without support and motivation from any church or organization. As I listened to him and learned how God is using him to be a tremendous blessing to many, I saw how he is overflowing with the joy of God as he is engaged in God's mission. Despite holding a job which keeps him quite busy, he still takes time, particularly using his weekly off, to actively minister to people. How many I find trying to give excuses for not being active in ministry! But we learn from this brother - where there is passion, there is a way. Candidly speaking, I don't witness such passion to live for the glory of God even among many Christian leaders and full-time Christian workers.

Coming to this brother's wife, she is just a housewife. Unlike many housewives who enjoy cooking, television and shopping, she is more passionate to involve in God's mission. So, besides fulfilling her household chores, she spends more time in praying for the lost, does prayer walk and loves to use opportunities to share the gospel with neighbors and strangers. She is zealous to impact lives for Christ Jesus. As I listened to their testimonies, I am impressed to see how this grassroots Christian couple is burning for the Lord to carry on His mission and to accomplish His will on this earth. Their lives distinctly exemplify stewardship. Such people consider their lives as a gift from God and want to use all that they are and have for the glory of God and for the expansion of His kingdom. Although they earn money and enjoy every earthly blessing from God, their heart is predominantly set on God's kingdom and His righteousness, not on earthly kingdom and worldly amusements.

I take great delight and extract inspiration in watching such committed lives to the cause of Christ. However, I am also saddened to look at so many people who claim of being believers and followers of Christ Jesus, but as Paul said, they look out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ (Php 2:21). It seems many Christians are passionate to fulfill their own will and to build their

own kingdom, unlike Jesus who taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come and thy will be done.” They have given themselves over to consumerism Christianity, pursuing earthly prosperity and seeking to attain material things to live a comfortable life. Regretfully, in all their carnal pursuits and worldly passions, they seek God to richly bless them, as if God is existing to serve them to fulfill their every whim.

Moreover, to satisfy their conscience and to feel religious, they practice little spirituality [pray little, study little, worship little] and give little offering to church or ministry. But their lives are not evidently marked with a passion to follow Christ by denying self and carrying their cross, to spread the gospel of Christ, to make disciples, to help the needy & missions, and to build the flock of Christ which He bought by His own blood.

Paul, in writing to the believers at Rome, exhorts, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11). Don't you think many of our believers lack this godly zeal, spiritual fervor and passion to serve the Lord? The devil seemingly has become successful in making many of Christ's followers sluggish in spiritual disciplines and distracted from God's mission, but alert and zealous for worldly things. Is this not confirmed by looking at so many Christians whose lives are being enslaved by consumerism, materialism and hedonism? I am convinced there is a desperate need for revival, the great spiritual awakening, in our Christianity today.

I urge you, dear believers of Christ, to think about the wonderful couple I have shared and examine ourselves with these questions - How am I living my life for Christ? What am I doing for God's kingdom? Is my life impacting those around me? Am I am a good steward of God's blessings in my life? Am I Christ-centered, kingdom-minded, gospel-oriented, people-builder and self-disciplined in God's ways?

Let's commit our brief life on earth to live for the glory of God, walking with God by constant communion with Him and impacting lives around us by exemplifying God's standards, by sharing the gospel, by making disciples, by helping the needy and missions, by encouraging the weak believers and by praying for the lost and for revival in Christian community. Such is a life lived worthily for the glory of God as faithful stewards in contrast to wayward consumerists.

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S. Straight Talk to Men - Reflections from 12 Years of Marital Life

Straight Talk to Men – Reflections from 12 Years of Marital Life On October 7, 2010, my wife and I had celebrated 12th year of our wedding anniversary. I thank God for this institution of marriage, for it is one of the wonderful schools wherein we learn great and life-changing lessons. It is here that a man's character is exceedingly molded, learning patience and gentleness in the adventurous journey of life together. It is here that a man is educated to die to self. It is here that a man learns sacrifice and service.

Keeping Wives Happy

If I am asked, "What is that one lesson you have learned all these years?" I would say, "Men, if you want to have your world happy, keep your wives happy." I am most happy when I give my wife utmost happiness. In grieving her, I grieve myself the most. In hurting her, I hurt myself more. This is not to say I have to love my wife only to keep myself happy. That's sheer selfishness. I have a grand reason to do so: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Christlikeness is first manifested at home. Men, we cannot become like Christ by bypassing the command to dearly love our wives as Christ loved the church. And who doesn't possess great joy and happiness when lived in accordance with God's word!

I have seen—no matter how much I pray, read my Holy Bible, have fellowship with other saints, gain good reputation in society, achieve great things in life—if I don't faithfully fulfill my role in loving my wife, at the end of the day I come back to a place (home) where there is no peace. What a failure I am if I cannot love and lead my family well! Let me make this honest assertion – the responsibility about the wellness and peacefulness of a family is mostly dependent on a husband, for he is the head of the family, God's appointed leader.

Meeting Emotional Needs

What do I mean by "keeping wife happy"? Should I have to fulfill her every whim? Must I always remain a wife-pleaser? Should I be played like a puppet in her hands? Certainly not! Loving my wife and keeping her happy is not becoming a musical instrument under her control, sounding the way she wants me to; it is meeting her basic emotional needs as a responsible husband; it is doing everything that I can on my part to make her feel happy; it is fulfilling God-given responsibilities of a husband as I made a sincere commitment to be my wife's life-partner. So what is that I need to do to meet my wife's basic emotional needs? Knowing the needs and interests of wives is one of the greatest discoveries husbands can make. Trust me, it is a worthwhile research. I made some such discoveries, which I believe every wife expects from her husband, and that which makes her happy, consequently giving happiness to a husband.

Affectionate Behaviors

Here is the good news—it doesn't take great labor or great achievements to meet the emotional needs of my wife; it takes just little sensitivity, doing simple things in a loving way; it takes just

small investments but reap great benefits in family life.

More than anything, one thing that my wife expects from me, or any wife from her husband, is AFFECTION. It is something which she earnestly craves from her husband and feels frustrated when she doesn't get it. In my counseling of numerous families, I have observed this is one thing in which husbands majorly fail. They believe they are good and loving husbands, and they are in some way, but their actions are not very much evidential of affection. Remember, many problems in families can be avoided if husbands appropriately express their affection towards their wives. The following are some of the affectionate behaviors I have lately learned to express to my wife:

Tell her sincerely, as often as I can, "I love you."

A caring touch or hug.

Call her during the day to see how she is doing.

Kiss her as often as possible before she or I leave for work.

Call her if I am late home.

Let her know where I go when I leave home.

Bring her simple gifts once in a while to express my love for her, especially on non-special occasions.

Assure her with words and actions that, besides God, she is the most important person in my life.

Let her know all good things and bad things that happen to me.

Share the responsibilities of children's upbringing, without dumping all burdens on her.

Do not criticize her before others.

Don't miss the privileges of appreciating her.

Respect her views, without sarcasm, however differing from mine.

Gently correct her mistakes without exploding with anger.

When necessary, be firm but not harsh.

Make family decisions together.

Give her special attention and care when she falls sick.

Respect her parents.

Listen to her problems with undivided attention.

Encourage her during tough times.

Help her with washing dishes when she is tired.

As far it depends on me, keep the house clean.

Spend some time with her, having meaningful conversation, before going to bed.

As far as it is possible, have family supper together.

Take her out for dinner occasionally.

Walk closely when I go out with her.

Give her utmost pleasure when it comes to sex and not focus on just extracting pleasure from her.

Pray with her daily.

Do these things, I bet, the rewards would be incredible! To be honest with you, I am not a perfect husband, meticulously doing all the above things. I have miserably failed in many issues. However, I have learned to pray and take efforts to be a best husband possible. I hope I would become a better husband every year as we joyfully celebrate our wedding anniversaries with thankfulness to God's abounding grace in our lives. Glory be to the Creator of the heavens and the earth for this marvelous gift of marriage, my wife!

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below (or) write to E-mail: friendsofchrist@gmail.com

S. Stunning Evangelism

Stunning Evangelism

He was not an apostle. He didn't hold any high ecclesiastical office. He held an ordinary responsibility, just to serve food to the Hellenistic Jewish widows. Perhaps, in our modern terminology, we can call him "waiter." Yes, Philip's ministry can be called, "The Waiter's Ministry." He is an example in the history of Christianity about how God can use ordinary people to do extraordinary things. He went in the fullness of the Holy Spirit to Samaria and did an awesome ministry. Many came to the Lord. People got baptized. Amazing wonders and miracles took place.

Now, what is the secret of his astounding ministry? A life lived under the full control of the Holy Spirit.

During the peak of his successful ministry, one day Philip was told by an angel of the Lord, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." Later, the Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." He obeyed the Lord, leaving his successful ministry in Samaria, and eventually leads the Ethiopian eunuch to the Lord and baptized him (Acts 8:26-38). Hearing the voice of the Spirit resulted in winning a soul for the Lord. Such instances are also found in other parts of the book of Acts (Peter to Cornelius, Ananias to Paul (post-conversion) and Paul's call to Macedonia). The Lord not only commanded His disciples to go and preach the gospel to all nations, but He also at times led them specifically to individuals He prepared for the harvest.

Spirit-led Ministry

Brother Bakht Singh of the last century was a powerful instrument in the Lord's hand in leading thousands to Christ and in planting numerous churches in India and abroad. One late night, about one o'clock, he was extremely tired and wanted to throw himself on the bed. As he went to sleep, he heard the voice of the Spirit saying to him, "Rise and go out." He struggled to obey, for he was quite weary and sleepy. However, as the voice came to him again, he went out. Immediately, he found two young men walking in front of him. He called them and said he had something to tell them.

After sharing how the Lord had led him to them, when brother Bakht Singh shared from the Bible the message of transformation, one of the men said, "I know God has sent you for my sake. I was unhappy and have longed for a Bible. Could you give me a Bible?" He bought the Bible from Bakht Singh and received the Lord Jesus Christ.[1] There are numerous amazing accounts about how God led this ordinary man to do extraordinary ministry for His glory.

Stunning Evangelism

Baptist minister and evangelist Tony Campolo shares an intriguing incident he experienced. Let's hear in his own words:

Several years ago I was invited to speak at a small Pentecostal college located near Eastern College, where I teach. I love going to this little school because the people there seem to be so much in touch with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Before the chapel service, several of the faculty members took me into a side room to pray with me. I got down on my knees and the six of them put their hands on my head and prayed for me. Pentecostals seem to pray longer and with more dynamism than we Baptists do. These men prayed long, and the longer they prayed the more they leaned on my head. They prayed on and on and leaned harder and harder. One of them kept whispering, “Do you feel the Spirit? Do you feel the Spirit?” To tell the truth, I felt something right at the base of my neck, but I wasn’t sure it was the Spirit.

One of the faculty members prayed at length about a particular man named Charlie Stoltzfus. That kind of ticked me off, and I thought to myself, if you’re going to lean on my head, the least you can do is pray for me. He prayed on and on for this guy who was about to abandon his wife and three children. I can still hear him calling out, “Lord! Lord! Don’t let that man leave his wife and children! Send an angel to bring that man back to his family. Don’t let that family be destroyed! You know who I’m talking about, Lord...You know who I’m talking about...Charlie Stoltzfus. He lives down the road about a mile on the right-hand side in a silver house trailer!”

I thought to myself, with some degree of exasperation, God knows where he lives...what do you think God’s doing, sitting up there in heaven saying, “Give me that address again”?

Following the chapel talk, I got in my car and headed home. I was getting on the Pennsylvania turnpike when I saw a young man hitchhiking on the side of the road. I picked him up. (I know you’re not supposed to, but I’m a Baptist preacher and whenever I can get someone locked in to where I can preach to him, I do it.) As we pulled back onto the highway I introduced myself. I said, “Hi, my name’s Tony Campolo. What’s your name?”

He said, “My name’s Charlie Stoltzfus...”!

I didn’t say a word. I drove down the turnpike, got off at the next exit, turned around, and headed back. When I did that, he looked at me and said, “Hey, mister! Where are you taking me?!”

I said, “I’m taking you HOME!”

He said, “Why?” And I said, “Because you just left your wife and three children! RIGHT?”

He said, “RIGHT! RIGHT!”

He leaned against the passenger door the rest of the way, staring at me. I drove off the turnpike and onto a side road – straight to his silver house trailer. When I pulled into the drive, he looked at me with astonishment and said, “How did you know I lived here?”

I said, “God told me!”

Well, I believe that God did tell me. I think God may set up things like that, just for fun. I mean, if you’re God, you’re probably having a pretty sad time of it looking down on all the things that are going on in the world. I can just imagine God nudging Peter and saying, “Hey, Pete, Watch this!”

I told Charlie, “You get in that house trailer because I want to talk to you and I want to talk to your wife.”

He ran into that mobile home ahead of me. I don’t know what he said to his wife, but when I got in the house trailer her eyes were as wide as saucers. I sat them down and said, “I’m going to talk and you’re going to listen.”

Man, did they listen! And during the next hour I led both of them into a personal relationship with Jesus. Today that guy is a Pentecostal preacher down South. When the Spirit leads, there are all sorts of surprises in store for us. [2]

How wonderful and exciting it is to experience supernatural guidance from God in winning the lost for His Kingdom. I am not saying we must not preach the gospel unless we receive supernatural direction from the Holy Spirit. God may not always give us supernatural guidance in reaching the people with the gospel of Christ. However, as we keep on preaching the gospel, He may at times divert us to the people or to the places where He wants to reap a harvest. Are we willing to believe that God at times, according to His sovereign will, can lead us in a marvelous way to lead people to the knowledge of the truth? Are we seeking Him to make us quite sensitive to the Holy Spirit so that we would know how to win the lost souls? Evangelism will be adventurous and exciting when it is done in the Holy Spirit. When we move in the Spirit, lives are marvelously touched, even without our knowledge. I have seen a glimpse of it in my own life and how thrilling Spirit-led ministry is! Oh, may we long for Spirit-filled life and ministry!

Notes:

[1] T. E. Koshy, Bakht Singh of India: The Incredible Account of a Modern-Day Apostle (Colorado Springs, CA: Authentic Publishing, 2007), pg. 62 [2] Tony Campolo, Let Me Tell You a Story (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing Group, 2000), pg. 60

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Success in Evangelism

Success in Evangelism

One of the most demotivating factors in evangelism is to see lack of life-changing results through our preaching of the gospel. Many think that if we continue to preach the gospel and yet do not see people getting transformed, we are failures. We suppose, "I am useless and unproductive in God."

Some may even dishearteningly think that God has pushed them aside, using only His favorites to win the lost. And when we hear from those who share about how people are coming to Christ through their sharing of the gospel, we may get more disappointed and assume, "I am not gifted or fitted to proclaim the gospel."

Success in Evangelism

Well, we need to ask ourselves this question, "What is success in evangelism?" Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Observe, He didn't say, "Go into all the world and change the lives of all creation" or "Go into all the world and get everybody into my kingdom." We are simply commanded to preach the good news. And, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

Fact—we are responsible to preach the gospel; we are not responsible for the response of the people.

Success in evangelism is preaching the gospel of Christ Jesus, whether people believe in Christ or not. Conversion is God's business, not ours. Our business is to preach the gospel and God's business is to change lives.

Fact: Obedience to the proclamation of the gospel is what God requires from us, not saving the souls. Regarding salvation, says God, "Leave that to me."

It is written, "Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, he gave the right to become children of God--children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13-14). How plain it is—salvation is the glorious work of God out of which a person is born-again, not the work of man! It is, as Jesus said, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (John 3:6). The Holy Spirit is the one who gives spiritual birth.

Here is a word of caution—if we suppose of being failures for not seeing people believing the gospel we preach, then we are most likely to take credit for saving a person when he/she believes in Christ, when actually salvation is the result of God's work in man through man, not man's work in man.

Reward in Evangelism

Paul said, “Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (Acts 20:26-27). Paul was free from the innocent blood of all men, not because he saved all of them, but because he proclaimed to them the whole will of God, i.e. God’s full plan of salvation.

Fact—God holds us accountable, not for how many souls we have won into His kingdom, but to how many people we have preached the kingdom of God. When Paul gave his grand evangelistic sermon in Athens, many didn’t believe in the gospel he preached but just a few men (Acts 17:34). Was Paul a failure in Athens? Not at all! I just heard about a brother who is working in one of the most spiritually dark places in India. He is working for thirteen years and led only four souls to the Lord. Is he a failure? I don’t think so.

Fact—God rewards us, not for converting people, but for proclaiming the gospel of Christ to the unconverted.

Therefore, let us not lose heart, even if not a single soul is converted. Let us keep on preaching the gospel of Christ as we have opportunities. Who knows, we may just be sowing the seeds of the gospel but others may reap what we have sown! (John 4:37) Remember, “Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow” (1 Corinthians 3:7). Of course, in our evangelism, we should eagerly expect people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must fervently pray for their salvation. We need to strongly equip ourselves to effectively present the gospel. We should desperately seek the power of the Holy Spirit in witnessing to others. We need to live an exemplary Christian life. We ought not to remain passive or inefficient in evangelism.

However, we should fix this truth in our mind—we cannot change a single soul to take an inch of step towards eternal life. If anyone believes and is saved, it is only because of the convicting and enlightening work of the Holy Spirit, leading one to confess, “Jesus is Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Fact: All our methods, efforts and resources are only a means but they are never the source for converting people. God alone is the source of growth and salvation.

I remember reading Charles Spurgeon saying somewhat like this, “To convert a sinner into a saint is like converting a carnivorous lion into a vegetarian.” In other words, saving sinners is humanly an impossible task. But, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27).

Yes, preaching the gospel is important, for “how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14) But our responsibility, our success and our reward is in just preaching the gospel to people. And salvation is God’s work in the heart of a person and his/her faith in Christ Jesus. Let us, then, faithfully and diligently keep sowing the seeds of the gospel in the hearts of people and leave the results to God to accomplish His sovereign will.

Fact—God takes delight in those who preach the gospel, though people may detest what we preach to them.

Question

Let me leave you with a question to consider—Suppose Mr. A has preached the gospel to five hundred people and witnessed four hundred conversions. But when Mr. B has faithfully preached the gospel to five hundred people, not even four people have turned to the Lord. Who do you think is successful and who is a failure?

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S. Suicide in India

Suicide in India

Global

Over the last five decades, suicide has risen dramatically with alarming rate. According to the widely circulated daily newspaper, The Times of India—worldwide, suicide rates have increased by 60% in the past 50 years, mainly in the developing countries. Globally, one million people die from suicide every year -- a mortality rate of 16 per 100,000, or one death every 40 seconds. These figures do not include suicide attempts which are up to 20 times more frequent than completed suicide. Most suicides in the world occur in Asia, which is estimated to account for up to 60% of all suicides. On the occasion of World Suicide Prevention Day 2008, WHO says—China, India and Japan may account for 40% of all world suicides. [1]

According to WHO estimates for the year 2020 and based on current trends, approximately 1.53 million people will die from suicide, and 10-20 times more people will attempt suicide worldwide. This represents, on an average, one death every 20 seconds and one attempt every 1-2 seconds. [2]

India

India, the second most populous country, is known today as one of the fastest developing nations in the world. Along with the increase in economy, there is also increasing number of people who are dying from suicide every year. As per estimation of WHO's latest suicide rate, India along with China, holds the dubious distinction of having the highest suicide rates in the world. In India 98 out of every 100,000 people commit suicide annually. According to Union health ministry's estimates—as many as 1.2 lakh people end their lives every year in India by committing suicide. Besides that, more than four lakh people attempt to commit suicide. [3]

Suicide is said to be the third-leading cause of death in India.[4] Isn't it astonishing to know that a mortality rate of 1.2 lakh people committing suicide in India would mean more than 300 suicides per day, not less than 14 suicides per hour and one suicide in every five minutes? Moreover, isn't it heartbreaking to come to know more than four lakh people attempting to commit suicide in India would disclose about 1100 attempted suicides per day, about 46 attempted suicides per hour and one suicide attempt in every one minute and thirty seconds?

What we are hearing is just what we have come to know through news and reports, and there may be many more suicides, both committed and attempted, of which we aren't aware of because they haven't been reported or detected by the media and police. The reason for many suicide cases, which doesn't reach police and media, is to avoid the hassle of interrogation, embarrassment and social stigma. Another reason is:

Attempted suicide and suicide is illegal in the Indian penal code. The most families will not report about attempted suicides (Venkoba Rao 1983: 212). It is a problem that families very often cover

up suicides as accidents, because for fear of being punished by law. Therefore the estimated number of unknown cases must be very high.[5]

Such disturbing statistics within our nation calls for a serious response to the prevention of suicide. Unfortunately, despite the high rates of suicides occurring every year in India, it is reported that there is no special national policy for suicide prevention.[6] It is no wonder why much attention isn't given to the preventive aspects of suicide in India. Even the churches are unaware, untrained and unequipped to face this challenging task. Leading magazine, India Today, observed it right, "Unlike the West, counseling facilities in India are almost non-existent." [7] Let not this plea go unheeded, "The need of the hour is a robust counseling system equipped to pick up distress signals in people and help them out of their entrapments." [8]

Prayer Request: If God willing, it is my desire to start a HELPLINE for severely depressed and suicidal people. This would be a powerful tool to give eternal hope to those struggling for survival in this temporal world. Kindly pray for God's wisdom, providence and guidance in this matter.

Feel free to post your comments below or you may write to : friendsofchrist@gmail.com

Notes:

[1] "India, China have highest suicide rates in the world." The Times of India (11 October 2008). <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/IndiaChinahavehighestsuicideratesintheworld/rssarticleshow/3582342.cms>

[2] J. M. Bertolote and A. Fleischmann, *Suicide Prevention: Meeting the Challenge Together* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2004), 7

[3] Ibid.

[4] Paul Watson, "In South India, the Way Out Is Often Suicide." *Los Angeles Times* (May 30, 2004). <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/may/30/world/fg-suicide30?pg=2>

[5] See Marion Zimmermann, "Suicide in India in a Religious, Political and Social Context." *Ethnology Essay*, 2002, 36 pages.

[6] Lakshmi Vijayakumar, *Suicide Prevention: Meeting the Challenge Together* (Orient Blackswan, 2004), 99

[7] Malini Bhupta and Aditi Pai. "Crimes of Passion." *India Today* (July 13, 2008). <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/contentmail.php?option=comcontent&name=print&id=9758>

[8] Ibid.

S. The Conversation of Job on Lust

The Conversation of Job on Lust

Note: One morning, I had a severe struggle with lust. To win this war, I turned to the words of Job in Job 31:1-12. Job was one of the oldest patriarchs and is renowned for being a man who feared God and shunned evil. What he spoke here few thousands of years back are very much challenging to the people of modern age. As I reflected upon these few words of Job, I was led to write the following words, elaborating the discourse of Job and allowing them to plainly converse with our hearts. I found the words of Job quite challenging in my own life in regard to living a life of sexual purity.

Here is Job.

Listen to my words. Let me tell you something to think about. I made a covenant with my eyes, with my sight, with how I look at a woman. Do you want to know the covenant I made with my eyes? I determined not to look lustfully at a woman. I resolved not to entertain sexual fantasies about a girl. I took a stubborn decision, not only to flee from committing physical adultery, but also from its very thought in my mind, i.e. not to undress a girl with my imagination.

Yes, I fled from watching the nakedness of a woman, whether with my physical eyes or in my imagination. I firmly made up my mind not to be led by whatever my eyes sees and whatever my heart feels. I have learned to master my sight, my thoughts and my feelings. I decided to treat the opposite sex with absolute purity. I know it is hard. It is a tough battle. But I made this solemn choice, not a one-time choice, but a constant choice not to dwell on lust. Do you know why I did this? Because I fear God. Does He not punish those who do wrong? Is not disaster waiting for those who live by wicked thoughts and actions? Does He not see my ways? Are not my thoughts laid bare before Him? Is He not counting every step of my life? Isn't God looking, observing how I live and what I think?

Am I not accountable to God for what I choose, what I watch, what I think and what I do? Does not God weigh me according to His holy standards?

O, my Maker, my God, knows all my thoughts and all my ways. When I watch a naked woman, God is watching my evil actions. When I secretly imagine of having sex with a woman in my mind, God is observing my evil thoughts. I cannot hide from His pure sight! There is no sin that I can commit without His knowledge.

All my thoughts, all my imaginations, all my secret communications, all my ways, which no man may ever know—glare before His blazing holy eyes. Since I cannot escape from the holy sight of God, from His judgment, I chose not to sin against Him by immersing myself in lust. And God knows that I am blameless.

There is another thing I thought about which I would like to tell you. It sounds scary but I thought it anyway. If my heart has been enticed by a woman, if my heart lustfully goes after her, and if I

secretly lust to sleep with another man's wife, let me be honest in telling you this—let other men sleep and have sex with my wife, for that is the worst punishment I should receive for what I did. When I lust after other women, why can't my wife lust after other men? When I sleep with another man's wife, why shouldn't other men sleep with my wife? My wife has every right to go against me when I choose to go against her. The other men have every right to go against me when I choose to go against them [for lusting their women]. Oh, I have no right to hold my wife faithful to me when I remain unfaithful to her, whether in thought or in deed.

Here is what I want to say at the end. Lust and adultery is a deadly fire. It burns my house and others' house too. It ruins my family and others' family too. It puts everyone closely connected to me in trouble. It brings curse upon everything. It gives momentary pleasure but reaps lasting pain. O, a choice made out of lust reaps inescapable destruction.

Therefore, I decided, not to lust any woman and chose to fear God and to stay faithful to my wife—in my thought, in my imagination and in my action.

What is your covenant?

Sincerely,

Job Job 31:1-40 (New International Version) 1 "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.

2 For what is our lot from God above, our heritage from the Almighty on high?

3 Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong?

4 Does he not see my ways and count my every step?

5 "If I have walked with falsehood or my foot has hurried after deceit—

6 let God weigh me in honest scales and he will know that I am blameless—

7 if my steps have turned from the path, if my heart has been led by my eyes, or if my hands have been defiled, 8 then may others eat what I have sown, and may my crops be uprooted.

9 "If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door, 10 then may my wife grind another man's grain, and may other men sleep with her.

11 For that would have been wicked, a sin to be judged.

12 It is a fire that burns to Destruction; it would have uprooted my harvest."

ENQUIRIES:

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S. The Folly of Assumptions

The Folly of Assumptions A family of five was rushed to the hospital to have their stomachs washed out after the cat with which they had shared a meal of mushrooms suddenly began to have stomach contractions. While members of the family showed no signs of illness, the doctor still had them rushed to the hospital. When they returned home they found the cat feeling well, after having produced five kittens.[1] The above illustration, which speaks about a false assumption of a family, sounds humorous. But what about the hasty assumptions in our lives which lead to untold conflicts within interpersonal relationships? Rarely do we find humor in these situations. The Cambridge Dictionary defines assumption as “accepting something to be true without question or proof.” And presupposition means “to think that something is true in advance without having any proof.” Assumption and presupposition are quite related and inseparable. While the former accepts something to be true right away without scrutiny, the latter imagines more and reasons less. Both are equally dangerous because they are based on subjective perceptions than on objective facts.

Now assumptions can either be right or wrong. However, in this small article, I used the word ‘assumption’ in the context of assuming things falsely without knowing the exact facts. I have keenly observed that most of the conflicts in relationships begin with assumptions, which often prove to be wrong. Later, these assumptions are fed day and night by adding more and more presuppositions, which ultimately result in bitterness and unhealthy relationships. I have witnessed numerous broken relationships - within families, relatives, friends, colleagues and neighbors – just because of small assumptions. Oh, what troubling results these quick assumptions can reap in our relationship with others! As the little foxes ruin massive fields, so do these quick and unexamined assumptions. Believe me - they are incredibly disastrous.

Meet an Expert of Folly Assumptions I can relate countless assumptions I’ve often entertained in my life without knowing the facts and ended up behaving foolishly. I can say I am a Ph.D. in assumptions:-) No wonder this has caused a great difficulty in getting along with people. I’ve not only lost the joy of relationships but sometimes even the joyous people. Let me share some of my experiences.

* One person didn’t call me at a said time. I assumed that to be an act of disrespect and was disturbed. Later I came to know that he didn’t have enough money to make that call.

* I was preaching in a place wherein I often found a young man sleeping. I was so disturbed looking at him that one day I rebuked him publicly. Later I came to know that this person wakes up early at 3 a.m. to prepare food, along with his parents, which he goes out on the streets to sell, during the early part of the day. And by the time he sits with the church, he falls asleep due to insufficient sleep. I felt ashamed of my assumption.

* A person gave me a word to meet at a particular time. When I tried calling him before I could start off from my home to meet him, his mobile was turned off. I tried calling his cell phone repeatedly

but still saw that it was switched off. I was hurt assuming that he was trying to ignore me. Later I came to know that this person forgot his mobile in his relative's house because of which he could not access my call.

Apart from this I can also recollect instances when people assumed falsely about my actions.

* I was riding my bike one day and did not greet my friend who was passing by across me. He assumed that I had ignored him and later spoke to me sarcastically about that incident. I had to explain to him that I sincerely did not notice him.

* I was in a meeting when I got a call from a person and was compelled to cut the line. Hence, this person assumed that I deliberately did so thinking I wasn't interested in speaking to him.

* Sometimes my voice sounds a bit dull and flat on the phone. This happens mostly when I am depressed about something or quite absorbed in some work that requires my full attention. This has nothing to do with the person who might have called me at that particular time. In such situations there is a possibility for the person on the other side to misunderstand me as a sign of rejection and may get hurt. Instead of perceiving my pre-occupation, if that person assumed wrongly and instead of clarifying if he built negativity upon it, things might go far enough to potentially damage relationships.

Dear friends, I have learned through my folly, how one small assumption of a little act can create huge problems in our relationships. Many such minor issues have unnecessarily and unfortunately been made big by unexamined assumptions and presuppositions.

Knowing the Facts I am not saying we are always wrong in assuming things. I am not even implying that we have to always be positive thinkers. Negative thinkers focus on negatives while ignoring the positives and positive thinkers focus on positives while ignoring the negatives. I suppose both are extreme stances. I neither suggest negative thinking nor positive thinking but thinking rightly. Confronting the negatives lovingly and appreciating the positives honestly is a sign of balanced life. It is not healthy to come to conclusions without knowing or having the clear facts. It is good to clarify issues than build mountainous assumptions, which may later become difficult to deal with.

How many relationships have been broken just because of entertaining assumptions which may not be true, often resulting in loss of peace and relationships! Some relationships are detached forever without any hope of reconciliation. One thing I have noticed - Our human tendency is too quick to misunderstand and slow to understand rightly. We frequently fall prey to wrong assumptions and presuppositions and magnify the situations rather than simplify them for better understanding. This is because we are too self-obsessed and insecure. We always think about what people think about us, how they treat us, how we appear to others....etc, rather than understanding and caring for others. How true it is in the Holy Bible, "Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions" (Proverbs 18:2).

People, we cannot be amiable with this kind of thought life. Indeed we will be the unhappiest and the most pitiful persons on the face of the earth. I have observed that the greatest problem in interpersonal relationships is neither situations nor people but our own perceptions. There were surplus occasions in my life wherein I had to suffer day and night with frustration towards people

due to false assumptions, until final confrontation of the issue showed that the real problem was either too small or didn't exist in the first place. I unnecessarily entertained thoughts that were not true at all. Charles R. Swindoll rightly pointed out, "We do what we do with others because of the way we think" .[2] Remember, we don't look at people as they are; we see them as we think. We behave with others the way we think about them. How we view others shapes our relationship.

Therefore, I suppose, our attitude towards people ought to change. Healthy attitude towards people is vital to maintain healthy relationships. During conflicting times, it is always good to clarify issues than clenching to our own views. We usually don't confess our hurts honestly and clarify the issues directly. Instead we are great engineers in building and hiding behind forts of unnecessary imaginations and assumptions. Examining and knowing the facts can save us from lot of troubles in relationships. If our assumptions cause us to suffer, it is wise to approach the person directly and ask courteously, "I thought about you in this way, what do you think about this? Can you help me understand?" Let us not dissolve from relationships by foolish assumptions; rather learn to resolve the problems in relationships appropriately. Take heed, false assumptions inevitably lead to misunderstanding, sudden reaction, anger, bitterness, frustration, disrespect, judgmental attitude, gossip and eventually result in broken, unhappy relationships.

Understanding the Motives Recently I read a penetrating statement, by Edwin Louis Cole, that put me in deep thinking. He wrote, "Most people judge others by their actions, and themselves by their intentions." [3] How true it is! Many times we say or do something and later confess, "I didn't mean that or I didn't intend to do that!" But we don't apply this to others saying, "Perhaps he or she didn't mean that or didn't intend to do that." We ought to learn to understand others by their attitudes since most of our assumptions are based on either appearances or words rather than motives. As we are constantly involved, either consciously or subconsciously, in evaluating people, we should be careful about how we evaluate people's communication and their appearances. Renowned counselor, Larry Crabb, observed it so well: "How a person mentally evaluates an event determines how he feels about that event and how he will behave in response to it." [4]

Communication: It is said that most of the problems are a result of faulty communications. A leading marriage counselor says that at least half of all divorces result from faulty communications between spouses. [5] So it is important not to base our judgment on words alone. I have noticed that many of us are poor communicators of our feelings and attitudes. There were countless times I was misunderstood, as well as I misunderstood others, just because of faulty communication. As I was writing this article, I was involved in a conflict that was about to tear apart a long friendship between three friends. When probed carefully, the major problem was in improper communication and impulsive assumptions. It was so nice that we all realized our faults in the light of God's Spirit and a lovely relationship was saved. During problematic situations, it is always good to ask, "When you said this, what did you intend to say? Will you please help me understand? Or I thought about your words in this way, am I right?"

Appearance: Jesus once rebuked, "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (John 7:24). Jesus had to rebuke the people who frequently judged based on outward appearance. We must not judge on appearance alone. There were times when I was thinking of some people as proud and indifferent. My understanding was based on the way they appeared. Amazingly, usually such people became good friends and my assumptions proved to be a folly.

Besides, introverts are always assumed as being unfriendly. But such people become wonderful buddies when we get to know them closely. I realized we don't know who a person truly is unless we know him or her intimately. Some of us have a bad attitude of scanning the people in our minds with wrong assumptions without knowing who they truly are. It is not wise to depend on our impulses. A friend of mine was behaving quite strange. I was so hurt that I almost thought of quitting my relationship with him. My mind was bombarded with assumptions after assumptions and I was greatly disturbed by his behavior. But a question came to my mind, "Do I have all the facts about why is he behaving in such a way?" The answer was, "No". I finally decided to sit with him and clarify the issue and resisted the assumptions that crept into my mind. When the matter was brought before him, he started to pour out his heart and recognized the strong assumptions within him that controlled his conduct. He felt extremely sorry for his behavior and we got reconciled. Later, I thought, if I hadn't taken effort to clarify the issue with him by yielding to my assumptions, our relationship would have been wrecked.

Furthermore, there will be occasions wherein we get offended by someone. We assume a lot about what had happened and slowly try to avoid that person. We no more relate in a well-mannered way. The regretful thing with this kind of situation is that the person who offended doesn't know what's happening on our mind and what had hurt us. Then observing our behavior this person starts to assume all other negative things about us and finally the relationship gets broken. Sounds funny, isn't it? But this usually happens in relationships, reaping damaging results. One little effort from us to initiate and talk about the problematic issue with the person peacefully can save wonderful relationships. We must control ourselves from coming to quick assumptions and judgments. Charles Swindoll gives us the right reasons as to why we have to do so:

- * We do not know all the facts.
- * We are unable to read motives.
- * We find it impossible to be totally objective.
- * We lack "the big picture."
- * We live with blind spots.
- * We are prejudiced and have blurred perspective.
- * Most of all, we ourselves are imperfect and inconsistent.[6] At last, I thank my Lord Jesus Christ for opening my eyes to see my folly assumptions. I have to honestly confess that I am not completely free from false assumptions. I suppose no one is ever completely free from prejudices and presuppositions. This is a constant battle. Nevertheless, I am learning to become quite careful to control my thoughts from quick assumptions. Friends, if we are careful in our thinking pattern, we'll save ourselves from becoming victims of embarrassment, loss of peace and can safeguard our relationship with others. It is said that assumption is the mother of all screw-ups. So flee from assumptions and make relationships joyful by learning to understand people.

Cheers!

Notes:

1. Assumption, England Post, in Homemade, April, 1989 <>
 2. Charles R. Swindoll, The Grace Awakening (Texas: Word Publishing, 1996), pg. 156
 3. Edwin Louis Cole, Maximized Manhood (Pennsylvania: Whitaker House, 1982), pg. 101.
 4. Larry Crabb, Effective Biblical Counseling (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), pg. 90.
 5. John C. Maxwell, Be A People Person (Colorado: Victor Books, 1994), pg. 22
 6. Charles R. Swindoll, The Grace Awakening (Texas: Word Publishing, 1996), pg. 169
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S. The Fourth Temptation of Man

The Fourth Temptation of Man

We are well aware of the three temptations a man commonly confronts—glory [pride], girl [lust] and gold [money]. As we live in this modern, advanced age, there is another temptation that I wish to add to the list. This has become a powerful, irresistible temptation to many a man. It has now taken an enticing, equivalent position to the common three. Can you guess what it is?

GADGETS.

Today, many Christian men, including so many pastors and leaders, have become victims of the fourth temptation—electronic gadgets. These have enslaved so many of us in the form of being good to our eyes and appearing pleasurable to our senses while in fact eating away our precious and brief time on earth.

Just think:

- How many spend more time before Facebook than before God's book!
- How many spend more time in online chatting than in conversing with God!
- How many spend more time before the television, watching movies and programs, than in study of sound books that builds oneself in the Lord!
- How many spend more time listening to music players [mp3 players, iPod...etc] than in seeking opportunities to listen to discouraged souls and encourage them!
- How many spend more time with computer games than treasuring God's word in heart!
- How many spend more time in superfluous conversations on their mobile phones than grabbing time to serve others for their edification!
- How many spend more money in buying electronic gadgets than generously helping the needy ones and in the spread of God's kingdom work!

Well, I am not saying it is wrong or sinful to spend time with the electronic gadgets. What I want to convey is that we need to exercise discipline and moderation, investing reasonable time and money in such things. If we allow these to take precedence over our relationship with God, His Word and His kingdom issues—we lose spiritual fervency, vitality and strength, living no better creatures than those who do not know the Living God.

Donald S. Whitney counsels, "If we are going to be like Jesus, we must see the use of our time as a spiritual discipline." O, time wasted on earth is life wasted for God! So, let us beware of glory, girl, gold and gadgets—for all these have the potentiality to suck our spiritual strength and valuable time, making us impotent in our life for God.

Finally, remember, we are accountable to God even in regard to our time. Jonathan Edwards [1703-1758] exhorted to live each day as if at the end of that day you had to give an account to God of how you used your time. Imagine how carefully we would daily invest our time in things if we live with this sacred consciousness!

ENQUIRIES:

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S. The Great Commission

The Great Commission

Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

One of the greatest responsibilities the Lord Jesus Christ has left to the church is to go and make disciples of all nations. This is not just the responsibility of the pastors, evangelists, teachers and preachers but of every Christian saved by the grace of God. This is not an option but a command. Hudson Taylor, a sacrificial missionary to China, rightly said, "The great commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed." THE GREAT OMISSION Not doing what we should is as serious as doing that which we shouldn't. Omitting this Great Commission is as sinful as committing adultery and murder! In saying this I am not bringing condemnation but a challenge to all so that we would repent and take the task of discipleship as seriously as it was intended of the Lord to be taken by us. Most of our convictions are overruled by minor issues while being desensitized to that which is greater. For instance, if an average Christian of our day fails to attend a Sunday service once or twice he feels extremely guilty; however, he doesn't feel an ounce of guilt for living a life for years without discipling anyone. Why is it so? There must be something terribly wrong with our present day church system.

Christian Life and Ministry To many believers, Christian life is no more than offering a daily word of prayer, reading the Holy Bible (frequently or occasionally), attending Sunday service, singing songs together, listening to a sermon and giving offerings. The thought of discipling people commanded by Jesus Christ never occurred in their mind. In fact, this is unknown and even untaught to many. Believe me, it will be quite a strange question to many Christians if they are asked, "Are you making disciples?" This does not at all exist in their dictionary.

Besides, even the pastors and preachers are neglecting this Great Commission. To some, ministry is no more than preaching from the pulpit or perhaps praying for those who request or sometimes visiting houses. Generally, there is no personal discipleship happening on a relational level. I hear some ministers say, "I go to preach in various places; I baptized so many people and I planted so and so churches." Seldom do I hear them saying, "I disciplined these many people." Jesus didn't say, "Go and preach every Sunday to the people and have good services"; He said, "Go and make disciples!"

Arise and Go Being an itinerant teacher, man of prayer and a miracle worker, Jesus still took time to personally disciple. He made disciples and taught His disciples to make disciples. He knew this is God's way of bringing His kingdom on earth. God is seeking for disciples and disciple makers, not for church goers and mere preachers in the church. If a survey is taken today, I suppose, 95% of the Christians, including the pastors, will be found neglecting the great commission. What a

pathetic state the church is in! Oswald J. Smith hit the nail right on the head when he said, "Any church that is not seriously involved in helping fulfill the Great Commission has forfeited its biblical right to exist."

Dear Christian, you are not called to settle down as a passive believer in the pews. You are God's priest and His mighty instrument to impact the world (Matthew 5:14-16; 1 Peter 2:9). Therefore, rise up, go and make disciples for Christ. You don't need a special calling (for you are already called); you don't have to have a formal training (for you can learn without necessarily going to an institution); you do not have to leave your job or studies (for you have to support your family, yourself and the needy)—to fulfill the great commission. Remember, the command in the Great Commission passage is not "go" but to "make disciples." Therefore, wherever you are and whatever you do—you are God's witness to fulfill His commission.

Dear pastors, make disciples and encourage your people to do likewise. Desire that your people would do greater works than you. Have an attitude that you would descend and they would ascend. I urge you in Christ not to control and lord over their lives but as a servant and facilitator assist them to be used by the Holy Spirit. If the pastors encourage the people on making disciples as much as they motivate them to attend Sunday service, the church will be on fire for God.

QUOTES FOR CONTEMPLATION!

"The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed" – Hudson Taylor, a sacrificial missionary to China.

"Any church that is not seriously involved in helping fulfill the Great Commission has forfeited its biblical right to exist." -- Oswald J. Smith.

"The Great Commission was given to every follower of Christ" -- Rick Warren.

"I have but one candle of life to burn, and I would rather burn it out in a land filled with darkness than in a land flooded with light" -- John Keith Falconer

"People who don't believe in missions have not read the New Testament. Right from the beginning Jesus said the field is the world. The early church took Him at His word and went East, West, North and South." -- J. Howard Edington

"In our lifetime, wouldn't it be sad if we spent more time washing dishes or swatting flies or mowing the yard or watching television than praying for world missions?" -- Dave Davidson

"Missions is not the 'ministry of choice' for a few hyperactive Christians in the church. Missions is the purpose of the church." -- Unknown

"The Bible is not the basis of missions; missions is the basis of the Bible" -- Ralph Winter, U.S. Center for World Mission "The mission of the church is missions" -- Oswald J. Smith "Only as the church fulfills her missionary obligation does she justify her existence." – Unknown

"The command has been to 'go,' but we have stayed -- in body, gifts, prayer and influence. He has asked us to be witnesses unto the uttermost parts of the earth ... but 99% of Christians have kept puttering around in the homeland." -- Robert Savage, Latin American Mission

"Go ye' is as much a part of Christ's Gospel as 'Come unto Me.' You are not even a Christian until you have honestly faced your responsibility in regard to the carrying of the Gospel to the ends of the earth." -- J. Stuart Holden "The best remedy for a sick church is to put it on a missionary diet." -- Unknown "The Church must send or the church will end." -- Mendell Taylor "We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God." -- John Stott

"Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. It remains an abstract idea, a myth which has a place for the Fatherhood of God, but omits Christ as the living Son. ... There is trust in God, but no following of Christ." – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God" – William Carey, who is called the father of modern missions.

"The great mark of a healthy church is not in its seating capacity but in its discipling audacity" – Stephen David C. THE GREAT DIVISION

Now how can we make disciples? Did Jesus give us a basic pattern? Of course, He did. He said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). It is important to note here that the command to make disciples is followed by, connected to and contingent upon two participles—"baptizing" and "teaching." It is obvious here that making disciples is done by baptizing the people in the name of Trinity and by continuously teaching them to obey Christ's commands.

Regretfully, the Great Commission has not only become the great omission but also the great division. In fact, I must say the Great Commission has become the great omission because of the great division. Why do I make such an assertion? When I take seminars on the New Testament Ministry, I often ask the pastors and the believers, "Do you believe the Great Commission applies to every Christian?" All of them would undoubtedly respond, "Yes". I continue to ask them, "Do you believe every Christian has the responsibility to preach the gospel and to make disciples?" Again the people would assuredly respond, "Yes". Still further, "Do you believe every Christian can baptize others?" Now there would be almost absolute silence! Finally, I ask them, "Do you believe that every Christian is called to teach others?" Again, no certain response!

Baptize

I come across many who teach on the necessity of carrying the Great Commission by every Christian without specifically addressing how it can be done (perhaps they are afraid of disturbing or may be ignorant themselves). One of my friends testified of attending a wonderful conference on "The Great Commission". Many ministers happened to be present and were greatly challenged. I asked my friend, "Did the speaker mention that every Christian can make disciples, baptize and teach them God's word?" He replied, "No". Well, it troubles me when this is ignored. How is it that the one part of the command, i.e. go and make disciples, applies to all Christians yet the other part of the command, i.e. baptize and teach, does not apply to all! Where in the Scripture does it say such ministerial activities ought to be constrained only by the "separate class of ministers"?

Indeed, the Holy Bible reveals that the purpose of God to raise some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors-teachers is to equip God's people for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). Praise

God for these equippers of the church! We are called to the ministry of equipping the believers for ministry. Sadly, due to this negligence, the believers are only focused on being ministered to rather than also ministering to others; they have become passive rather than active; they have become church attending members, not the ambassadors of God's kingdom. But blessed are the ministers who pray, "O Lord, give me men and women who can exceed my ministry." In one of the theological forums, when the question was asked, "Who has an authority to baptize?", the response was, "Some believe it must be a pastor or priest, but I don't think the Bible supports that. I think anyone who is a born again follower of Jesus Christ can baptize another new believer. Personally, if I had to do it all over again, I think it would be neat to have the man who led me to Christ baptize me instead of the pastor." Yes, I agree with this response. When a believer leads a person to Jesus Christ, why can't he baptize and disciple him? There is no need of man-induced ordination when God has already given the commission to all His children to go and baptize. The church today is shackled by a lot of traditional teachings, missing the freedom of living according to God's word. Sadly, what was simple in the early church we made it too formal and complicated!

Moreover, it is intriguing to see some preachers being crazy to baptize people when in fact Jesus and Paul allowed even other disciples to baptize (John 4:1-2; 1 Corinthians 1:14-17). How many preachers boast and take the credit of baptizing so many people without even personally leading at least few souls to Jesus Christ! To witness the effective fulfillment of the Great Commission, I believe, believers must be released and motivated to make disciples by baptizing and teaching. For further reflection, you may give careful thought to the questions below:

1. Is there a single Scripture wherein a pastor or an elder giving baptism? Note: Apostles are different from local pastors.
2. Is there a single Scripture wherein a pastor or an elder was exhorted to baptize? In his leadership epistles, i.e. 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus, did Paul delegate the responsibility of giving baptism to the elders or pastors?
3. Does the Bible give prominence (anywhere) to who should give baptism or to the importance of baptism itself?
4. Does Great Commission apply to every Christian? If yes, according to Jesus' exhortation in Matthew 28:19-20, how do we make disciples?
5. Acts 8:1-40 : Philip gave baptism to Eunuch? Who was Philip? At that time was he chosen to help in feeding the widows or to any higher ecclesiastical office?
6. Acts 9:1-43 : Who gave baptism to Paul and what was he? Remember, the term disciple and believer are used interchangeably for the followers of Christ.
7. Did Jesus give baptism or did he allow his disciples (who were still trainees) to baptize too? Read John 4:1-2.
8. In Acts 8:1; Acts 8:8 it is said that except the apostles all the people were scattered and preached the word? Do you suppose the scattered believers preached the gospel without giving baptism to those who believed? When thousands of believers were coming to the Lord do you think only the selected few had the responsibility to baptize them?

9. 1 Corinthians 1:16 - Was Paul passionate to give baptism or to lead people to repentance? The church of Corinth was founded by Paul, so how many people were baptized by Paul in Corinth?

10. According to the Holy Bible, which one is a challenging responsibility? Leading a person to repentance or baptizing people?

11. If a believer comes to know that the person who baptized him in the past was not really a born-again person (not everyone who is doing church ministry is really born-again), is the baptism still valid or should he be re-baptized? This question is posed to understand whether the significance is in the baptism itself or the person who gives. (Note: This question is not intended to be stretched too far, implying that anybody, i.e. even a person who is not born-again, can give baptism.)

12. Finally, which one is more effective in the fulfillment of the Great Commission—only the pastors giving baptism & making disciples or even the believers doing the same? Note: True, pastors and leaders have a greater responsibility in the church and we need to hold them in high regard because of their work; nevertheless, nowhere does it say that giving baptism and discipling people belong to that class alone. The Great Commission, its exhortation and pattern, applies to every Christian.

Teach

Jesus Christ had given the commission to His disciples to teach people to obey everything He had commanded. He said, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). If the task of fulfilling the Great Commission applies to every Christian then every believer has the responsibility to teach and equip others. Discipleship includes teaching and this is not confined to the professional ministers only. In the early church of the New Testament every person was a functioning member, not a mere attender (1 Corinthians 12:27; 1 Corinthians 14:26). It wasn’t ‘one man over others’ but ‘one another church’. They were teaching and exhorting one another (Colossians 3:16; Romans 15:14). In the epistle of Hebrews, the inspired author rebukes the Jewish Christians, “In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!” (Hebrews 5:12). The author meant to say, “You have been disciples long enough to be able to teach others, but still need some one to teach you.” Now this is not to say all should become gifted teachers, involving exclusively in teaching, for according to Romans 12:7; Ephesians 4:11 & 1 Corinthians 12:28-29 there are some who are specially gifted with intense teaching, functioning extensively for the edification of the body of Christ.

However, all must reach a certain level of maturity wherein all will be able to generally instruct and teach one-on-one. For example, God has given evangelists to the church who function extensively in evangelism (Ephesians 4:11), yet all Christians are generally required to personally preach the gospel (Mark 16:15). Jesus said to make disciples by teaching people to obey everything He had commanded (Matthew 28:20). Well, how many Christians do we find, who obey their Lord in making disciples by teaching His word? Oh, how many are still babes in the churches for years!

We are deeply entrenched in such an ecclesiastical system that even though we believe the Great Commission pertains to every Christian, it is still difficult to practically witness that along with the

preaching of the gospel—every Christian can make disciples, baptize and teach them the word of God. It is sorrowful that we have divided the Great Commission—delegating the responsibility of preaching the gospel by all Christians but confining baptism and teaching to a special class of people who are called ‘leaders’ ‘pastors’ or ‘fulltime ministers’. Where did Jesus make such a distinction?

Priesthood of All Believers

I read elsewhere, “It seems that a layman (i.e. a believer) cannot baptize, because to baptize belongs properly to the priestly order (i.e. the clergy).” This is a faulty notion. The unbiblical concept of clergy and laity has done great damage to the body of Christ, thereby producing passive Christianity. The believers are paralyzed in the pews without knowing their great responsibility in Christ Jesus, whereas the ministers have become overly active in the pulpit (I am speaking against the system, not people).

Believers are not ordinary people; they are chosen by God to declare His Excellencies. They are kings and priests of God (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6). All believers are clergy. Though not all have the same function, yet every person in the body of Christ has some contributing function (Romans 12:4-5). Ironically, we believe in the doctrine of priesthood of all believers without the priestly functioning of all believers! The Reformers, during and before 16th century, fought against the church authorities of their time to restore the doctrine of priesthood of all believers. A believer at that time cannot even personally possess and interpret the Holy Bible. It was an abomination and heresy to the church authorities then to count all believers as priests of God and even to read the Holy Bible themselves.

I wonder how many would count this teaching in our day a heresy if the believers are motivated to make disciples, baptize and teach others God’s word. We need another reformation today to reinstate the right of God’s people to completely fulfill the Great Commission by every genuine Christian. Imagine what would happen on this earth if every member of the body of Christ passionately function to fulfill the Great Commission! Oh, I look forward to seeing the glorious days where every Christian—filled with the power of Holy Spirit—will lead the people to Jesus Christ, baptizing and teaching them what God had commanded!

Final Words My dear people of God, no matter how many gospel meetings we conduct, pastors’ conferences and seminars we hold, churches we plant—if the responsibility of personally making disciples is not taken by every Christian or at least by the most, the world would still remain unreached. As long as ministry is restricted to the “pastoral class”, the people of all nations would still be spiritually starving to death without being thoroughly disciplined. There is no other effective method for world evangelization than personal discipleship. May God revive His children to take the task of discipleship seriously!

“The great mark of a healthy church is not in its attending capacity, but in its discipling audacity.”

Contact: friendsofchrist@gmail.com

S. The Pastor's Greatest Temptation

The Pastor's Greatest Temptation

What do you think is the pastor's greatest temptation? I am not going to talk on the common battles that are well known to many – gold [money], glory [pride] and girl [lust]. I would like to share with you about something crucial which many pastors do not even think about it as a temptation.

One of the reasons, I believe, why the church today is not maturing is due to the pastor's focus on this while neglecting the essential. I think, almost every pastor, who is honest with himself, agrees that his focus is primarily on this and that this is indeed his greatest temptation. I have seldom come across a pastor who is free from this enticement.

What could this be?

Sunday Service In my years of Christian life and ministry, I have observed that the pastor's greatest temptation is Sunday service. His focus is primarily on getting people together, possibly in large numbers, on Sunday. His main passion is to fill the place with people and feel good to see every member on the chairs.

There is nothing as disappointing for pastors as to see the missing members on empty chairs. Thus he chases people during the week not to miss the Sunday service. The pressure is even more when a guest speaker comes to speak. When I go as a guest speaker to different churches and if there are no good numbers, I see how pastors feel embarrassed and struggle to justify why it is so. I have to take some effort to let them feel at ease.

Why does a pastor chase people to bring them all together? Is it for the glory of God and for the edification of all God's people? I wish this would be the reason but it seems this is not the attitude of many pastors. I am afraid whether there is a kind of pomposity, a puffed up feeling, to stand before the crowd and feel good about the numbers.

I don't completely deny a pastor's love for people but I fear whether the temptation for numbers has taken precedence over his heart for them. The sight of great numbers of people can truly feed our hidden egos. We love numbers, want to feel good at the sight of numbers and even boast about the numbers.

Didn't David feel great about the numbers in 2 Chronicles 21:1-20 and invoked God's judgment? One of the reasons the Lord may not hear our prayers for church growth is this—our attitude may not be to save people and fill the kingdom of heaven but to bring people and fill our church hall with folks and feel good about the numbers.

How complacent a pastor can feel to see his church hall being packed with people! But is good numbers on Sunday service a sign of success?

Building Lives in the Lord

I never heard of a couple being complemented for having a successful family just because of giving birth to a dozen children. Our common sense tells—the sign of a successful family is not in how many children we bear but in how we bring them up in the Lord. Likewise, a pastor's success is not in how many people he can gather on Sunday service but how he brings them up in the Lord. His reward is not in bringing people to the church but in drawing people closer to the Lord. When a pastor sees a great number of people before him, instead of feeling good, he should prostrate before God and cry out to Him, "Lord, here I see so many before me. How can I bring them in you? I have a great responsibility upon me. I am incompetent to rear them. Give me your grace and wisdom to lead them towards maturity." As the numbers increase, he should fear and tremble at the great responsibility of equipping them to walk worthy in the ways of the Lord.

Remember, unlike many pastors today, Paul's passion was not to present every person regularly on Sunday service but to "present everyone perfect [mature] in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). I wonder how many pastors come out of the pulpit and take personal concern, finding out and motivating believers to have a disciplined and devoted walk with the Lord in their daily life.

Monday to Saturday

Yesterday, i.e. on Sunday, I had an opportunity to personally listen and learn from brother Zac Poonen who visited my city to speak. He is about seventy two years old, doing the Lord's work for more than forty years. He is one of my esteemed Indian bible teachers in our day. In his teaching, he said something like this [about his ministry] which very much impressed my heart: Our focus on people is not for Sunday. Our focus on people is for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and then at last Sunday. We want to see people living for the glory of God from Monday to Saturday. Sunday is not that important to us.

If pastors have such a focus and passion, the spiritual condition of the churches today would be quite different and better.

I plead with the shepherds of the church, not to stay focused on just the Sunday service—having good numbers, good worship, good sermon, good offering—but to stay committed and prayerfully focused on equipping people to have a good personal walk with the Lord 24/7. [1]

1. I am not saying that we should not pray and desire to have a lively Sunday fellowship. It is good [provided if our attitude is to build lives in the Lord]. But it is not the only important thing as it is to many pastors today. The primary concern of every pastor must be for the believers' personal walk with the Lord, not simply for a large gathering.

ENQUIRIES:

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S. The Price For Peace

The Price For Peace “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy” (Hebrews 12:14). No one is immune from conflicts in relationships. Virtually all of us have experienced the hurt that often causes intense pain within interpersonal relationships. Needless to say, living in unity with others is not an easy issue. Remember, there is a price to be paid to live at peace with others. Healthy relationships are not built automatically but with great effort. The Lord once taught me a wonderful lesson regarding the price I have to pay for preserving peace in relationships. When my wife was pregnant with our first child, one day, I hurriedly got on the bed to sleep. Before going further, I must say that my wife is known for cleanliness. She usually surprises the guests with her neatest house. Because my wife was carrying the child, she could not do much of the house work as she was physically weak. That was the time I was disciplined to become a family man. So when I got on the bed, my wife requested me to do a small task. She politely told me to wash the vessels before I go to sleep (usually, in India, to wash the dishes is below the dignity of a man).

Now it was winter season and I was feeling cold and a bit lazy to get up. I told her I will wash the dishes the next morning. She however insisted to wash before going to sleep because to leave the vessels unwashed throughout the night would create a stench in the kitchen. I argued with her that I will wash in the morning and right away went to sleep. The next day I got up to do the house work. As I was washing the vessels, the Lord brought a Scripture to my mind and it was so enlightening. The lesson I learned that day was an unforgettable experience. The Lord reminded of the Scripture in Hebrews 12:14, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men.” Last night I went to sleep without having peace with my wife. Had I taken little effort to get up to wash the vessels I could have possessed great peace with her and prayed together before going to sleep. Paul said to the Roman saints, “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Romans 14:19).

Notice, it is not written, “Desire to live at peace with others.” There are many who desire and talk a lot about living at peace and in unity without making any effort. I have learned that in living a Christian life it takes effort, pain and denial of self in order to be at peace with others. Forgiveness, patience, generosity, humility and grace signify denial of self in our love for others. In the original Greek, “make every effort”, could also mean, “to seek after eagerly; earnestly endeavor to acquire; by implication, to suffer persecution.” To be at peace with others requires earnest pursuance and even a will to suffer. To get into conflict is very easy, but to live at peace is extremely difficult. Relationships crumble because of casual and flippant attitude. When we take relationships seriously and make every effort to live at peace with everyone, there is scope for healthy and prosperous relationships. To the saints in Ephesus, Paul as well exhorted, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

Genuine relationships are built on the pathway of sacrifice. We have to pay the price to cultivate good relationships. God desired our relationship so much that He restored us back at the cost of

laying His life for us on the Cross. Just think, if it cost God His life to bring us back at peace with Him, how then do we expect ourselves to be at peace with others without taking pains? If we sit coolly and expect things to work out all well, that's not possible. Those who walk in the footsteps of our Lord will see great fruit in their relationship with others. Like God, they value relationships and therefore make every effort to be at peace with others. Note this fact—No pain, No peace.

"The process of dying to self is excruciating and we cannot bypass this path to live at peace with God and people."

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S. The Secret of the Power of Prayer

The Secret of the Power of Prayer “The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them” (Psalms 34:17).

I used to believe that the secret of the power of prayer lies in protracted prayer. The more I pray the more blessing I receive. Did not Jesus pray for long hours, sometimes the whole night (Luke 6:12)? Also, I believed the secret of the power of prayer lies in fasting. Did not Jesus say, “This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting?” (Mark 9:29) I read numerous books on prayer and some on fasting and my conviction grew even more. Hence, my prime focus was either on protracted prayer or fasting prayer. I suppose there are many fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord who believe the same. Not until later did I learn that I was wrong. Of course, there is a significant room for protracted and fasting prayer, but there is an important prerequisite for a prayer, protracted prayer or even fasting prayer to be effective! What then is the secret of the power of prayer? It is written, “Moses and Aaron were among His priests, Samuel was among those who called on His name; they called on the LORD and He answered them” (Psalms 99:6). We know the wonders God did through Moses and Samuel. They called on the LORD and He answered their prayers in a wonderful way. What could be the secret?

Again it is written in Psalms 99:7, “He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud; they kept His statutes and the decrees He gave them.” We learn here that the secret of the power of prayer is obedience to God’s word. God is greatly pleased with the prayer of an upright man. He eagerly listens to those who devotedly listen to Him. “The Holy One,” said the Rabbis, “yearns for the prayers of the righteous.” Is it not written, “The LORD is far from the wicked but He hears the prayer of the righteous” (Proverbs 15:29)? Furthermore, James emphatically said, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). God can do anything in and through a man who commits himself to obey Him in everything.

Coming to Jesus’ prayer life, we know how long He prayed and fasted. So, is that the major reason He was heard? The Holy Bible says, “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission” (Hebrews 5:7) Jesus Himself said, “By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please Myself but Him who sent Me” (John 5:31). While He was desperately hungry, He said to His disciples, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work” (John 4:34).

Jesus’ whole life on earth was a life of obedience and submission to His Father’s will and therefore God was pleased to hear His prayers. His protracted and fasting prayers were done by living in obedience to His Father. How often we bypass the path of obedience and endeavor to pray and fast! Sometimes we wonder why our prayers are not powerful and even doubt the promises of God! Did He not say, “You may ask Me for anything in My name, and I will do it” (John 14:14)? Now there is a great danger when we read a particular verse in isolation while neglecting to observe the teachings of the whole Scripture in its totality. For it is also written, “Dear friends, if our

hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from Him anything we ask, because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him" (1 John 3:21-22).

Finally, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, when we read carefully the entire Bible we learn that the whole emphasis is on living an obedient life. Obedience to God is the pathway of blessing and a stronghold of an effective prayer life. Many times it is easier for us to pray and offer a sacrifice; however, the Holy Bible exhorts, "To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice" (Proverbs 21:3). May we repent of any disobedience and seek His grace upon us to live a life holy and pleasing to Him and our prayers will be a fragrant offering to God. Take heed of Proverbs 28:9, "If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable".

"Obedience is the great factor in our whole relationship to God" — Andrew Murray."

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S. The Sin of Self-Protection

The Sin of Self-Protection

Dr. Larry Crabb is one of the highly respected counselors of our day, writing extensively on the core issues of man's needs and guiding many to find satisfaction in their Maker. He is an author who won my eyes, whose books I blindly recommend to read.

Recently, I was reading a portion, from his well-written book, *Inside Out*. In this Gold Medallion Award-winning classic, he writes, "not everyone is involved in flagrant sin." Many Christians do not commit horrible sins as such. They basically live honorable and decent lives. But as good as they maybe, there is a sin in which they easily fall and remain unaware of its disastrous work, which Larry calls, "The Sin of Self-Protection."

What does it mean?

It certainly does not mean protecting oneself from physical assault. Larry describes, "The sin of self-protection to which I refer occurs when our legitimate thirst for receiving love creates a demand to not be hurt that overrides a commitment to lovingly involve oneself with others." I cannot help myself but agree with Larry's comment. How that demand for self-protection, that overly preoccupation with oneself to not be hurt by others, hinders people from moving toward others with their well-being in view, thus violating the law of love!

I have seen people (not excluding myself) how good they are in being passionate for God, for His Word, for Truth, for His Kingdom, but at the same time, how poor they are in interpersonal relationships! They are good in talking with God and about God but weak in walking with people. Their good life is not that good enough to get along with others. They shine brighter from afar, when people are good to them, but become darker when facing interpersonal conflicts.

Larry makes the right point, "It seems that when people live blameless lives in terms of the first category of sin (visible transgressions of known standards) and when their way of coming across is apparently commendable (humble, gracious), we're inclined to wrongly think that sin is no longer a current problem for them, except perhaps for normal temptations with such things as lust. But (regrettably) understanding the second category of sin opens up new doors to dark rooms."

What is that second category of sin, with which people subtly clothe themselves, living in dark rooms?

It is self-protection.

It is dissolving from resolving conflicts in relationships.

It is being hypersensitive, too easily upset by criticism and disagreement, leading to bitterness.

It is becoming frustrated for not getting the attention we think we deserve.

It is burying hurtful feelings and living non-transparent lives.

It is side-stepping rejection.

It is relating to one another with the hidden purpose of maintaining our comfort and avoiding whatever sort of interaction we find threatening.

It is being more concerned with how we feel and less concerned with the lives of others.

It is being clothed with 'nice' conduct, not with an intent to glorify God and to do good to others, but to protect oneself from further frustration of our longings to be respected and loved.

It is having the top priority of one's own protection from the possibilities of pain in relationships.

It is getting depressed for not getting the approval from people to feel one's own significance.

It is becoming angry when people fail to care about us as they should.

It is developing bitterness when people don't respond to our demands.

It is justifying oneself to conceal sins and mistakes.

It is clinging to our "right" to protect oneself.

It is being a slave to self-concern, allowing self-protection to govern what we say, how we say it and to whom.

These above descriptions of self-protection may not fall into the category of terrible sins, but who can deny the damage these little foxes do to the entire relationships! How many decent people are miserably suffering, even causing suffering to others, for being committed to self-protection! May our sincere desire be to find deliverance from these little, hidden evils and live a purposeful life for the glory of our Creator and for the blessing of His creation.

Everything said (although briefly), but what is the antidote?

It is possible to change our behavior without ever changing our attitude. So Larry exhorts that we need to first change our mind about the best way to deal with our thirsty soul. Genuine change comes from within (inside) and affects without (outside). Nevertheless, it is not easy to recognize, get exposed, admit and give up our commitment to self-protection. As Larry puts it, "Change from the inside out requires that we take a disturbing look at the ugly parts of our soul." To use a strong word, it is 'excruciating'. We have to face the inevitable tough battle with ourselves. Larry explains this struggle, "We resist giving up our self-protective commitment with the desperate strength of a man fighting for his life. To move toward life without self-protection feels like suicide." In spite of its difficulty, may we recognize and repent of our self-protective commitment.

Secondly, we should stop looking in the wrong places for the relief our soul desires so badly. Let us understand that our thirsty soul finds its security and satisfaction only in the Creator, not in created things. To find deliverance, we are supposed to come to God in our thirst by abandoning our commitment to self-protection. We should turn to God who wants us to trust His love enough to freely love others, not to protect our longing from further injury. We need to stop digging for water (security and satisfaction) in our relationships and drink the living water from the infinite fountain,

our Lord Jesus Christ, and share that amazing love with others. What God said to the people of Israel then is still relevant to the people now, "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

Says Larry, "When thirst is acknowledged and self-protection is unmasked, then trust in Christ can become more profound and repentance more complete. We can trust Him more when we know how badly we need what only He can provide." Yes, let us confess our nakedness, our thirst, our hungers, our emptiness, our despair and seek fulfillment from our Maker, the emotional and physical contentment which only He can provide.

Let me close with my personal reflection in Christ - As much as it is exhilarating to experience the love of God through people so much it is exhausting and disappointing to seek love from people. To enjoy life on earth, seek love only from God and share only His love with others.

Note:Larry Crabb, Inside Out (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Navpress, 1988)

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Three Tragic Signs of Complacency

Three Tragic Signs of Complacency "Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth," said A.W. Tozer.

These days I have been meditating on the book of Amos. What wealth of insights the Lord has in store for His children to learn about His ways! When I came to Amos 6:1-14, I was moved in my heart to self-examination, for it reveals three tragic signs of complacency.

One of the terrible diseases of Christianity today is complacency [a feeling of self-satisfaction]. A.W. Tozer says, "Religious complacency is encountered almost everywhere among Christians these days." He also observed, "Among the many who profess the Christian faith, scarcely one in a thousand reveals any passionate thirst for God." I cannot resist agreeing with Tozer. If the world is shattered because of its callousness towards the truth, Christianity is miserable due to its complacency in the truth it has believed.

Let us reflect upon the following brief message with a prayerful heart and allow God to redeem us from this evil of complacency.

Self-Sufficiency The Lord spoke to the backslidden Israel through His prophet Amos, "Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come!" (6:1) The Lord was addressing to the people who were self-satisfied in their comfortable zone, who thought secure in their affluence and who felt safe in their strength. These people wallowed in their cozy lifestyle with no desire for God, with no hunger for His righteousness and with no reverence to live according to His Word. They were self-confident and self-sufficient. Thus the Lord warned them about the impending judgment upon them.

How often do we fall into this mire of complacency wherein we live a self-satisfied life and give up our humble dependence upon God for our sustenance! Remember, complacency makes us to feel secure in our job, safe in our strength, good about our knowledge, protected in our money and possessions, eventually leading us to build an ivory tower of egotism.

Complacency also ruins our passion for God. It takes us away from God-satisfied life to self-sufficiency. It makes us to think that we know God better, that we are thoroughly biblical and that we are spiritual enough. It ends the fresh streams of living water flowing through our lives which in fact results from our continuous growth in Christ and keeps only the rotten water in us by ceasing our growth. O, complacency kills our thirst for God, robbing us of the experience which the Psalmists expressed, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God" (Psalms 42:1).

Moreover, complacency leads us to think that all is well with our heart and fails us to recognize our depraved nature. We do little good and think we are good enough. We feel satisfied in our own righteousness and so-called spiritual activities. We may pray, read the Bible, give offerings and

participate in church activities, but all these may be done as rituals than out of passion for God and for His Kingdom. These devotional acts may be "like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears" (Hosea 6:4).

Indulgence The Lord spoke to His people through His prophet Amos, "You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves" (Amos 6:5). When the lives of God's people were far from their Creator and from His standards, instead of repenting and seeking the face of the Lord, they indulged in worldly pleasures. They didn't care about their dire spiritual condition but were focused on enjoying the worldly things. They externally expressed their devotion to God in the form of following certain rituals but their hearts were indeed set on the world, on its things and pleasures. They lived for themselves, for their ambitions and for their pleasures. Thus the Lord cautioned them about the disaster that was about to come upon them. When our hearts are lukewarm in God and far from His commands, rather than going through godly sorrow and turning to the Lord with a contrite spirit, how possible it is for us to give ourselves to more worldly amusements and pleasures! Complacency thrusts our heart to run after the pleasures of the world than after the pleasures of God, to pursue the comforts the world offers than the comfort of the Spirit of God, to seek our security in the things of the world than in the Maker of the heavens and the earth.

Complacency creates discontentment for worldly pleasures and makes us content with spiritual things. It leads us to vigorously pursue the earthly things, leaving us paralyzed in spiritual issues. It produces in us spiritual fatness and lethargy.

How tragic it is to think that we are rich in the spirit when Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit [realize their spiritual poverty] for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). How pathetic it is to amuse ourselves by material things when Christ said, "Blessed are those who mourn [weep over their spiritual dryness] for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). How regretting it is to be passionate for worldly prosperity when Christ said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6).

If our prayers are examined, would they be found with more repentance, more cry for God and for His holiness or with more petition for earthly blessings?

Now, let us not suppose that indulgence means just going to clubs and pubs, brothels and orgies. We may be good enough not to get involved in such blatant activities. But one of the devil's subtle temptations is to enslave God's people, not by things that are considerably evil, but by the things that are seemingly good and let them take precedence over our passion for God. When the good earthly pleasures become our priority and pursuit [food, fun, television, internet, hobbies...etc], when our mind is dominated by the nice things of the world [work, business, family, friends...etc], when our heart is filled with more delight for material things [money, possessions, electronics...etc]—what could it be if not complacency? Is the Living God, by whom and for whom we exist, loved and pursued above all things?

O, when we are taken captive by complacency, we can never say to God what the Psalmist sung, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You" (Psalms 73:25).

Desensitivity The Lord spoke to His people through His prophet Amos, "You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph" (Amos 6:6). When

the kingdom lied in ruin, people were self-sufficient, indulged in earthly pleasures and did not grieve over the disaster that has come upon God's children. They became desensitized to the miseries of the people around them. They lacked compassion for others. All that they were concerned was—personal security, personal comfort and person happiness. Thus the Lord pronounced His curse upon them.

Complacency makes us desensitized. It ruins our compassion for people. It hardens our heart from thinking about the welfare of those around us. It does not let us grieve over the pathetic condition of others. It causes us to stay focused on personal happiness and safety. It drives our thoughts, interests and pursuits to revolve around the globe of self. When we are complacent, we ignore the pain of other people. Our heart is not moved by looking at the troubles and sins of others. We lack generosity, hospitality, care and empathy. We neglect the helpless and hopeless. We have no burden for the lost. We even care little about the spiritual decay in the body of Christ. Matthew Henry comments, "Those are commonly careless of the troubles of others who are set upon their own pleasures; and it is a great offence to God when His church is in affliction and we are not grieved for it, nor lay it to heart."

Final Words

If we honestly examine our hearts, don't you think we have fallen into the abyss of complacency? Don't you suppose we are self-sufficient in our life, indulgent in worldliness and lack compassion for others? Don't you think we need revival, mighty revival, tremendous awakening that will lead us to become passionate for God, drive us to love our Lord with our whole heart and mind, and cause us to care for others out of God's love in our hearts for them?

O, we need revival, that awakening of spiritual poverty for the glorious riches of God! Let us keep seeking the face of God, keep asking before the Mercy seat and keep knocking the door of the heaven for an awesome revival in our lives.

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below (or) write to E-mail: cstephendavid@gmail.com (or) stephen@tents-india.org

S. To Overcome Lust - Time is Everything

To Overcome Lust - Time is Everything

Last week, as I was riding on my bike, my eyes abruptly fell upon a billboard. I found on it these words, written in big letters, “In Cancer Treatment, Time is Everything.” As I was reflecting on it, a thought suddenly dawned on me—to overcome lust, is not time everything, I mean, an essential element?

Everyone knows cancer is a deadly disease, which is responsible for the death of millions of people. According to World Cancer Research Fund International, it is expected that by 2030 the number of people dying of cancer would reach to 21 million. And one major reason for people dying of cancer is due to lack of early detection and treatment. Time seems to play a vital role, isn't it?

Lust—which is an inappropriate and unrestrained sexual passion in striking contrast to healthy sexual desire—is perilous like cancer. Lack of prompt dealing with lust is a major cause for so many to fall into sexually immoral acts, thereby ruining one's personal and family life.

Take Instant Turn

We need to understand that many who fall into sexual sins—be it in pornography, fornication, adultery, homosexuality or lustful fantasies—neglect to deal with them promptly and seriously at its initial stage. They casually face it and miserably fall into it.

Fact: Lust thrives in a delayed and negligent attitude. For this reason, Jesus exhorted in hyperbolic language, “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matthew 5:29). Eugene Peterson paraphrases it in his contemporary translation *The Message*, “If you want to live a morally pure life, here's what you have to do: You have to blind your right eye the moment you catch it in a lustful leer.” In other words, if your eye is caught up in a lustful sight, turn your eyes instantly from it and urgently root out that lustful attitude. To save oneself from falling into lust, it is only a spur-of-the-moment. If you delay a bit, you will without delay find yourself drowned in a lustful pit.

Fact: The more we delay in resisting lust, the more it becomes difficult to overcome it.

I have learned that to overcome lust—particularly when you bump unexpectedly into something sensual, such as a porn image or a lustful wall poster or a sensual scene on television—it is only a matter of seconds. If I do not turn away from it immediately at my first glance, my mind would easily be captured by its lure. Therefore, when I find myself into a lustful temptation, I am disciplining myself, by God's grace, to turn immediately or flee in a second. Of course, when I flee, I do face temptations that I am missing a great pleasure and just need to yield to the temptation to satisfy my sensual emotions. But I know that's deception and also destructive.

Fact: Lust grows stronger when you stay longer at what you watch.

Flee Lest You Cleave

Therefore, the Holy Bible says, “Flee from sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18). In my study of the word “flee”, I have found that it means, “To run with rapidity, as from danger; to hasten from danger or expected evil.”

Fact: Lust is such a fiery temptation that if we do not run away from it, we rush into it.

We cannot spend a little time and then walk away slowly from lust. It is like a flood of water released from a dam. If we don't flee quickly and immediately, we cannot stand against its raging torrent of temptation, having been easily wiped out by its enticement.

O, how many neglect to flee instantly from lust, but once they are swept off by it, they cry out helplessly for freedom!

Fact—The devil doesn't drag people directly into sexual acts. He first feeds their sight with lust, fills their mind with evil imaginations, and then it is effortless for him to knock them down in immoral acts.

Take Off Lest You Give In

Think about the young man Joseph. Since he was handsome and well built, the lustful eyes of Potiphar's wife fell on him. After persistently tempting him, one day when none was there inside her house, she caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me!” But what did Joseph do? He left his garment in her hand and immediately fled from her (Genesis 39:11-12). Had he given a little room for lust to gaze at her, he could have easily fallen in adultery.

Fact: If you don't flee from lust immediately, you may cleave to it inescapably.

Friend, may be you are entertaining a conversation or chat with a person which is progressively leading you into an illicit affair. May be you are moving too close physically with a person which may end up in some sexual sin. May be you are staying in a place where there is a danger of getting dragged into immoral acts. May be you are watching certain things which may appear less harmful to you now but they may indeed be stepping stones to greater pits and terrible fall. May be you are constantly tempted by someone or something to enjoy the momentary pleasure of sex which doesn't fall into the boundary of marital fidelity.

Like Joseph, are you learning to rapidly flee from such lustful traps?

So, the next time, if you happen to find yourself into a lustful sight or place, know—time is everything. Just flee!

Related Articles:

[The Conversation of Job on Lust](#)

[A Lesson from Cotton Buds on Sexual Purity](#)

[Winning the Battle for Sexual Purity](#)

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S. Training Children in Charity

Training Children in Charity Train a child in the way he should go - The Holy Bible (Proverbs 22:6)
On Monday, I was on a day off from my usual work. Since my two kids were also having a holiday, I took them for breakfast to a nearby restaurant. After having our delicious breakfast, we were returning to home on my bike. On our way, we saw a street vendor pushing a cart (with four wheels), carrying some watermelons on it. Then we noticed that his cart suddenly fell into a drainage hole, having all the watermelons spilled out on the footpath. Our hearts were moved to see what had happened and I turned my bike towards the cart to offer some help. Even before I completely stopped the bike, my eldest son, Joy (now 6 years old), jumped from my back and rushed to the cart to help the vendor. I didn't have to get down from the bike. I just watched my son picking up the watermelons with his tiny hands and putting them on the cart. After finishing his good work, he wiped his hands, sat at the back of my bike and we headed to home. My heart is often delighted to see such wonderful acts in my kids. I praise the Living God for these two blessings (kids) in my life! That night, I spoke to my wife about what Joy did and we encouraged ourselves to train our children more in charity and take them to the needy places where they would engage themselves in works of charity. We don't know what amazing results we witness when we teach our children the importance of helping others and model before them. Do we train our children in charity? We take our children to shopping malls, amusement parks, circus, stadium, parties, movies and to various sightseeing places, but do we occasionally take them also to orphanages, old-age homes and to other needy places so that our children would learn the importance of charity? Do we teach them by words and deeds about the significance of helping the needy? Do we just give them comforts without exposing them to the painful lives around us? Aren't we responsible to coach our kids to share, to give and to become beneficent people of our age?

Father in heaven, the One who causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous, move our hearts to do good to others and deliver us from living a selfish life. You taught us that true joy is not found in gaining but in giving. May we become partakers of that joy and engage our children to enjoy its blessings too. In Jesus Name. Amen!

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Treating Holy Spirit like Toothpaste

Treating Holy Spirit like Toothpaste This morning, as my children were getting ready to go to school, my wife called me and told me to brush the teeth of Joe, my youngest son. Now this is what my kid does—he applies toothpaste to his brush, puts it in his mouth and just enjoys the taste. He simply keeps it over the tongue and doesn't properly brush his teeth. His focus is more on relishing the taste of the toothpaste than on cleaning his teeth so as to protect them from germs and bacteria.

Well, don't you think this is how we treat the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity? It seems many of us want to feel His sweet presence, enjoy His good blessings, experience His pleasant comfort in our troubles and do some fascinating things by His power. Although there is nothing wrong to expect such things, I am concerned that in our passion to relish His sweet blessings are we missing the supreme purpose of the Holy Spirit in us?

God's purpose in sending His Spirit is not to lead us into all pleasure, but into all truth (John 16:13). God's aim in blessing us with His Spirit is not to revive our emotions but to reveal the glory of Christ Jesus in us (John 16:14). God's desire in having His Spirit dwell in us is not to enjoy ourself but to glorify Him (Php 3:3). God's passion in giving us His Spirit is not to satisfy our wants but to sanctify our soul (Romans 8:13-14). Of course, we do enjoy the sweetness of His blessings but that is just the byproduct of sanctification, not the supreme purpose. Let us not treat the Holy Spirit like how kids use the toothpaste to enjoy its taste without allowing it to clean. Remember, the Holy Spirit is holy and His greatest passion for us is to make us holy by sanctifying us from our sinful passions and from the contamination of the world.

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

ENQUIRIES:

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S. True Religion

True Religion

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27). The above exhortation by James is unfortunately one of the most neglected practices of Christians today. The term true “religion” should not be understood here in the same way as the world defines various religions. It could also be translated as, “true piety or true devotion.” So, what is the true religion or devotion that the word of God describes?

True Devotion

Many suppose true devotion to be prayer, fasting, worship, studying and knowing the Holy Bible, attending church activities and witnessing to people. These are no doubt good practices but without following what James has exhorted we are still a long way from true spirituality. Some even believe that true devotion is just about living an ethical and moral life. Make no mistake: piety and charity are inseparable in living the Christian life. Someone commented rightly, “No kind of religious services paid to the Deity can be of any avail, if we neglect the royal law of charity.”

I have observed people clinging to two extremes. Some claim that evangelism and missions are the Christian priority and charity is not our responsibility. Thus, they focus on the soul and neglect the body. Others assert that charity is all that matters and neglect evangelism. Such people focus on the body and neglect the soul. Christians have always committed a mistake by neglecting to see a person as a whole. Someone rightly said, “We either see a person as a soul without a body or as a body without a soul.” Biblically, evangelism and charity are equally important. We are required to meet both the spiritual and physical needs of a person. Our words have no value if we do not practically demonstrate the love of God.

There are three things James wrote about true religion, revealing pure and faultless devotion in the sight of God: a) Looking after the orphans, b) Taking care of the widows in distress and c) Keeping oneself from being polluted by the world. Most Christians are aware about keeping themselves away from worldly desires. This matter is emphasized in numerous messages and rightly so; but what about our disposition towards charity? It is said that the widows in the New Testament times didn't have the freedom to work and support themselves as they have today; hence their plight is better today than it once was. The focus of this article, therefore, is on “orphans”, who are still the most neglected section of our community today, in spite of being the most needy. Of course, this is not the entirety about religion but our attention to this issue, without which our devotion to God will not be pure and complete, can never be exaggerated. Our true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can only result in our lives the manifestation of His love to the destitute. Christianity is not a religious activity but a living charity.

Horrifying Report

There are millions of orphans scattered around the world today, lonely and unloved. UNICEF reports that the number of orphans globally is projected to reach 44 million by 2010.[1] In India alone their number is around 12.44 million.[2] Also, India has the largest number of AIDS orphans than any country - and this number is expected to double in the next five years.[3] The statistics of orphans in Ukraine, between ages of 15 to 18, points to a gruesome reality. It is disappointing to notice that, "Statistics on orphans during this time of their lives have shown an estimated 70% of the boys end up in crime, 60% of girls in prostitution, and 10-30% commit suicide." [4] Although the percentage may vary, the terrible and disturbing fact about how orphans end up in crime, prostitution, suicide and even in child labor is true in any country.

Thus, we beg the question, what is the contribution of the church to the shattered lives of the orphans, in obedience to God's word? Is not the church the only representative of the one and only true Living God, whose very nature is love?

Looking after Orphans The following are the three means I propose to practice true religion as mentioned in James 1:27 : a) The best way to help orphans is by adoption. If every Christian family adopts one orphan each I wonder if there would be any orphans left in the world. How wonderful it is to witness a few Christians, who are such a tiny minority, adopting orphans and giving them parental love despite having children of their own! Thank God for such beautiful people! Childless parents should consider the privilege of adoption rather than remaining in despair and regret. We need to understand that the exhortation of James is not written to social organizations or charitable groups; it is written to every Christian who is a disciple of Christ Jesus. Sadly, we have institutionalized the work of charity, washing our hands off individual responsibility.

Most peoples' considering adoption is prematurely paralyzed by questions about inheritance – "Shouldn't my inheritance really be going to children born of my blood? Won't that be a problem if I adopt?" Well, considering this, the Holy Bible reveals that we ourselves are the adopted children of God through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:5). The Lord not only adopted us as His children but also gave us the full rights of sons and made us His heirs (Galatians 4:5). Likewise, in adopting orphans and making them our heirs shouldn't we share the grace that we received from God? The Lord has blessed me with two sons (still small kids) but after being convicted by this Scripture, I have resolved to adopt an orphan into our family. I believe there is no other ideal way to look after orphans than by their adoption by into Christian families. b) The next best way to assist orphans is by the local churches taking their responsibility. During the New Testament times there were no social organizations (NGOs) or orphanages as we have today. Every church was a social entity and took the responsibility of helping the needy and the orphans. Even during the middle part of the second century, the weekly collection of the church was taken primarily to help the poor and the orphans. Church historian Earle E. Cairns notices that at the end of the church fellowship, "they finally took up a collection for aid to widows and orphans, the sick, the prisoners, and strangers. The meeting was then dismissed, and all the people made their way to their homes." [5] But today how is the weekly offering used in our churches? Is there a willingness to set apart from the church's offering to help the orphans and the needy? How wonderful it would be if the churches come forward to provide food, shelter and education to the destitute children! Interestingly, unknown to many, even during the Old Testament times a special tithe was raised once in three years to assist the orphans, widows and other poor people (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). How are the tithes of the churches used today? Do the churches use a part of their tithes to assist

the orphans and the destitute?

Sadly, we use a lot of God's money for things not mentioned in the Scripture, like buildings, programs, meetings...etc., and neglect utilizing it for what is exhorted, like helping the orphans, helpless widows, poor and needy. The churches have to give an account to God when the judgment comes upon them as to how wisely they have used God's money. Remember, God has a great concern for the orphans. David spoke about Him, "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling" (Psalms 68:5). Isaiah admonished the people of God to, "defend the cause of the fatherless" (Isaiah 1:17).

Also, there is a stern warning from God to the leaders, "Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them. Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: "Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies" (Isaiah 1:23-24). Oh, how terrible it is that God calls leaders as His enemies because they seek only to procure material things and feed themselves, having no concern to stand for the cause of the orphans and the needy! The leaders must not only be passionate to teach and preach but also to care for the orphans and the needy (Galatians 2:10). Did not the apostles devote themselves to prayer and preaching of the word without neglecting to care for the needy? (Acts 6:1-4) c) The two means mentioned above in looking after the orphans are simple and feasible. The third means to help orphans is by establishing and supporting orphanages. To share a fact, setting up a registered orphanage requires higher budgets and demands more effort. If a Christian family is not willing or unable to adopt, or the church is unwilling or incapable to take such a responsibility, they can at least support orphanages that are genuinely committed to the care of orphans.

Just a word of caution though: Do not assist orphanages without a careful evaluation as some of them might be established out of selfish ambition and for personal profit. It grieves my heart to see leaders of certain orphanages living a grand life while the orphans under their responsibility are neglected, fed improperly and shown no love and concern. But that being said, there are quite a few orphanages that take good care of orphans and these are worthy of generous support.

Final Words:

Many Christians seem to miss the great purpose of being saved by the grace of God. The purpose of salvation is not just to receive peace and blessings, get into heaven and enjoy eternal life, but also to do good works on earth. The Holy Bible clearly reveals that Jesus Christ "gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us His very own people, totally committed to doing good deed" (Titus 2:14, NLT). It is also written in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Many of us look ignorant about the reason of our existence on earth, which is not primarily to receive great things, but to do good things for which God has created us in Christ Jesus. Are we Christians and our churches totally committed and actively participating in doing good works to the destitute children? Or are we busy making money without being concerned about sharing it with the needy? Regretfully, most churches today are found busy with services, meetings, programs and every other activity – everything else, except the practice of charity. We seem to be immersed in religious services without doing service to the destitute. Is this pleasing to God for whom the church exists? I wonder how apostle James would have sharply addressed our

religious and barren Christianity!

I doubt whether our worship services are truly pleasing to God when we refuse to listen to the cry of the fatherless children. More than the lip service kind of worship God is greatly glorified through our good works (Matthew 5:16). Lifting our hands unto God in worship is vain if we don't stretch our hands to help the destitute. May God's people and churches wake up to walk worthy according to the good purpose for which God has prepared us in advance!

Dear brothers and sisters, just pause for a minute to think of the orphans. If they are refused to show love and care, will it not have a negative impact on their childhood – and possibly on what they become in adulthood? The way they interact with people, the way they react to situations – won't all these be pathetically different if they grow up without proper parental love and care? It is the passion of God to use His people to share His love and compassion with the needy and helpless children. Picture those little innocent faces looking around for care and acceptance - these are the children who are tomorrow's future. Are we really unable to make a difference in their lives for the glory of Christ Jesus? Or are we still unwilling?

[1] See <http://answers.google.com/answers/threadview?id=134992> [2] See
<http://www.indianngos.com/issue/child/adoption/statistics/index.html> [3] See
<http://www.cira.med.yale.edu/research/indiaovc.pdf> [4] See
<http://orphanshope.org/projectsmore.html> [5] Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through The Centuries*
(Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), pg. 84.

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S. Wanted: Sanctifying Communities

Wanted: Sanctifying Communities

We are aware of the exhortation from God's word to us—to live holy, to pursue righteousness, to shun evil and to do good. But many of us suppose this process of sanctification is something that happens in isolation. This is something individualistic. This is my pursuit, my responsibility, my concern, my commitment, my act of discipline.

Yes, we know it is the Holy Spirit who is the source of sanctification. But we assume He does His sanctifying work just personally in us—the Spirit of God sanctifies and I have to yield to His sanctifying work through submission and discipline.

Now, there is no doubt of untruth in this assertion, but is this completely true?

Sanctification in Community

It is written, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Hebrews 3:12-13). Again it says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

What do these Scriptures speak about? Does it not talk about sanctification? Exhort one another so that you can guard each other from being hardened by the deceitful work of sin. Stir up each other to love and good works so that you would not live an unproductive life. Are these not sanctifying acts?

Sanctification is not something that happens only in isolation, the Holy Spirit dealing just personally with us. It happens most importantly in a community, the Holy Spirit using each other to sanctify us. Sanctification is primarily a community event. The Spirit of God conforms us into the likeness of Christ in and through the fellowship of believers.[1] Services without Sanctification
What can we say about contemporary Christianity? What is happening in our churches, communities and fellowships?

We modern Christians have become so overly concerned with privacy, so unduly reserved, so too preoccupied with minding one's own business that the acts of sanctification in a community has become something alien to us. John Piper rightly pointed out: "We live in a day when people shun responsibility and accountability. We are very individualistic and resistant to others holding us to any standard that might cross our immediate desires." [2]

Don't you think our gatherings are simply external rituals without internal sanctifying ministry of one another? We come together physically but stay miles away from each other from the spiritual work of sanctification. We have formal programs and nice Sunday services but no sanctifying

communities.

Sanctifying One Another

Notice, the said Scriptures—Hebrews 3:12-13; Hebrews 10:24-25, does not speak about pulpit ministry, just one man exhorting all others. There is, of course, room for the ministry of leaders. But these Scriptures primarily speak of one another ministry, sanctifying each other toward holiness and love. This is a community work. This is the act of the Holy Spirit in and through the community.

Sadly, how our fellowships are merely physically connected without no spiritual connection in a way that stimulates our faith, our love, our purity and our life with God! Honestly, when we come together, is our spiritual life boosted?

O, how much holy we would become, how much loving we will be, how much we can shine as the light of the world, how much salt can be spread across, how much glory we can bring to the name of God, if we heed to these Scriptures—seeking for and building sanctifying communities, such as encouraging each another, correcting one other, rebuking each other, holding one another accountable and stirring up each other to live a life worthy of the calling we have received from the Living God!

Wanted: Glowing Fellowships

Remember, no matter how much knowledgeable I may be, having great Christian experience, I need the sanctifying fellowship of the saints that stirs up my walk with God. How few of us realize like Charles Simeon (1759-1836), the nineteenth-century spiritual giant, who said, "I love to view all my Christian friends as fuel. Having gathered you all together at my hearth, I warm myself at your fire, and find my Christian love burn and grow."^[3]

I believe, one of the reasons we are so cold, so lukewarm, so shallow in Christian life is—we pursue spirituality and sanctification just as an individual act but not as a community. We somehow missed to understand from the New Testament teachings—we grow as a body, not as an individual part (1 Corinthians 12:14-27; Ephesians 4:15-16). Thus counsels John Piper, "Put yourself in some kind of fellowship, small enough so that this one-another ministry is happening. One of my first questions in dealing with a joyless saint is, "Are you in a small group of believers who care for each other and pray for each other and 'consider how to stir one another up to love'"? Usually the answer is no."^[4] Don't you think this is what you need? I think, I desperately need it. O, we need sanctifying communities!

Prayer

Father in heaven, we come before Your Throne of Grace and plead unto You to forgive us of our sin of individualism. Forgive our churches for not living according to Your Word. We brought so many systems and programs which seldom reflect the life of the church you gave in your Word. Bring revival in our communities so that we may seriously take your word and build sanctifying communities.

O God, may we not be content with our current shallow Christian life and church gathering. We need the fire of Your Spirit within us which consumes each other with Your presence. Give us such

communities that stir us up to live mightily for Your glory, loving each other and expanding Your kingdom by bringing the lost into Your fold. In the name of the Chief Shepherd of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Notes:

[1] In some cases where the fellowship with believers is impossible, God does provide His grace to fill the lack.

[2] John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), pg. 131 [3] Cited by Gordon MacDonald, *A Resilient Life* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), pg. 219

[4] John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), pg. 130

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S. What Destroys Your Children's Security and Tranquility

What Destroys Your Children's Security and Tranquility "Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." The Holy Bible (Ephesians 5:33)

Many parents suppose loving children gives them great security. Is this completely true? Does loving them what all that matters to children? Or are they expecting something more from their parents? I'm not exaggerating—we may heartily love our children and give them all the best, yet they may remain as insecure as ever. Surprised? How could this be possible? Not long ago I was engaged in counseling a young girl who messed up her life by getting into things she shouldn't. She had parents who loved her so much and gave everything they could for her. I was asked by her friend, "How come this girl felt lonely, insecure, in spite of having such caring parents?" I replied, "No matter how much parents love their children, if they do not love each other, they leave their children in absolute loneliness and insecurity."

Parents—Love One Another

Many parents are not aware that the ongoing conflicts between them (husband and wife) would actually destroy their children's security and tranquility. I can never forget the scary face of my son, Joy, when my wife and I used to often quarrel. It's obvious on children's face—that sense of abandonment, insecurity, confusion and loneliness—when their parents fight before them. Home is a place where children feel most secure, and if that home were in a mess, where else would they go? It would be surprising to know how many children dislike going home just because of the absence of peace therein.

Some frustrated parents say to each other, "I am done with you. I have no love for you. If I am going to live with you under this shelter it is only for the welfare of my children." As sacrificial as their love seems toward their children, pediatrician and author Wilson Wayne Grant made a striking statement, "The most important possession any child can have is two happy, well-adjusted parents who deeply love each other."

Ah, it is not uncommon for a husband and wife to experience the decline of love and affection in their marital life. When love is dying in marriage, it is good for parents to rekindle their affection for one another by working towards identifying and destroying those marriage killers rather than live as either strangers or enemies under one shelter, thereby disrupting their children's security and safety. Loving one another is not only essential for the security and joy of husbands and wives but also for the emotional wellness and mental happiness of children.

Kindly understand—children hate to see their parents living in conflicts. If you want confirmation, ask your children. When I asked my child's opinion about his parents getting into conflicts, he promptly responded—with an expression of disgust on his face—that he detests seeing his parents quarrel with each other. I find my children elated with joy when my wife and I enjoy one another. I have learned, the secret of children's happiness is in a loving, happy relationship between their father and mother. This may be surprising to many: research shows that it is not

divorce per se that harms children, but the continuing conflict between parents. Children are going to suffer as long as their parents don't live at peace each other, whether it leads to divorce or not.

Children's Craving for a Happy Home Do you know what our children crave for at home? It is a loving and peaceful atmosphere. Are we parents making every effort to create such an aura of peace and tranquility at home wherein our children feel most secure? Is our home a haven for our children? Let me tell you a fact—Children would rather love to stay in a shanty filled with bliss than in a mansion full of conflicts. Can our children testify, "There is no place on earth—wherein I feel secure, accepted and loved—like my home?" I come across numerous young people who share how their parents constantly fight and shout at each other, causing great trouble and distraction in their (children's) lives. The mental agony they undergo because of conflicts between their mother and father is insurmountable. Sometime back a case study was done among young students to determine what caused them the highest degree of sadness, anxiety and depression. Here are the causes—having parents separate or divorce, having parents argue with one another, and having parents who didn't spend enough time with them.

Dear parents, are you aware the kind of influence you are going to have on your children the way you get along with each other?

I once asked a young man, "What is it that you most hate in your parents?" These are his heart-rending words: "Fight and heated argument between mom and dad. This has affected both of us (brothers) a lot. It ruins the peace. It destroys our day. It is embarrassing because neighbors get to know. Lots of sad consequences we children have to face as a result of parents quarreling with each other." Can parents hear the cry of such children?

ENQUIRIES:

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S. What Happened on July 8, Two Hundred and Seventy Years Back?

What Happened on July 8, Two Hundred and Seventy Years Back?

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) On Wednesday, July 8, 1741, exactly two hundred and seventy years back, at Enfield, Connecticut, Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon which later came to be known as one of the most powerful sermons in the history of Christianity. He selected his text from Deuteronomy 32:35, "Their foot shall slide in due time." And he titled his message "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

Before going further, I am afraid our age of sensation may despise Jonathan Edwards and his sermon. Our generation is brimming with such superficial preachers, sugar-coated sermons and make-me-feel-comfortable listeners that many feel nauseated by hard and strong teachings. Our current Christianity is crowded with those who get enamored by messages on love, heaven, blessings, peace and success, but not righteousness, wrath, hell, warnings and curses. Nonetheless, the Holy Bible is a book of truth—not a book of sensation, teaching with balance both love and holiness, heaven and hell, blessings and curses, kindness and wrath, peace and suffering, grace and truth.

Although many emotionally suppose Edwards to be just a "fire and brimstone" preacher, he was in fact a broken and tenderhearted man, pleading with people to know God for whom they were created. Out of his more than 1000 sermons, only few messages were as fiery as "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." He spoke much on the sweetness, the pleasures and the glory of God which makes us to fall flat on our face before the Maker of the heavens and the earth. Just like the Holy Bible he diligently studied, he was a man of balance.

So, back to the grand day in history—July 8, 1741. It was said that when Edwards was about to preach the atmosphere was lousy. People came to the meeting as if they expected more of a fashion show than revival. One minister later wrote of the scene, "When they went into the meeting house, the appearance of the assembly was thoughtless and vain. The people hardly conducted themselves with common decency."

Then came Jonathan Edwards, an unimpressive, tall, fragile and thin man, with a high forehead and a long narrow face. He wore thick glasses to read his sermons. His voice was not up to the standard of homiletics, for it was monotonous, not strong and not loud but yet distinct, precise and solemn. He stood like a pillar, motionless, making no gestures with his head or hands.

Now Edwards poured his heart in prayer for revival for a long period of time and prepared his sermons with great intensity and hope to see the mighty move of the Holy Spirit. The time came for the Spirit of God to honor His servant's passion and labor. How many of us persistently pour out our hearts before God for revival and prepare messages with great anticipation for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? When Jonathan preached his message, "Sinners in the Hands of an

Angry God”, before he could even finish his message, people fell down under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and began crying out. One minister reported, “There was a great moaning and crying out throughout the whole house. What shall I do to be saved? Oh I am going to Hell. Oh what shall I do for Christ.” The atmosphere at the time was filled with such solemnity that they imagined the floor had opened and they were about to be swallowed up. There was such weeping, outcry and distress in the congregation that Edwards could not be heard. Although he asked them to be quiet, they could not and Edwards never finished the sermon. The revival continued for a long duration—converting souls, reviving the lukewarm, enlivening charity, increasing godliness and bringing untold glory to God.

If you ask me, “What do you think is the greatest need of our time?” I reply, “Not evangelism, not charity, not church planting...etc but REVIVAL.” Yes, we need revival. When revival comes, the former activities would be the outcome done with great zeal and love. Without revival, whatever we do may become shallow and dreary acts.

O, what the Lord had wrought through His servant, Jonathan Edwards, may He do that again in our time! May He raise servants—as bold and tender, as full of the Spirit and the word, as laborious and dependent on God, as bright and humble, as studious and prayerful, as God-soaked and passionate for the lost—as Edwards.

Lord, send your wind of revival upon us and sweep away lukewarmness and worldliness from our lives. Set our hearts on fire to love you passionately and to live for your glory and to accomplish your divine purpose on earth. Amen.

Here is a brief excerpt of the words Edwards spoke on July 8, 1741. Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure toward hell...There are the black clouds of God’s wrath now hanging over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder... The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like a fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet ‘tis nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment: ‘tis to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night...but that God’s hand has held you up: there is no other reason to be given why you haven’t gone to hell since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship: yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you don’t this very moment drop down into hell.

Oh sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in... And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has flung the door of mercy wide open, and stands in the door calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners;...many that were very lately in the same miserable condition that you are in, are now in a happy state, with their hearts filled with love to him that has loved them and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. How awful is it to be left behind at such a day!

Click here to read the entire sermon: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/sermons.sinners.html>

Source referred: Roberts Liardon, God's Generals: The Revivalists (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2008), pg. 157-159

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S. What I Believe

What I Believe

“Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18). The Holy Scriptures

I believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (66 books) as verbally inspired of God and inerrant in original writings. I believe that this inspiration extends equally and fully to all parts of the Scriptures and that they are the supreme and ultimate authority in faith and life. (John 5:39; John 17:8; John 17:26; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21) Therefore, I renounce every other writing that claims (as authorized) equality with the Holy Bible and that which contradicts these Scriptures. The Godhead

I believe in the One and the Only True God who is eternally existing as three Persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each having precisely the same nature, attributes, and perfections, and worthy of same worship and obedience. (Matthew 28:19-20; John 1:1-4) Therefore, I deny every other writing that denies the Godhead of Trinity.

Jesus Christ – His Person

I believe that Jesus Christ is True God and True Man (or fully God and fully Man) at the same time. He was eternally begotten of the Father, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. I believe that Jesus Christ is impeccable and unchanging and the Creator of all things. (Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 4:15) Therefore, I deny all other theories or doctrines that deny either the deity or the humanity (or both) of Jesus Christ, or His virgin conception, or His sinlessness and Sovereignty.

Jesus Christ – His Work

I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins as substitutionary sacrifice, paid in full for the atonement of our sins, that His crucified body was raised from the dead and that He ascended into heaven to appear before Father as our High Priest, Advocate and Mediator. I believe that Jesus Christ is coming again for His church. (1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 1:18-20; 1 Corinthians 15:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) Therefore, I abstain from every other belief that denies: substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins; His full atonement and finished work on the Cross; His death and resurrection in bodily form and His ascension and His second coming. The Holy Spirit

I believe that the Holy Spirit is the absolute Person and God, performing actions and possessing the attributes of deity. I believe that He took up His abode in the world in a special sense on the day of Pentecost, dwells in every believer, and His baptism unites all Christians in one body, the Church universal. In this age, the Holy Spirit carries out the ministries of restraining evil in the world, convicting people of sin, righteousness and judgment, regenerating all believers, indwelling and anointing all Christians and sealing them unto the day of redemption, baptizing into one body

of Christ all who are saved and filling each yielded believer for the power and service. (John 14:16-17; John 16:7-15; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 2:22; 2 Thessalonians 2:7) Therefore, I decline every other belief or teachings that denies the personhood and the deity of the Holy Spirit.

Fall

I believe that man was created in the image of God, that by voluntary transgression fell in sin and thereby incurred not only physical death but also spiritual death, which is separation from God. Because of the fallen state of man there is none good and righteous (Genesis 1:27; Romans 3:10-12; Romans 5:12-19; Isaiah 64:6) Therefore, I renounce every teaching that disbelieves the fallen state of mankind.

Salvation

I believe that salvation was accomplished solely by the finished work of Christ, by shedding His blood upon the Cross, and that nothing on the part of man can avail for salvation, i.e., all are sinners and that no one can reach heaven or attain salvation by good works. I believe that salvation was provided for the whole world by the grace of God; that Jesus Christ is the only way for Salvation; that whoever believes in Jesus Christ receives the new birth, becomes the partaker of divine nature and thus becomes a child of God, once for all, forever, but whoever rejects the Crucified Lord will be eternally condemned. (John 1:12; John 3:16; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:12; Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10; 2 Peter 1:3-4) Therefore, I stand against every other doctrine that believes salvation by good works and that denies the completed work of Christ on the Cross for man's salvation.

Eternity

I believe that man is born in flesh only once and dies once and then faces judgment and eternity. We reject the notion of pre-birth or re-birth or total annihilation of the soul. I believe in the reality of eternal heaven and hell. (Hebrews 9:27; Daniel 12:2-3; Hebrews 10:34; Revelation 20:15) Therefore, I deny every teaching that disbelieves judgment, eternity, heaven and hell.

Sin

I believe the sober teachings of the Holy Scriptures on the destructive nature of sin. If unrepentant, the Holy Bible explicitly teaches that – “the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, impure, thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers, the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, those who practice magic arts, the liars, the envious, the aggressors will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 21:8; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5) Therefore, I renounce every deceptive belief and teaching that ignores holiness and encourages sin and its consequences.

Church

I believe that the church is composed of all such persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are united together in the Body of Christ as a family of God. Jesus Christ is the Lord and Head of the Church and that every member in the local church is called to actively function for the edification of the body of Christ and effectively witness

for the salvation of the lost. (Ephesians 2:19-20; Ephesians 4:16; Mark 16:15-16) Therefore, I reject every teaching that denies the significance of the body of Christ.

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S. What are Your Idols?

What are Your Idols?

John, an apostle of Christ Jesus, ends his first epistle with these words, "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). Knowing that this epistle is written to God's people, this seems to be a strange exhortation, for we associate idols usually with pagan worship. Reading the entire epistle reveals that just like the Israelis of the Old Testament who were influenced by the pagan customs and often fell into the sin of idolatry, we do not see such a problem with the believers to whom John was addressing.

So, what does it mean to "keep yourselves from idols"?

It appears that John wasn't addressing a physical idol to which pagans pay homage. It seems to be a figurative language, using the term "idol" to make a significant point. An idol is anything that takes God's place, robbing the attention, passion and devotion which belong primarily to God alone. Although believers may detest worshiping pagan idols, it is quite possible for us to erect earthly things in our heart, substituting God's place, which could become no less than an idol.

Dethroning God

If we devote our attention and passion to anything more than God, it becomes an idol, making us idolaters. An idol is anything that dethrones God and enthrones itself in God's place.

What could be the possible idols in our lives? An idol could be entertaining things like movies, television, music, mobile phones, iPods, iPad, video games...etc. An idol could be recreational activities like sports, hobbies, parties or travel...etc. An idol could be social networks like Google, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, E-mail...etc. An idol could be food and beverages. An idol could be education and job. An idol could be sex and other pleasures. An idol could be power and success. An idol could be preoccupation with personal reputation (what people think of me??). An idol could be money and possessions. An idol could also be people like family, friends, girl/boyfriend, and celebrities (secular or spiritual). It may seem strange, but even church and ministry could become idols.

How many of us have idols as mentioned from the list above (one, few or many)? How many of us often think about these things more than God's glory and goodness? How many us are more passionate for them, giving less attention to prayer and meditation of God's word? How many of us are deeply attached to these things and lack passion for God's kingdom and His righteousness? How many of us are pursuing such things and lack hunger and thirst for God and His intimacy? How many of us admire the created things more than worshiping the Creator of the heavens and the earth? How many of us have placed them on the throne of our heart, pushing God to the footstool?

Turning Blessings into Idols

Remember, an idol may not necessarily be evil in itself; it may be a good thing to which we may devote our hearts more than God Himself. It is easy for us to become addicted to good things and remain blinded to sin by justifying ourselves, "What's wrong with this or that?" Let us take heed to these words of Susannah Wesley, which she wrote in a letter to her son, John Wesley, describing about what sin is:

Take this rule: whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself.

We need to understand that sin is not just stealing, committing murder and adultery; it is also giving God the secondary place in our lives by indulging ourselves in the good things of the world. We may love Jesus and yet sin against Him when we love Him less than other things (Matthew 10:37). We may thank God for what He gives and yet idolize those blessings.

If we examine our heart, what does our thoughts, dreams and passions speak about? Are they set upon God or upon the world?

We may be active in some of the spiritual activities, but if the Giver of life has not been given the central place in our lives, we are still idolaters and no better than pagans.

So, here is the fact—one of our greatest battles in Christian life is to fight against anything (be it inherently good or evil) that tries to penetrate our hearts to take priority over God's place. And this is what holiness is—separating ourselves from everything and consecrating ourselves in everything to live for God's glory.

Enthroning God

Dear believers of Christ Jesus, God gave us every blessing on earth so that we would enjoy them with gratefulness towards Him. He gave us everything as a means to manifest His love and mercy so that in turn we would be devoted to Him in our daily life. However, we sinful people often turn those means into objects, blessings into idols, and treat God as a means to possess them.

Don't we often ignore God and give ourselves to be enslaved by those things which God has given us for His glory and for our welfare?

Therefore, shall we allow the Holy Spirit to convict us of idols within us? Shall we repent of any idols which we have erected in our hearts? Shall we turn from those good things of which we have become slaves and return to the good Lord who loved us and gave His life for us? Shall we give the Living God the utmost place He deserves in our lives? Shall we make a commitment, "I will not allow anything to divert my attention, passion and devotion from the Lord in whom there is fullness of joy, peace and satisfaction?" When the world makes much noise, enticing us to itself, let these words of apostle John ring constantly in our ears, "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

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S. When God Does Not Make Sense

When God Does Not Make Sense

Recently, in our training class, questions were raised from the Holy Bible about why God did certain things which seems unreasonable to our finite minds. No doubt we all find some incidents in the Scripture, leading us to question – Why God did that thing? How did He let that happen? How can He do that? When people do not make sense, that is endurable, but when God does not make sense, it is quite troubling to our mind. Don't we expect God to be the most reasonable being, I mean, according to our perception? What then shall we do when God does not make sense to us?

Here is one important lesson I have learned in life—when it comes to man, we look at his actions and understand who he is. But when it comes to God, we need to look at who He is and understand His actions. The Scripture makes it clear that we do not always comprehend His ways and cannot at all times trace His paths, for He is infinite and sovereign.

- As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).
- Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! (Romans 11:33).
- He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Although His works and ways are incomprehensible to our finite mind, the Scripture makes it flatly obvious about who God is and how just He is in everything He does.

- He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He. (Deuteronomy 32:4) • As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. (2 Samuel 22:31) • The LORD is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in Him. (Psalms 92:15) • Everything He does is right and all His ways are just. (Daniel 4:37)
- Great and marvelous are Your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are Your ways, King of the ages. (Revelation 15:3)

Now this is what I have seen the devil working on many minds—when what God does do not make sense, he tempts us to doubt the goodness of God. When we try to understand God's ways in the absence of His holy nature and good attributes, the devil grabs such endeavor to ruin our faith. O, how many have abandoned their faith as they yielded to the temptation of the Enemy whose sole aim is to use what people do not understand about God's actions and infuse doubts in them so that they would misunderstand God and turn their back against Him.

So, this is what I have learned—when what God does do not make sense, I simply have to trust who He is. This, I believe, is absolutely sensible. I do not have to understand the reasons behind everything He does. Am I not a mere man, whose understanding is limited and even flawed? But I know from the Holy Scripture—God is faithful and upright. His works are perfect and all His ways are just. He is a faithful God who does no wrong. Upright and just is He.

Come, therefore, let us trust the Lord, “for the LORD our God is righteous in everything He does” (Daniel 9:14).

ENQUIRIES:

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S. When We Dont Feel Like Praying

When We Don't Feel Like Praying

We all are aware of the fact that Christian life is not always a mountaintop experience. There are times we have to walk through the valley, which, in the words of St. John of the Cross, is called, "Dark Night of the Soul." When our soul is plunged into darkness, one most important commandment we find it hard to obey is 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing."

How painful are those moments when we are externally encircled by darkness and internally filled with dryness!

What can we do when we don't feel like praying?

How can we walk with God when there is no inner desire to talk with Him? When prayer is an activity whereby we are enabled to get through life's struggles and temptations, what can be done when our heart do not wish to open itself out to communicate with its Creator? When there is no passion in us to walk on the path of spiritual disciplines, how can we take a step? There is a song, in one of my vernacular languages, which goes like this, "The goal is in its place and the path to reach it is also in its place; but, when the feet do not cooperate, what can a traveler do!" When I sought the Lord in this matter, my mind has been enlightened to understand what can be done when we don't feel like praying. I would like to make my point by using three examples.

Sickness

Although we all love to stay healthy, sickness is an inevitable part of life. We know what it is to fall sick. Our tongue becomes bland. Our stomach finds food repugnant. And those feelings of revulsion. We hate to intake anything. Even the kind of food which is naturally relished by us now turns nasty. What is it we are told by doctors at such unpleasant situation? Like it or not—we have to still take good diet in spite of our feelings which says 'no' to food. There is no other way. To listen to our feelings at that time is to let our body and health deteriorate.

During our sickness, when we don't submit to feelings and discipline ourselves to eat, there are two good outcomes that we reap.

First, healthy diet nourishes our body and plays a vital role in the process of healing; mind you, even medicines do not become a substitute to diet. In fact, good food enhances to fulfill the purpose of medicines we take.

Second, compelling ourselves to eat in spite of reluctant feelings not only brings nourishment to our body but also lead us to the point where we eventually like the very thing we hated to do, i.e. to eat that which we generally love as we get well. When we do what we do not like to do because it is the right thing to do, we end up liking what we disliked to do.

So, here is the point. When we fall into spiritual sickness, our natural tendency is to resist praying and meditating on God's word. However, it is still necessary for us to pray and meditate in spite of

our weakness and resistant feelings, for this is the only way for the nourishment of our soul, although the healing is not necessarily immediate. This would also eventually lead us to the point where we again love praying and meditating as our soul finds healing. In our battle with feelings and inner dryness, when we keep on pushing ourselves to pray, we inescapably find victory and witness rivers of living water flowing in and through us.

Sadly, many of us yield to those fleeting feelings, quit battling, and suffer from spiritual malnourishment. This isn't the pathway for victorious Christian life. To depend on feelings to agree with us in order to do things we are required to do is but to put ourselves on an unstable and slippery path. Just as resisting to take healthy diet because we do not feel like eating is detrimental to our physical health, so is neglecting to pray, because we do not feel like praying, proves disastrous to our spiritual health. Let us fix this fact in our mind—we do things because it is the right thing to do, whether we feel like doing it or not.

One significant principle we learn during our sickness is that we eat food, not primarily to enjoy the taste or because we feel like eating, but to survive. Likewise, we pray, not because we like to, but to survive in God and to live for Him. As a matter of fact, much prayer is required from us when we do not feel like praying, for it is the only antidote to spiritual sickness. C. H. Spurgeon rightly said, "If I feel myself disinclined to pray, then is the time when I need to pray more than ever." There is no other way to overcome those feelings unwilling to pray than by praying, even more.

Therefore, let us learn to control our feelings rather than allow our feelings to control us. May we learn to keep going, with God's gracious help, despite our feelings which try to pull us back. When we manage our emotions and keep seeking the face of our Lord, we learn to be led by the Spirit of God, not by wild emotions. The words of Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones are worth considering to apply, "The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand."

Marriage

Another example that comes to my mind is marriage. Who doesn't know that marriage is not always sailing on the romantic moods of honeymoon! Feelings of tension and frictions between husband and wife aren't uncommon in many homes. How effortless it is for the once bed of flowers to turn into bed of thorns! It doesn't come as a surprise when the deeply-fallen-in-love couple reaching the stage of dryness and boredom. There are times, even often, when once passionate-for-each-other couple may fall into the land of wilderness, where the desire for intimate communication with his/her spouse can be lost. What could be done at such dry situation?

One most significant advice wise counselors offer to bring life into marriage is by improving communication. Spending time with each other prevents a relationship from departing from one another. It is by working on such relational areas that marital life can be revived. Lukewarm couples realize at that time—marriage is sustained by commitment and discipline, not by feelings and mere expectations. To do whatever one's feeling say is but to invite destruction in relationship.

If couples are dependent on feelings to love each other, they may have to face two disastrous results:

First, when they don't feel like loving each other, there are chances for them to get attracted towards another person, developing an affair, whether emotional or actual.

Second, the marital life may either become completely dead, pushing the coffin as long as one can, or it may lead to break-up in relationship.

Therefore, to avoid these plights, it is crucial for couples to resist being led by feelings and be committed, staying strong in will to build up their marital life. As they improve their communication and give themselves up for each other, denying their self-centered feelings, their first love can be restored. Beware, to wait for some good feelings or sensations to automatically arise to love is to make one's relationship even more fragile and is likely to crumble to pieces. This is true even in our life with God. There are times we lose our passion for our Divine Bridegroom. Our love towards our Savior becomes lukewarm. We don't feel like communicating with Him. Spending time with Him appears like wandering in mind. During that wilderness walk, it is much possible for our hearts to flirt easily with worldly things. The world and its pleasures become more fascinating than the Maker of all things. We may progressively drift away from God and permit other things to sit on the throne of our heart. (mind you, when we don't do the right things, we don't end up doing nothing; we do the wrong things.) And finally, God may become once-upon-a-time lover of our lives.

Just as it is important for a spouse to overcome his reluctant feelings and start saving his martial life, especially by working on communication and sparing time, it is also necessary for us to resist yielding to those fleeting feelings and work on improving our communication by spending time with our Heavenly Father. Although feelings are involved in love, the fact is— love is not all about feelings. Most importantly, it is commitment, regardless of our feelings, towards the best interest of our spouse. Therefore, if we are committed to love God, we don't wait for our feelings to take us on an exciting emotional prayer trip. Whether our feelings agree or not, we pray to Him, earnestly seek His face and become desperate for Him. Such examples are replete in the book of Psalms.

Furthermore, let us know that God's love towards us will neither increase nor decrease, for He loves us infinitely and is invariably passionate for our relationship. During dry times of our life, God looks upon us to see how desperate we are for Him. He takes delight in us when we long and thirst for Him, and wrestle for His relationship, the Source of living water. He doesn't drag us to Himself but rejoices when we drag ourselves nearer to Him. Theresa of Avila is reported to have asked God to make her pray four hour every day. "Ah," replied God, "as I do not make the birds to eat, neither will I make you pray; the birds eat because they get hungry. When you are hungry for Me you, too, will pray, Theresa."

C.S. Lewis said it so well, "When you feel like praising God and you praise Him, that's wonderful. But if you don't feel like praising Him and you praise Him anyway, that's an exceptionally sweet fragrance in His nostrils." To put it in the context of prayer, "When you feel like praying to God and you pray to Him, that's wonderful. But if you don't feel like praying to Him and you pray to Him anyway, that's an exceptionally sweet fragrance in His nostrils." Are we offering such prayers that are exceptionally sweet fragrance to our Lord? Our commitment to the Lord is well proven, not when we do things we like to do, but when we do things, regardless of our feelings, to please Him. It wasn't in vain that our Lord said, "If anyone wishes to follow Me, he must deny himself..." The battle of self-denial is frequently faced and fiercely fought in our closet. God's intimacy belongs to

those who don't give up! TO BE CONTINUED.....

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below (or) write to E-mail: friendsofchrist@gmail.com

S. Where is the Money of the Church Going?

Where is the Money of the Church Going?

Did you ever think about how the early churches had spent their finance? When I asked this question to a vice-principle of a Bible College, he said, "I never thought about it; I don't know." I appreciate the honest confession of this man, for it is not easy to be in such a position and admit, "I don't know."

I wonder how many believers and leaders truly thought about this matter. And if they thought about this issue and know the answer then I wonder how many are serious enough to follow the example of the early church.

Incidentally, it is obvious in the early churches of the New Testament that they didn't practice the concept of tithing, for they were not under the finite system of law but in the infinite freedom of grace. The renowned bible teacher, Ray C. Stedman wrote, "Nowhere in the New Testament do you find tithing taught or laid upon Christians." [1] Does this mean they didn't practice giving at all?

Certainly not! The fact is that the early church gave more than a tithe. They practiced generous giving, for they were taught to live by grace. Paul wrote, "But just as you excel in everything-- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this grace of giving." (2 Corinthians 8:7) We need to think - Is grace motivated by unconditional love or by conditional law?

However, there is nothing wrong to set aside tithe as a minimum act of discipline but one should know that it is not a maximum offering. The principle of the New Testament is this: "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." (2 Corinthians 9:6) Based on this principle, one must examine whether the concept of tithing is sparingly sowing or generously sowing.

Let us come back to our topic to where money in the early church was primarily directed. After examining the following Scriptures the readers themselves would be able to clearly understand the precise answer.

A. EXPLICIT EXHORTATIONS ON GIVING * Romans 12:13 – Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

* Galatians 6:9-10 - Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

* Titus 3:8 - This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

* Hebrews 6:10-11 - God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.

* Hebrews 13:2 - Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

* Hebrews 13:3 – Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Albert Barnes writes that remembering those in prison and those who are mistreated means:

(1) To feel deep compassion for them;

(2) We are to remember them in our prayers;

(3) We are to remember them, as far as practicable, with aid for their relief.

* Hebrews 13:15-16 - Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise-- the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

* James 1:27 - Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

* James 2:15-17 - Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

* 1 Peter 4:9 - Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

* 1 John 3:16-18 - This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

B. GENERAL SCRIPTURES ON GIVING

* 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 - Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.

Comment: Paul told the church to set aside a sum of money on the first day of every week (Sunday) so that this relief offering can be sent to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

* 2 Corinthians 9:1-2 - There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.

* 2 Corinthians 9:7 - Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (Isn't this one of the most often quoted verses from the Holy Bible???)

Comment: Remember that Paul gave these exhortations to the Corinthian church in the context of raising relief fund to help the poor Christians.

* Galatians 2:9-10 - James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

* Acts 20:34-35 - You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Also, one of the primary qualifications of a leader is to be generous. Along with the above Scripture, consider the following Scriptures:

* 1 Timothy 3:2 - Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...

* Titus 1:8 - Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

C. INDIVIDUAL EXAMPLES

* Acts 4:36-37 - Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Comment: Remember that these offerings that were put at the apostles' feet were distributed to the needy people (See Acts 4:35).

* Acts 9:36 - In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.

* Acts 10:1-4 - At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God."

* 1 Corinthians 16:15 - You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it.

* Philemon 1:7 – “Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.” It is also written in Proverbs 11:25, “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

D. CORPORATE EXAMPLES * Acts 2:45 – Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

* Acts 4:32-35 - All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they share everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

* Acts 6:1-4 - In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

Comment: In the above Scripture, it becomes quite clear that the apostles counted helping the needy and the ministry of the word as quite important. They chose seven men so that helping the needy would not be neglected while doing the ministry of the word. How many leaders in our day are balanced in this way, meeting both the physical and spiritual needs?

* Acts 11:28-30 - One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

* Acts 24:17 - After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings.

* Romans 15:25-27 - Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

* 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 - And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.

Also, meditating on Jesus' teaching reveals to us the importance of helping the needy: Luke 10:25-37 (The Good Samaritan); Luke 12:32 (Giving to the Poor); Luke 14:1-14 (Inviting the Poor to the banquet); Luke 16:19-31 (Rich and the Lazarus); Mark 10:17-22 (Rich Young man to sell everything and give to the Poor); Matthew 25:31-46 (The Sheep and the Goat).

What do we observe in the above Scriptures (see Part 1)? We need to understand that these exhortations were not written to social organizations or charitable groups; these were written to the local churches of Christ Jesus. When we examine all the exhortations on giving in the New Testament, which need takes prominence in the priority list? Where did the money in the early church primarily go?

It is quite obvious from the Scriptures—the poor and needy people were of primary importance to the early church. John MacArthur in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary 1 Corinthians* (pg. 451), comments, “The primary purpose of giving, as taught in the New Testament, is for the support of the saints, the church.” Also, Church historian Earle E. Cairns, in *Christianity Through The Centuries*, notes that even during the middle part of the second century the collection was primarily taken to help the poor and needy people. According to the information found in *First Apology* by Justin Martyr and Didache, Earle E. Cairns mentions that at the end of the fellowship of the church, “They finally took up a collection for aid to widows and orphans, the sick, the prisoners, and strangers. The meeting was then dismissed, and all the people made their way to their homes” (pg. 84)

Besides the New Testament's emphasis on helping the needy, even in the Old Testament, wherein tithing was an act of obedience to the law, there was a special tithe which the Lord ordained to help the poor people. Interestingly, those who emphasize on the mandatory practice of tithing today rarely mention this Scripture, much less practice. At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. (Deuteronomy 14:28-29)

Sadly, where is most of the money going today? Are poor and needy in the priority list of the modern day churches? Sometime back, I did a survey of some churches in my city to rate their overall activity in charity. Do you know what the result was? Not more than 8% of the churches are active in doing service to the poor and the needy.

It seems most of the money is going towards buildings, administration and programs, but the poor and needy are greatly neglected by the churches when they should be on their priority list. We need to ask, “Is this pleasing to God for whom the church exists? There is a great necessity to do the former which is our highest priority.

We need a reformation in the way we use the finance of the church. The preachers and teachers of our day must realize the importance of the poor and raise their voice to wake up the churches. Someone rightly commented, “No kind of religious services paid to the Deity can be of any avail, if we neglect the royal law of charity.” Our words have no value if we do not practically demonstrate the love of God. So the leaders must change and bring change into the churches. The churches must take heed to what John MacArthur said, “Support of the poor and needy in the world in the

name of the Lord is a high-priority Christian activity by Scriptural standards.” May God’s people and churches wake up to walk worthy according to the good purpose for which God has prepared us in advance – “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)! But some may question—what about giving to missions? What about supporting the pastors? How did the early church give much to the needy when it seems to be highly difficult in our modern day church?

We have learned till now how the poor and needy were on the priority list of the early church’s financial budget. The book of Acts reveals how some believers gave up even their property to help the needy (Acts 4:32 ff). But is there place in the church’s finance to support Christian servant leaders? Of course, there is! Although the money in the early church was used primarily to help the poor and needy, giving priority to those within the family of God, there are few exhortations which speak about assisting Christian leaders too. Those who give themselves to the extensive ministry of the Word and labor in expanding His Kingdom are worthy of generous support. Let us look at the following Scriptures:

- 1 Corinthians 9:14 - In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. (Said within the context of the rights of an apostle)
- Galatians 6:6 - Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. (Of course, this text is debated among biblical scholars whether it refers to sharing monetary things with the instructors. The language isn’t readily apparent, leaving room for different opinions)
- 3 John 1:5-8 – Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth. (cf. Titus 3:13-14) (Written about traveling evangelists and apostles)
- 1 Timothy 5:17 - The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. (Spoken about the shepherds of the church)

Now, let us come to the issue about how the early churches, although generally lacking affluence, were able give so much priority to the poor and needy people, without neglecting to support the laborious preachers and teachers of the word. There are two reasons why this was possible:

First, the early church gathered as small communities in a simple, informal structure, like a house (Acts 2:46; Acts 8:3; Acts 12:5; Acts 12:12; Acts 16:40; Acts 20:7-8; Romans 16:3; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:1-2; 2 John 1:10). There was no huge investment for buying properties and constructing buildings for church gathering, including for its maintenance. In fact, they sold their property and gave to the needy people rather than taking money from people to acquire property.

It is a well known fact of our day that most of the church's money is spent in constructing buildings and maintaining them rather than meeting the needs of the poor and missions. I appreciate those few churches, besides investing in buildings and salaries, giving generously to help the needy. But I am sad at those many churches that neglect the poor, needy and missions, and just increase the offerings in their bank account month after month and spend for structures than to support people. I am also troubled by those leaders who emphasize to believers on bringing tithes unto them while ignoring to motivate them to help the needy and to support missions.

Well, keeping all these troubles and sad examples aside, isn't it still a good model to gather as small communities in an informal structure, like in a spacious house, or in an economical rented place, or build a simple hall, and use money for better purposes? The commentators of Life Application Bible Commentary of Mark, warned, "If our churches spend large amounts on their physical buildings and ignore missions, evangelism, and CARE FOR THE POOR, they will likewise come under God's judgment" (Brue B. Batton, et al., - Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1994, 319)

Secondly, it is important to note that in the early church there were primarily two kinds of ministries— itinerant and local ministry. Gordon Fee, a highly respected New Testament scholar and commentator, points out that leadership in the New Testament was generally of two kinds – itinerant and local. (Listening to the Spirit in the Text (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959, 141) The itinerant teachers, evangelists and church planters were constantly on the move and therefore required help from the churches. But the local church leaders who were settled in their own locale, known as elders or pastors, were generally bi-vocational, which means, shepherding the church as a volunteer with another occupation to support themselves. To these local leaders, Paul exhorted, "You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:34-35) Of course, Paul did say in 1 Timothy 5:17, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work (literally in Greek, 'labor,' i.e. work until exhaustion) is preaching and teaching." There are workers, though not all, in the body of Christ who labor extensively in preaching and teaching and such laborers ought to be helped by the church (we need to think whether giving a sermon on Sunday with few activities during the week is truly what labor is in ministry?). But to claim that whosoever aspires to lead a church must resign from his job and be completely dependent on the church for his sustenance is something not known or taught in the New Testament Scriptures.

Jackson W. Carroll, Professor Emeritus of Religion and Society at Duke University Divinity School, notes, "Christianity has a long tradition of bivocational pastoral leadership... Indeed, most pastoral leaders in the early church were bivocational." (God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006, 79)

Well-known author of Understanding and Applying the Bible, Robertson McQuilkin, implies that one reason why the early church gave more to help the poor and also to support missions is that there were no church buildings and the local ministers were bivocational. (Five Smooth Stones: Essentials Principles for Biblical Ministry (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007, 139). Space

would not be sufficient to provide plethora of evidences on how the early local church leaders were practicing bi-vocational church ministry.

Well, what is the point I am trying to make? I am in no way condemning the traditional practice of church buildings and salaried local shepherds. My whole concern is how best we can use the resources of God—in helping the poor and needy, supporting itinerant teachers and missionaries and also helping those few local church leaders who labor in preaching and teaching—by practicing the simple, yet efficient, model of the early church.

One of the best contemporary models I have seen and studied are the churches planted by Dr. Joy David. He is a native of India, born and brought up in the state of Kerala. He had done his PhD in Engineering and while working as a professor in a university, he felt the leading of God to commit himself to missionary work. He took voluntary retirement service and gave himself to planting churches and building them since twenty three years. He, along with his team, had planted some good churches, especially in south India, and raised many leaders. I am glad to know him personally and am blessed through his exemplary lifestyle.

Unlike many I have witnessed, it is amazing to see how the churches Dr. Joy David had planted are faithful stewards of God's resources. The churches generally gather in simple structures, as small communities, and follow the NT pattern of plural leadership. With very few being in full-time preaching and teaching, most of the local leaders are bi-vocational. Therefore, all the money that comes to these churches are used to help the needy, missions, the orphans, and also to support itinerant workers....etc. Since the believers know how carefully and generously the money is spent to meet the appropriate needs, thousands of rupees from all the churches are given every month as love offerings, even without any emphasis of giving from the leaders. May the Lord plant such charity-mission-centered churches that would use its finances in a way God honored in His word!

We have been exploring the Scriptures about how the church's finance was and should be used. We looked into the word of God and learned the importance given to the aspect of giving and sharing with the poor and needy, and also supporting the laborious Christian workers. There are few more things that are on my heart to share with you in order to give better clarity to the message.

Priority

There are so many poor and needy people existing in the world. Can we help all of them? Practically speaking, we are aware it is beyond our ability to help every needy person. Nevertheless, there is one thing we can do—we can prioritize. The Holy Bible does give an answer about who are mostly entitled to receive our help.

I shared in the first part of these series of messages—the explicit and general Scriptures, individual and corporate examples—about the importance of giving to the needy people. If we carefully notice all these Scriptures, we witness that people within the body of Christ stand first in the priority list. May I share some of them with you again for your keen observation:

Romans 12:13 – Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Galatians 6:9-10 - Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people

especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Hebrews 6:10-11 - God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped His people and continue to help them.

James 2:15-17 - Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

1 John 3:16-18 - This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

1 Corinthians 16:1-3 - Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.....

2 Corinthians 9:1-2 - There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints...

The above Scriptures make it evident to us that God's people are our priority when it comes to giving and helping. The church is God's family and the believers are undoubtedly our family members. After our physical family, doesn't our spiritual family (church) come next? Therefore, we need to see that the poor and needy believers in the body of Christ are given foremost attention in charity. Such priority given to one's own community is found even in the Old Testament wherein God said, "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land" (Deuteronomy 15:11). This being understood, I suppose, we need more clarification about what kind of people can be prioritized even within the body of Christ. The Holy Scripture speaks about the church in two different manners—universal and local. All believers in the world who biblically believed in the Lord Jesus Christ fall into the category of universal church. And the regular assembling of saints in a given location is called a local church. So here is how it can work:

When it comes to helping the needy, we need to give priority to those needy believers within our local church. If we see any brother or sister in our own church, either poor needing help or needy because of some dire situation, let us give attention to help that person. The local church is our immediate spiritual family and such members cannot be neglected, for they are always our first concern in receiving our help.

The second priority can be given to the churches with whom the local church is associated. This association does not necessarily mean churches within a particular organization. If a local church knows other churches or has some kind of relationship with them, the needy ones in those churches may fall second in the priority list of financial or material help. For example, when our church comes to know anyone who is in genuine need and belongs to another church we personally know, we take it as our privilege to meet that need in whatever way we can.

The needy ones in the churches that are in the other parts of the country or the world may come third in our priority. There are numerous poor and needy people in the churches that are in other parts of the world to whom the spiritually as well as physically blessed churches can make a great contribution to help them. There may be local churches in which there are no poor or needy

believers and such churches can considering giving to the needy people of other lands. For instance, how wonderful it is to see few churches from America helping many needy believers in India! Of course, in doing charity to the churches we do not personally know, much scrutiny is required to know the credibility of the mediators and the receivers.

Finally, the poor and needy, outside the body of Christ (unbelievers), cannot be neglected. They are our priority too, after God's people. Although they may not belong to the family of Christ, they are still God's creation and for whom Christ laid His life on the Cross. God loves them and loves to help them through us. Therefore, it is a great privilege to witness the love of Christ to the unbelievers through our physical help. We are the representatives of Christ, not only in calling the world to find salvation through the preaching of the gospel, but also in demonstrating His compassion through charity. John MacArthur well-commented: The primary purpose of giving, as taught in the New Testament, is for the support of the saints, the church. A Christian's first obligation is to support fellow believers, individually and collectively. The church's first financial responsibility is to invest in its own life and its own people (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 2 Corinthians 9:12-15; Php 4:14-16).

Obviously that is not the only economic obligation we have. The parable of the Good Samaritan makes it clear that we should minister personally and financially to anyone in need, regardless of religion, culture, or circumstances (Luke 10:25-37). Paul also teaches that we should "do good to all men" (Galatians 6:10). But in the same verse he goes on to say, "And especially to those who are of the household of faith" (cf. 1 John 3:17). In 2 Corinthians 9:13 the apostles calls for a generous distribution "to all." Support of the poor and needy in the world in the name of the Lord is a high-priority Christian activity by Scriptural standards. (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984, 451).

Now, when it comes to helping the unbelievers, there are two important things I want to share:

1) We need to understand that salvation of the souls is more important than just meeting the physical needs of the people. What is the point in helping people just physically while eventually letting them go to hell! It is said that Christianity has often fallen into two extremes: treating a person either as a soul without body or a body without soul. Therefore, let us help the poor and needy with prime intention and effort to save the souls.

I believe, just giving our focus to the poor while neglecting evangelism is unbiblical. We need to strike the balance, saving the souls and meeting the physical needs. Remember, charity is not a substitute for evangelism. If Christians just focus on meeting the physical needs of the people while neglecting gospel preaching, they are no better than other religious people. And if Christians just preach the gospel and manifest no compassion in meeting the physical needs of the people, they are worse than other religious folks.

2) It is important that we need to preach the gospel, do evangelism, for this is our biblical mandate. However, let us not reject our physical help to people because of their denial to believe in Christ. Although we help others with a concern for their eternal security, we don't cease to help them if they reject our message, for our Heavenly Father causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45). If anyone withdraws his physical help when others deny the gospel message, he/she is not manifesting Christ-like

compassion, but trying to bribe others with their material things with a passion to win souls in an unbiblical manner.

So, let us continue to preach the gospel in spite of rejection and continue helping others irrespective of their positive or negative response to the gospel we preach. And who knows whether these people, after witnessing our unconditional love for them, may turn to Christ someday! May I end this section with a quote by an esteemed theologian of our day, Wayne Grudem: The evangelistic work of declaring the gospel is the primary ministry that the church has toward the world. Yet accompanying the work of evangelism is also a ministry of mercy, a ministry that includes caring for the poor and needy in the name of the Lord. Although the emphasis of the New Testament is one giving material help to those who are part of the church (Acts 11:29; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 1 John 3:17), there is still an affirmation that is right to help unbelievers even if they do not respond with gratitude or acceptance of the gospel message.

Jesus tells us, “Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:35-36) (Systematic Theology. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994, 868)

I think it is important for us to have a clear understanding of - “Who are the poor?” and “Who are the needy ones?” Describing this would help us to have a better understanding of this message.

Poor

Randy Alcorn is one of the prolific evangelical authors of our day. His ministry, Eternal Perspective Ministries, is dedicated to teaching and helping the poor in the world. His generosity is such that he gives away 100 percent of the royalties of his books to support missions, poor and other ministries. Now Randy cites the statistics that if you have sufficient food, decent clothes, live in a house that keeps the weather out, and own a reasonably reliable means of transportation, you are among the top 15% of the world’s wealthy. If you have any money saved, a hobby that requires some equipment or supplies (fishing, hunting, skiing, astronomy, coin collecting, painting), a variety of clothes in your closet, two cars (in any condition), and live in your own home, you are in the top 5% of the world’s wealthy.

So, what can be concluded about who the poor are? The poor are those who lack basic things to survive in this world, such as:

Food

Clothes

Good water

Shelter

Medicines...etc.

The Living God of the Holy Bible is very much concerned about the poor. He can be rightly called as the “God of the poor” (this doesn’t mean He despises the rich). It is written, “If you help the poor, you are lending to the LORD—and he will repay you!” (Proverbs 19:17, NLT). Those who

were fasting, praying and seeking the favor of God, the Lord rebuked them, saying, “Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” (Isaiah 58:7) As Christ is the head of His body, the church, He wants His parts to get actively involved in charity, manifesting His love and compassion to the poor, especially to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. But here is a word of caution: beware of helping those who are physically fit and have opportunities to work but yet remain idle and beg others for help. Such ones ought to be taught the principle Paul laid: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Let us help the helpless, but not make those who can help themselves lazy.

Needy Who are the needy then? Although the poor can be considered as the needy, the term “needy” may also fall in different categories. A needy person may not generally be a poor person but there are circumstances that unexpectedly come up, driving him/her into a difficult situation which requires help, such as:

Unemployment (no opportunity to work and earn despite willingness)

Sickness (no money to buy medicines)

Physical disability (loss of an essential part of the body, compelling to depend on others for help)

Loss of money or material things to provide oneself (due to natural disaster or theft...etc.)

Other unprepared, unexpected and emergency situations.

Remember, the point I am trying to make is how the money of the church, contributed for noble causes, can be used. If a person wants to individually bless someone with a gift, which may not be essential to survive (like phone, computer, vehicle...etc), that is something personal. Yet the church, without neglecting the poor and needy, can also contribute such things to support various ministries.

Missions and other Ministries May the readers not misunderstand that I am only defending to help the poor and needy, thereby causing an impression that all the money of the church must be used only for such purposes. There are other needs too that need to be met, like supporting the Christian workers and other ministries that are focused on evangelism or counseling or apologetics or church planting or discipleship or bible translation...etc. There are varieties of ministries in the body of Christ and such services, done with great diligence and wisdom, ought to be supported. By the way, when it comes to support the Christian workers, may we know that a person is truly a laborer in God’s service. It is saddening to see so many in Christian ministry, receiving good support, but without shedding sweat in their service to the Lord. I have observed that a person can be sincere, yet may not be a diligent worker. The Lord wants His servants to be diligent, not slothful. As Watchman Nee put it, “God’s servants are always industrious.” Being diligent isn’t being workaholic but giving oneself to labor within appropriate time and responsibility. The often cited Scripture to support Christian workers comes from 1 Timothy 5:17, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” It is noteworthy to mention that the word ‘work’ used in conjunction with preaching and teaching, emphasizes energy, labor, working to the point of weariness. (Holman New Testament Commentary—Acts. General Editor: Max Anders. Author: Knute Larson.

(Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000, pg. 226). It is the laborers, diligent workers, hard working people who deserve financial support. They are the ones who make a difference in expanding the Kingdom of God.

Now, what should our response be when the church leaders do not use the money appropriately? What decision can we make regarding our giving when they neglect poor and the needy, missions and other genuine needs, and lavishly spend money on things that are not truly necessary?

There are numerous people who suppose that their responsibility is just to give the money and what happens to that money is not their concern. In my conversation with a young man, the issue was raised about how wisely the finance of the church ought to be spent. This young person said, "I give money to the church and if it is not used properly, it is God who is going to judge them. I can't do anything about it." I then asked him, "If your sister is sexually abused in the church by a church leader, would you say the same thing?" He blurted, "No!" He was a bright guy—he got the message.

Judging

One of the major reasons for the abuse of God's money in the church is because of lack of financial accountability. God would eventually judge every person on the Last Day. But as long as we live on this earth, we have been given the responsibility by God to judge those within the church. To the passive believers of Corinth who were silent over the prevailing sin among them, Paul admonished, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!" (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). Did you observe those last words, "How much more we have the responsibility to judge the things of this life?" True, we are not to slander, gossip and curse others, but when something goes wrong in the church, we have all the responsibility to judge, i.e. hold people accountable and gently correct for restoration.

Remember, judgment and correction is done, not only by the leaders, but by the whole people of God. It is interesting to notice in 1 Corinthians 6:1-20 that Paul was not addressing to any particular leaders to judge and correct the erring person. He was writing to the whole church, exhorting them to purge the evil and keep the church of Christ holy and righteous. Of course, everything ought to be done in order and love, for Paul said in the same epistle to the Corinthians, "Do everything in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14), and also "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Therefore, a believer who justifies himself/herself, saying, "God knows who I am; He is the One who judges me; No one has any business to question me or to correct me", is not truly abiding by the principles of the word of God. And a church leader who terrifies believers, saying, "I am a man (or anointed) of God; I am directly accountable to God; If you judge me, God is going to curse you," isn't really walking in the light of God's word. A leader's life in the church is not a secret book; it is an open album. His life ought to be transparent before others, especially the way he handles the money of the church.

Two Principles

One of the wonderful qualities about Paul was the way he was honest and transparent in handling the money of the church. In no other book Paul spent so many words in writing about the issue of money as he did in 2 Corinthians 8:1-24; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15. Charles Swindoll gleans two principles from 2 Corinthians 8:16-21, relating to who should handle money and how. (A Minister Everyone would Respect, Insights for Living, 1989, pg. 12-13) First, only qualified people should handle financial matters.

I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. (2 Corinthians 8:16-19)

What are the qualifications of people whom Paul sent to handle the money of the church? They were earnest, their good testimony impressed the church to appoint them, and they were zealous to help and to do good works. The responsibility of money management shouldn't be entrusted to those who are not faithful in administering financial contributions. We are responsible to see that God's money goes into the hands of the right people who would use it to meet appropriate needs. The second principle: money matters should be administered honestly and openly.

We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men. (2 Corinthians 8:20-21). (2 Corinthians 8:16-19) Have you carefully read in the above text the honesty and transparency of Paul in handling church's money? His words in regard to the issue of money, "we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men", implies that he counted himself accountable to people and took every effort to avoid criticism or accusation of any kind in the way he used the generous gifts of the people given to noble causes. In light of Paul's integrity, what should we think about the leaders of the church today? How many of them are imitating Paul in regard to financial openness? Regretfully, many leaders aren't open to the church in the way they use their money. The believers who faithfully give to these leaders have no idea where their money is going. Many churches don't know how much of the money is coming in and where it is going. Although there are some leaders of the churches who announce every week or every month about the offerings received, they still withhold the information from the believers (intentionally or unintentionally) about how they have spent it.

I am glad to know ministries (not churches)—very, very, very few—who send financial statement, either monthly or yearly, to their sponsors, sharing with them their opening balance, received contributions, expenditure and the closing balance. Praise God for such wonderful exemplary ministries!

Don't you think every believer in the church, who works hard and faithfully gives money, has the right to know where their money is going? Shouldn't the leaders be transparent about the way they spend church's finance? If money is spent faithfully for the right needs, what's wrong in letting the church know about how their finance is spent? Do we find such accounts on the notice board, such as pastor's family support so and so, travel so and so, literature so and so, orphans so and so.....etc? I understand there are church leaders, who are diligent and faithful, don't practice this

transparency because they are unaware of such accountability. Writes Charles Swindoll: When people give their money to churches, ministries, and charities, they trust that their money will be used wisely and carefully. That trust is just as valuable as the money—maybe even more—so it must be guarded. We're accountable not only to God, but also to the people who contribute to His work. It's a matter of honor. (pg. 13).

I am glad to learn the lesson of accountability in my ministry. When people give me money, especially with the freedom to use it for my family, I spend it accordingly. There is no need to give an account about how specifically you have spent on your family. But if they give to use particularly for ministry, I give them the account about how the money was spent. I think it is their right to know how their money was used. This would also help me to do blameless ministry, for there are many leaders in our day who are accused (truly or falsely) of financial scam.

Two Suggestions But shall we do when leaders are irresponsible in handling church's finance? Should we ignore such things and continue to give or is there any wise means give our money to be used in a fruitful way? There are two things I want to suggest:

Go to the leaders. Humbly and respectfully ask them how the money is spent. You may also request them to be accountable in their spending of church's finance. If they are not practicing to share the offerings with the poor and needy, and even to support missions, you may motivate them, based on biblical principles, to consider helping them. In case there are no poor people in your church, there are many outside, especially in other communities and nations. It is noteworthy to observe that in 2 Corinthians 8:1-24; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15 Paul was raising money from other churches for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

It is also necessary to consider helping missionaries and itinerant workers who give themselves to extensive ministry. There are many places around the world where such people are working hard for the Kingdom of God in spite of financial crisis. Helping such blessed ones pleases the Lord who provides our needs. Laborious pastors who do local and non-local ministry, whom their churches are unable to offer sufficient support due to financial inadequacy, are well worthy to receive help too.

Here is a word of caution—before giving to any person, ministry or church, it is of utmost importance to examine the credibility of the receivers.

Give personally. If the church leaders are deliberately and continuously refusing to be accountable about the use of money and neglect to give for noble causes, I would stop giving my money and personally meet the genuine needs. I know churches that do not continuously spend even an ounce of their money for the needy and missions. I count them as unworthy to receive a penny of mine.

I know friends who do not give their tithes and offerings to their church but directly give to the people in need, for they have found their church leaders irresponsible in spending their money. I think this is a good practice of investing our money wisely. In spite of your church leaders being unreliable, if you feel obligated to give at least some of your finance (maybe 1 or 2% or whatever) because you are attending the church, and then give rest of your offering personally to meet the right needs of the people, that's better still.

Finally, keep in mind, you are responsible not only to give offerings but also to consider how wisely you are investing that money to bear fruit.

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Who Created God?

Who Created God?

Skeptics often argue, “If everything has a cause, then God, who is the so-called Creator of the entire universe, must also be having a cause. Therefore, who is the creator of God?” Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), a staunch atheist, insisted that if Christians want to be so adamant about pressing the causality question in seeking a cause for everything, then the First Cause (God) must have also had a cause. He said his father taught him that the question “Who made me?” cannot be answered, since it is immediately followed by another question: “Who made God?” The question, “Who created God” is an intriguing enquiry which begs a logical answer. There is no book on the face of the earth that handles this question so brilliantly like the Holy Bible. Skeptics must be careful enough to understand when it is said “FOR EVERYTHING there is a cause,” it means, “FOR EVERYTHING THAT HAS A BEGINNING or FOR EVERYTHING THAT HAS COME INTO EXISTENCE or FOR EVERYTHING THAT IS FINITE, there is a cause.” The question demanding a cause perfectly applies to universe because it did not always exist; it had come into existence at a definite point of time; it had a beginning. Even the “Big Bang theory”, in which many scientists believe, confirms this.

God does not have any cause simply because He is neither a finite being nor did He come into existence nor had a beginning. The Holy Bible discloses the truth that God is Self-Existent (Aseity). God revealed to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Self-Existent does not mean self-caused, for to cause Himself to exist He would have to exist prior to His own existence. ‘Self-Existent’ means ‘God is existing by Himself eternally’. He is the Eternal One, i.e. He has no beginning and ending. It is written in the Holy Bible, “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Psalms 90:2).

Biblically speaking, God, by default, is the Uncaused cause of everything. He is neither caused nor a self-caused being. Unlike us the dependent beings, God is the Independent being. He no more exists as God if He has a cause. He is, in fact, the Ultimate Cause of all the effects. The Holy Bible asserts, “Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). We bow before Him and worship Him because He is such an Awesome and Sovereign God.

Christian author and apologist, Ravi Zacharias, rightly stated, “God is the only being existent in this world, the reason for whose existence is in Himself; every other existing entity finds the reason for their existence outside of themselves. In that sense, God alone is perfect—His very existence is uncaused, He just exists.” Hence, the question “Who created God?” appears to be insensible, at least biblically. In the light of eternity’s definition that it has no beginning and ending, it is like putting an illogical question, ‘what is the origin of eternity?’

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S. Who Planted the Church of Antioch - Ordinary Believers or Unique

Who Planted the Church of Antioch - Ordinary Believers or Unique Apostles?

The city of Antioch was placed in the north of Syria. Needless to say, great movements occurred here. The church of Antioch is known to be one of the remarkable churches in the history of Christianity. It was in Antioch that the followers of Christ were first called as Christians (Acts 11:26). When I ask the question who planted the church of Antioch, the general response from people would be, "Paul" or "Barnabas" or "Peter." But is it what the Scripture says? Many suppose church planting in the early church was done only by the apostles. But is it true?

One major mistake people commit in their study of the Holy Bible is this - instead of reading and interpreting the Scripture in the light of historical context they read and interpret the text in the light of contemporary church practice. Consequently, many miss the insight of how the whole people of God were involved in building God's community.

Acts 8:1-40

Let's come back to our question, "Who planted the church of Antioch?" To answer this it is important that we start our study from Acts 8:1-40. When Saul gave approval to Stephen's death, "a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). It must be noted here that the apostles remained in Jerusalem while the rest of the believers had scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. So what were these scattered believers doing? It is written, "those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4). Imagine how our present generation would be reached with the gospel of Christ if the believers preach the word wherever they are and whichever place they go. Preachers, pastors and leaders alone will never impact the nations for Christ. This would only be possible along with the active involvement of the whole people God, i.e. every believer in Christ Jesus.

One primary reason for the early church to advance so exponentially is that every believer was involved in the ministry of preaching the gospel. Wherever they went they felt responsible to witness for Christ. They were not inactive like many in the modern day churches. They saw themselves as John Stott pointed out, "Every Christian is both a servant and an apostle . . . sent out into the world as Christ's ambassadors and witnesses, to share in the apostolic mission of the whole church." [1]

Furthermore, there was no clergy and laity distinction wherein only the former were active in ministry while the latter remained passive. If we want to use the word layman in its traditional sense then the founder of Christianity Himself was a layman (without no priestly heritage). E. Stanley Jones, that great missionary to India, said it right, "The fact is that Christian faith is a lay moment. Jesus was a layman. The religious system of the day gave Him no license or credentials.

His call was from God and not from man." [2]

Acts 11:1-30

Now let's come further to Acts 11:19, "those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews." Who were these scattered believers? It is obvious that these were not apostles. They were the ones who had been scattered by persecution in Acts 8:1-40. From these people "some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:21). And "the Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:21).

Hallelujah! So who do you suppose had reached Antioch and planted a church there? Peter? Paul? Barnabas? It was ordinary believers, whose names are not even mentioned, who did this marvelous ministry. F. B. Meyer wrote, "Antioch will ever be famous in Christian annals, because a number of unordained and unnamed disciples, fleeing from Jerusalem in the face of Saul's persecution, dared to preach the gospel to Greeks and to gather the converts into a church in entire disregard of the initial rite of Judaism." [3]

Later the "news of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch" (Acts 11:22). Barnabas and Saul together had disciplined the church of Antioch for a whole year (Acts 11:26). When their work was finished, the Holy Spirit called them for a different task (Acts 13:2). The church of Antioch grew powerfully and was blessed with prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1) and later had elders (shepherds) (Acts 14:21-23). It became a great missionary-sending church. It was this church which also played a major role to trigger the great council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-31).

Ed Stetzer describes, "A study of Acts reveals that laypersons affected early church planting (Acts 8:1, Acts 8:4). They performed mass evangelism (Acts 8:5-6, Acts 8:12) as well as village evangelism (Acts 8:25). Through this lay movement churches multiplied (Acts 9:31). Miracles enhanced the growth of the church (Acts 9:35-42), and salvation reached increasing numbers of Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48). Later, lay Christians from Jerusalem witnessed about Christ and planted a Gentile-Jewish church in Antioch (Acts 11:20-21)." [4] Moreover, Bible scholars even believe that the people who were converted at Pentecost, the Jews and proselytes who came to Jerusalem from Rome, were possibly the ones who started their fellowship in Rome. [5]

Acts 29

Like the early church, we need believers in our age to get active in evangelism and in planting churches as well as the gifted teachers and leaders to nurture the gathered church. Planting churches is not just the responsibility of missionaries and pastors but of believers too. In fact, church planting becomes much effective when believers are motivated and involved in this glorious task.

It is important to understand that believers are not called to settle in pews. Their work is not just to listen to sermons, sing songs and give tithes and offerings. They are called to be difference makers (Matthew 5:14). They are priests of God who have the godly potentiality to transform nations. There is a great need to help believers realize who they are - they are gospel preachers,

disciple-makers, church planters, social workers and God-glorifying people involved in His Kingdom activity. And it is the responsibility of the leaders to equip the saints for God's ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). How wonderful it would be if the great movement in our generation is recorded in heaven as Acts chapter 29!

Feel free to post your comments below or you may write to : friendsofchrist@gmail.com

Notes:

[1] John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society*, pg. 160 [2] E. Stanley Jones, *The Word Became Flesh* (Tiruvalla, India: SuVartha Bhavan, 2001), pg. 316 [3] Cited by Alex Rattray Hay, *The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary* (Alexander Rattray Hay, 1947), pg. 60 [4] Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), pg. 50 [5] For example, see Robert E. Picirilli, *Paul the Apostle* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), pg. 157ff

S. Who is this Most Controversial Person?

Who is this Most Controversial Person? Who is this most controversial person? Who is this person about whom the world has diverse, conflicting views? I suppose, no issue has been as much studied and as much debated and as much reaped contrasting beliefs as the subject of 'God'. The question, "Who is God?" is the most important matter on the face of the earth. There are diverse views regarding who God is. Some argue, "There is no God," i.e. naturalists claim the physical universe is all that exists. Some claim, "knowing yourself is knowing god within you," i.e. self is god. Others say, "God is everything and everything is god," i.e. they claim that god exists in idols, animals, and nature. Some propose, "God is a supreme power," i.e. he is reckoned as an impersonal force.

Moreover, there are others who say, "God is someone who is extraordinary," i.e. anyone who seems to be extraordinary—whether in knowledge, might, or in character trait—is seen as god. To them all who are unusually knowledgeable or mighty or morally good are seen as gods. Some assume, "There is one God but in many forms," i.e. there are many demigods. Others state, "God is a mystical being incomprehensible to human beings," i.e. skeptics say he is an unknowable being. Yet some contend, "God is a being separate and distinct from every created thing," i.e. a transcendent one. In this chaotic world where multiple religions, philosophies, and beliefs try to define God, we see that each gains a following, but, can all be right? Unfortunately, people are gullible enough to following anything without the careful examination that it requires. Some, in an attempt to bring unity in this diversity, say, "everything is right; nothing is wrong; there are different beliefs yet all roads lead to one God." Though this seems appealing, it, in fact, is not reasonable and logically convincing. If one can propose that everything is equally true then it is quiet possible that everything is equally false.

Ignorance of the right knowledge of God is the greatest problem worldwide. An unsound perspective of God's nature will undoubtedly lead to false conclusions and make anything a god. However, one needs to pursue the truth about the grand characteristics of God, which disqualifies all supposed gods for lack of genuine attributes.

Reason and common sense implies: Considering this massive universe, God must be the Creator of all existence. Everything man knows is finite, including himself, so a Creator God must be superior and Infinite. Man's knowledge and power is finite, so the Creator God, who is greater, must be all-knowing and all-powerful. If man is a relational being, no doubt his Creator must be a personal rational being too (not necessarily having a physical body, but a capacity to feel, think, relate, desire and decide). Finite man is limited by time and space, but God, being superior, must be eternal and unbound by time and space. Finite man dwells in a world where good and evil conflict, but God dwells beyond those limitations and possesses the highest attributes like – the purest love, kindness, compassion, patience, righteousness, holiness and justice. In fact, He must be the ultimate truth.

Just think, no sane person can claim himself to be a doctor without studying medicine, an engineer without finishing engineering, a farmer without knowing farming. And no one can claim himself to be God without having the basic qualifications mentioned above. Sadly, man has become so self-centered that the magnificent knowledge of God has been blurred by his selfishness. We are living in an age where “knowing yourself” has become more important than “knowing God.” Man’s self-induced beliefs have blindfolded him from seeing the Truth as it is. But the lofty sense of who God is compels us to pursue the actual God who is superior to all. Who do you think is perfectly qualified in your view?

There is one reliable truth where God has revealed Himself. This book has proven itself—historically, archeologically, geographically, scientifically, prophetically, internally (unity of the books), supernaturally and practically—genuine. And this Holy Bible speaks of the God who is Self-Existent, Creator, Infinite, Sovereign, Unchanging, Incomparable, Holy, Loving, Personal, and Eternal. Therefore, He alone is worthy for worship and obedience. At one time the human race knew this God intimately, but through sin, all mankind became separated from God. Regretfully, man in his sinful state has lost the godly knowledge and relationship with this wonderful God. The evidence of immorality, violence, distortion of truth, deception, hatred, injustice, and selfishness in the world proves how blinded man has become to comprehend the knowledge of truth. But what is the knowledge of the truth? The knowledge of the truth is—all are sinners and thus separated from the holy God. Nevertheless, in His passionate love for mankind, God came as a man, who is called Jesus Christ. He suffered for our sins, shed His blood on the Cross and eventually laid His life for us. That’s not the end. He rose again on the third day to prove that He is the Savior of the whole world. He commanded people to repent of their sins and to trust in Him to save them from inner emptiness, spiritual blindness, and everlasting destruction caused from sin. If you will, call upon Jesus in your heart—who is your Creator, the Savior and your only hope. Reflect on this truth and make a good decision that matters for eternity.

References from the Holy Bible: Exodus 3:14; Psalms 71:16; Psalms 86:8; Psalms 115:15; Psalms 147:5; Hebrews 13:8; 1 Peter 1:16; 1 John 4:16; Isaiah 40:11; 1 Timothy 1:17; Romans 1:21; Romans 3:23; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5; Luke 24:46-47. Romans 6:23.

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Why Did God put the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? - Part 1

Why Did God put the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? - Part 1

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:15-17)

One of the most asked questions, by both Christians and non-Christians, doubting the goodness and the wisdom of God, is this—"Why did God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden?"

Looks like if there is any person who is blamed more than anyone else—He is God. The dilemma about the existence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has troubled many, thereby accusing God of being unfair. Some even take this as an excuse to disbelieve in the God of the Holy Bible. By the way, if someone doesn't want to believe in God, he cannot be convinced by any reasons, however reasonable; he still clings to excuses to disbelieve. But anyone who wants to believe in God, provided that he finds honest answers, such a person is not far from the truth and understanding about God.

Therefore, I urge the reader to give careful thought to the following reasons, guarding oneself from being emotionally judgmental.

Knowing the Nature of God

Before we go further, I believe it is quite significant to comprehend the nature of God. Most of our misconceptions are the result of our ignorance about the right knowledge of God or our refusal to believe who He is and what He claims to be. To share briefly, the following is what the Holy Bible reveals about who God is:

The LORD is upright...there is no wickedness in Him. (Psalms 92:15)

The Lord is righteous in all His ways. (Psalms 145:17)

God is light [holy]; in Him there is no darkness [unholiness] at all. (1 John 1:5)

His [God's] works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He. (Deuteronomy 32:4)

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! (Romans 9:14)

We learn from the Holy Scripture that God's nature is perfect. He does no wrong. All His ways are upright. As the theologians say—He is impeccable and infallible. So, it is important to note that if our foundational knowledge about the nature of God and His attributes is imperfect, we often

misconstrue and misinterpret the just works of God.

Understanding the Purpose of Man's Creation

Another crucial thing to understand is about the purpose of man's creation. Man is God's unique creation. He has been created for the glory of God as a morally free being. For this reason, man is concerned about virtues like goodness, kindness, love and justice against vices like pride, hatred, corruption and illegalities, although there are differing opinions about how these are exercised.

We don't find animals thinking, desiring, discussing and debating about such virtues and vices. We don't have laws for animals and neither do we put them behind the bars for breaching them. But we hold man responsible and accountable for his actions, for he is created by God as a morally free being, though sadly he is now in a fallen state and unable to live a morally perfect life.

Now think about these questions:

1) When God made man as a morally free being, should He not give him the freedom to live a moral life? Don't you think that the fact about God creating man as a moral being by default requires freedom?

2) If God should give man the freedom, should He not give him the freedom of choice to obey Him, which also means a choice to disobey Him? Remember, God did not create man as merely a free being, like animals; He created man as a morally free being, giving him moral standards against immoral acts. And what is that moral freedom if there is no choice involved either to obey or disobey?

3) If God must give man the freedom to obey or disobey Him, should He not provide him the opportunities to make such choices voluntarily and without coercion?

Without the above elements, don't you suppose man would not be a morally free being, but simply a robot—thinking, feeling and acting by a fixed system, not by voluntary choices? The very fact that we question about God—His goodness and wisdom in putting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—shows that we are free beings with voluntary choices, either to trust Him or to disbelieve Him. People have the freedom either to love or to hate, to accept or to despise God because of this freedom. And here is a last question to think about:

4) If God ought to give man the freedom to voluntarily choose to obey or disobey His standards, then man is morally responsible for his actions. So, should there not be consequences for making moral choices—rewards for obedience and punishment for disobedience? Or else, does it make any sense whether we obey or disobey?

Indeed, the question about why God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil comes because of the pathetic consequence man had to face because of his choice to eat the forbidden fruit from this tree.

Freedom of Choice

We have seen that man was created as a morally free being, which means, man is free to obey and disobey the standards of God. To exercise his moral freedom, God should not withhold man the choice of disobeying Him. After all, what is that freedom to obey if there is no freedom to

disobey? Such freedom would be superficial and unreasonable. For this reason, God presented before man the alternative to disobey His command by putting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Interestingly, God has forbidden only one thing while giving man all the freedom to do other things. Is it fair to still accuse God because of this one forbidden thing which he has put before man? Doesn't this show how ignorant we are about God's holy nature and the nature of design of man's creation?

If God had not created man as a morally free being without freedom to disobey Him, He would still be accused of being a hypocrite or a manipulator, for He had created man as a morally free being without any choice to exercise his moral freedom. Norman Geisler rightly pointed out that "forced love is rape; and God is not a divine rapist. He will not do anything to coerce their decision."

If this sounds logical, why is God blamed for putting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, without which it doesn't make any sense that man is morally a free being to choose that which is right or wrong?

See how fair God was in His creation of man:

God created man as a morally free being with a choice to do right or wrong. Indeed, when Adam was created, he was fully upright, having left with a choice either to continue in his uprightness or to turn to wickedness. It is written, "God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes" (Ecclesiastes 7:29).

God created man and gave him the freedom to eat anything but also warned him not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:16-17 a)

God not only forbade man not to eat fruit from the forbidden tree but also cautioned him of the consequence if he goes against His command. He said, "For when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17 b).

You see, man did not fall in sin out of ignorance or out of compulsion; he was in complete knowledge of what he was supposed to do and what he shouldn't. He made the choice consciously and voluntarily. Therefore, God was perfectly fair in the way He created man, giving him the complete freedom to enjoy everything around him and also warning him of the consequence of choosing to go against His will.

Risky Gift of Free Will

Now, I can imagine some raising this question—when God already knew that man would disobey Him, why should He still put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?" Good question! Let us give a careful thought to this point.

God did not give man the freedom just for the sake of freedom—it is to love, to obey and to do good. Paul E. Little wonderfully describes the necessity of freedom to love in the following way:

How would you like to be married to a chatty doll? Every morning and every night you could pull the string and get the beautiful words, "I love you". There would never be any hot words, never any

conflict, never anything said or done that would make you sad! But who would want that? There would never be any love, either. Love is voluntary. God could have made us like robots, but we would have ceased to be men. God apparently thought it worth the risk of creating us as we are. [Know Why You Believe, pg. 87]

I take great delight when my children obey, for they choose to do voluntarily. I don't take the same delight in my computer which does what I command with my figures, for it is just a lifeless system playing as I wish. Fortunately, man was not created like this lifeless system. He has been created in a mysterious way to do things voluntarily. Although trees and animals are also animate things, man is marvelous and unique above all earthly creation because of the moral freedom he has and the creative way he functions. Of course, there is a risk involved in this freewill: The more freedom man has to obey means the more freedom he has even to disobey. J. B. Phillips put it so well, "Evil is inherent in the risky gift of free will." But just because of the negative consequences that man would face due to the abuse of His free will, should it stop God from creating him as a morally free being, especially if He truly loves us and expects us to wholeheartedly love Him and one another? Should Abuse Lead to No Use?

Let me pose few questions for your consideration. Is it fair to stop manufacturing vehicles just because of the accidents? Is it wise to cease using fire just because of the fire accidents? Is it reasonable to end using electricity just because of electrocutions? We all well understand that it is unwise to completely discard something which is so good and helpful just because of the possibility of bad. Someone rightly said, "The remedy for misuse is not disuse but right use."

Likewise, God did not stop to create man as a free being because of the potentiality to abuse his freewill. If man could do bad because of the abuse of free will, He could not even do good voluntarily without the right exercise of his moral freedom. Despite the risk involved in misusing the freedom, God had still created man as a morally free being. Although there are those who choose evil and grieve Him, God's ultimate delight is in those who freely choose to love and obey Him. Is it not a risk worth taking for at least the few who voluntarily and joyfully choose to obey?

Allow me to share few more instances to clarify the dilemma. We hear a lot of crime reports on the news. There are times I have read and heard how people murder others for money. Not even once did I hear anyone grumbling and accusing the person who had invented gun or knife. The natural accusation was on the murderer who was greedy and inhuman.

I wonder, why then many accuse God for keeping the tree of the knowledge of good and evil when it is man who should be blamed for abusing his free will!

Moreover, is it fair to blame the educational institutions for having grading system just because of some folks committing suicide for failing in exams? And what about sex? How many people are dying because of HIV/AIDS! Shall we stop having sex because of these deadly and incurable diseases? Think—is the problem truly with sex itself or with the misuse of sex?

Therefore, why is God held responsible for evil when it is man who abuses his freewill to do evil? Does the real problem lie with God who has given freewill or with man who abuses his freewill? You know, sin is nothing but the abuse of freewill God has given to man. And God created us in such a way so that we can rightly exercise our freedom of choice and become like Mother Teresa or abuse our freewill and become like Adolf Hitler.

Final Words

I have nothing but appreciation for God's marvellous creation. He didn't create us as robots nor did He manipulate our freedom. He created us in His own image, i.e. as volitional, relational, rational and moral beings, so that we would reflect His glory. God made man as a free being, i.e. with an ability to make moral choices. In consideration of this fact, there is no created thing on earth as beautiful and wonderful and mysterious as mankind. David rightly expressed, "I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well." (Psalms 139:14)

Well, the goodness of God is that, even though man disobeyed God and sinned against Him by abusing his freewill, He didn't give up on man to face his own eternal destruction. Here is the good news: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son [Jesus Christ], that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Therefore, I urge people to cease blaming God for putting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and rather repent of their sins and gratefully accept the gift of forgiveness given through Christ Jesus, who is the one and the only in the history of the world who died on the cross and rose again from the dead to give hope to the perishing world

S. Winning the Battle for Sexuality Purity

Winning the Battle for Sexuality Purity

It is no exaggeration to assert that this is an age of sensuality. We are constantly bombarded with erotic scenes, right from billboards to wall posters along the road, movies to television, magazines to newspapers, internet to mobile phones...etc. Considering the effortless accessibility to lustful stuff and people, to gratify one's sensual passions in our day is as easy as breathing. Ah, in this world filled with lust and sensuality, living a life of sexual purity is no easy walk! With already an inner struggle with sinful passions, how can we combat the sensual pressure from outside? In most cases, whenever I am battered by sexual temptation, be it from within or without, one of the effective ways I have found to overcome this vice is by treasuring and claiming God's word. The psalmist uttered, "I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalms 119:11). Treasuring God's word in our heart and bringing it to mind is of immense help to holy living, especially when we are confronted by lustful temptation to sin. I have also learned to speak forth the Scripture when I am assaulted by the evil one. Did not our Lord Jesus, when he was tempted by the devil, declared, "It is written..."?

Therefore, the following Scriptures are compiled for our constant study, memorization, reflection and declaration, which the Holy Spirit would use to enable us win the battle for sexuality purity. I took a print out of these Scriptures and got them laminated, so that I would discipline myself to memorize and constantly turn to God's word when lustful sin turns against me. I trust you would also find this helpful as you seek His kingdom and righteousness.

GOD'S WORD ON SEXUAL PURITY AND SEXUAL IMMORALITY

- It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)
- The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. (1 Corinthians 6:13)
- Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)
- Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished. (Proverbs 6:27-29)

- Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. Yet if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold, though it costs him all the wealth of his house. But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away. (Proverbs 6:30-33)

- Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife? For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths. The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly. (Proverbs 5:20-23)

- Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor...the greedy nor drunkards...will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

- So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature....The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery.... I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:16-21)

- But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matthew 5:28-30)

- But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place. (Ephesians 5:3-4)

- Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Romans 13:13-14)

- I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare. (Ecclesiastes 7:26) • I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. (Job 31:1)

- If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door, then may my wife grind another man's grain, and may other men sleep with her. For that would have been shameful, a sin to be judged. It is a fire that burns to Destruction. (Job 31:9-12)

If my heart has been seduced by a woman, or if I have lusted for my neighbor's wife, then let my wife belong to another man; let other men sleep with her. For lust is a shameful sin, a crime that should be punished. It is a fire that burns all the way to hell. It would wipe out everything I own. (Job 31:-9-12, NLT)

- Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted

to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. (Genesis 39:6-10)

- Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. (Hebrews 13:4)
- We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. (1 Corinthians 10:8) • Treat younger women as sisters, with absolute purity (1 Timothy 5:2)
- For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'. (Matthew 15:19-20)
- For the grace of God that brings salvation...teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. (Titus 2:11-12) • Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your Word. (Psalms 119:37)
- Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Php 4:8)
- As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy (1 Peter 1:14-16) • "Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:24)
- Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8)
- Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8). Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)
- The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. (Revelation 21:8)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God (Matthew 5:8)

ENQUIRIES:

Feel free to write your comments below

(or) E-mail: friendsofchrist@gmail.com

S. Word to the Leaders

Word to the Leaders Great leaders are great givers.

– said John Maxwell

Living in India, I always used to wonder by looking at palm readers and soothsayers. I heard them emphatically telling people about their future prosperity and I thought, “When they tell others about prosperity, why they themselves are not prosperous?”

Keeping this aside, when I see some leaders motivating believers to give so that they would become prosperous, I cannot help but ask, “When believers can give and prosper why can’t leaders also give and see prosperity? Why do they want to prosper by taking from others rather than by giving to them?” Doesn’t the principle, “Give and it shall be given to you and blessed are those who give than who receive” primarily apply to leaders?

We come to know through the Holy Scriptures that one of the primary qualifications of a leader is to be hospitable (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8). However, can we imagine hospitality without being generous? Reflecting on the life and ministry of Paul—an apostle of Christ and a laborer in Christ’s service—we notice that many times he worked with his own hands and was generous with his earnings. He himself acknowledged:

You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ (Acts 20:34-35)

We are well acquainted with this Scripture, “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” especially in our preaching to others. But let’s look into the context and consider to whom it was actually exhorted. When Paul was in Miletus, he sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church (Acts 20:17). Now in the New Testament, the terms - elders, pastors, overseers and shepherds - were used synonymously. Eminent theologian Wayne Grudem, in his classic Systematic Theology, notes, “Elders are also called “pastors” or “bishops” or “overseers” in the New Testament.”[1] So, after the arrival of the pastors, Paul began to give various instructions to them (Acts 20:17 ff). At the climax of his instructions, Paul exhorted the leaders, “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Later, he knelt with all of them, prayed and departed (Acts 20:36-38). By instruction and example, Paul taught the leaders of the church to be generous givers. He had to especially remind them, “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” as they probably are the ones who will be receiving more from others. Sad to say, these days, this Scripture is often used as a means to raise money from the believers while neglecting to follow it themselves, for it was first exhorted to the church leaders. Isn’t it obvious that this Scripture primarily apply to the leaders and then to the believers of Christ Jesus?

It is regretful to acknowledge that, generally, leaders are well known for receiving than for giving. There are those who are known for their eloquent preaching, sound knowledge, great talents, good fund raising and skillful administration but not for generous living. Before exhorting others to give, shouldn't leaders first model themselves in giving? Are they not called to be examples of every good act?

God's word speaks that the leaders must rise up first to live a sacrificial life by their generous giving. Then the believers will learn the pleasure of giving to the poor and to the Lord's mission by seeing (not just by hearing) the good acts of their leaders. When leaders model generosity in their lives, then they can challenge the churches to follow after their example. Even the Scripture says to observe the lifestyle of the leaders before following them - "Remember your leaders, who taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and follow the example of their faith" (Hebrews 13:7, NLT).

Moreover, people will be inspired to give more when they know that their leaders are generous with what is received. Why do you think people sold their property and put it at apostles' feet? Because the apostles were generously distributing to anyone as he had need (Acts 4:34-35). One major reason for poor givers to exist in the church is because there is a lack of generous leaders. To the leaders, "What we are, they will become," isn't said in vain.

Here is a challenge to us, the servant leaders, from the life of John Wesley. Wesley's simplicity and frugality enabled him to limit his living expenses to a very small sum so that he would have more money to give to the needy.

One year, when his income was 30 pounds, he lived on 28 pounds and gave away 2 pounds. The next year he received 60 pounds, the year after that 90 pounds, and the year after that 120 pounds. And yet in each year he spent only 28 pounds on himself and gave all the rest to the needy. It is calculated that in his lifetime he gave away at least 30,000 pounds. On one occasion, when the Tax Collectors paid him a visit, it was found that four spoons were the only silver plate that he possessed.[2]

Wesley lived what he preached. Sales of his books often earned him 1,400 pounds annually, but he spent only 30 pounds on himself. The rest he gave away. He always wore inexpensive clothes and dined on simple food. "If I leave behind me 10 pounds," he once wrote, "you and all mankind bear witness against me that I lived and died a thief and a robber." [3]

How blessed it is to have such wonderful and generous leaders these days! May the Lord enable us to live a life of generosity for His glory and to be a blessing to people!

Feel free to post your comments below or you may write to : friendsofchrist@gmail.com

Notes:

[1] Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 913-914 [2] Robert Backhouse, *1500 Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (London:

Marshall Pickering Publishers), pg. 154.

[3] Ronald J. Sider, Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), pg. 164.

S. Words as Essential as Living

Words as Essential as Living

How we live as Christians is quite essential. We are called to holy living. We are exhorted to be the light of the world. We ought to live good and do good to others. Yes, our life speaks far more than our words. And the statement, "Preach the gospel at all times, if necessary, use words," supposedly said by Francis of Assisi, is a good challenge to Christians to focus on living an exemplary lifestyle.

Having said that, here is a caution: Although the significance of practical Christian living cannot be undermined, I have seen there are those who have gone to such an extreme that they just focus on living an exemplary life without verbal communication of the gospel. They say, "Your life itself is the gospel. You don't have to necessarily speak the gospel. Whether in neighborhood or in workplace, simply live a good life and that declares the gospel. People should witness the gospel of Christ Jesus by seeing your life, not by hearing your words."

Now, there is an element of truth in the above statement and I understand the good intentions behind such declarations. However, in our endeavor to focus on practical Christian living, to obliterate the necessity of proclaiming the gospel with our words is unbiblical and even deceptive, a wile of the devil. Beware of such extremes, for it is the devil's horse on which he often delights to ride.

Jesus, Paul, Apostles and the Early Church

Give thought to this: None lived a glorious life like Jesus. He claimed of being the light of the world. On one occasion, He challenged the Jews to prove any sin in him. He was tempted in every way and yet was without sin. He lived an impeccable and absolutely holy life. Nevertheless, the gospels are replete with Jesus' verbal preaching about the kingdom of God. (John 8:12; John 8:46; Hebrews 4:15; Mark 1:38)

If practical Christian living is enough, why should Jesus have to speak so much, constantly preaching and teaching to people about God's kingdom and righteousness?

Consider Paul. Who can doubt his commitment in following Christ? Although he had human weaknesses, his life was sharply marked with holiness and love. He imitated Christ and even challenged others to imitate him as he imitated Christ. Nonetheless, he was passionate and committed to the verbal proclamation of the gospel of Christ Jesus. In fact, he considered his life worth nothing, except to testify to the gospel of God's grace and to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. (1 Thessalonians 2:10; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Acts 20:4; Romans 15:20)

If practical Christian living is sufficient, why should Paul have to be so passionate and diligent in proclaiming the gospel of Christ Jesus? Incidentally, it is interesting to notice that even when people preached Christ out of false motives and selfish ambition, Paul rejoiced saying, "The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And

because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice" (Php 1:18). And what should I say about the book of Acts? Is it not filled with the accounts of how the apostles and the believers were scattered everywhere, taking the message of the gospel to various people? (Acts 4:33; Acts 5:42; Acts 8:4)

Why should they have to labor so much in testifying to the good news of Christ when practical Christian living is all that matters?

Further, when reading the Holy Scripture, one should understand that when we find words such as preach, preached or preaching, it obviously means public announcement or verbal proclamation. And these words are found numerous times in the New Testament. I am sure you will get tired of counting them. In our zeal to exalt good living, therefore, it is unbiblical to undermine the verbal proclamation of the gospel of Christ. Remember, it is in consideration of the significance of both exemplary living and teaching that Paul said, "Watch your life and teaching closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16).

How we live and what we speak—both are essential to Christian living. No Proclamation of the Gospel, No Persecution

Besides, if Jesus, Paul, the apostles and the early church were focused only on practical Christian living, then they wouldn't have faced so much persecution. There may probably be no persecution if you live just a moral life and do good to others. There may be indeed lots of fans we would gain who admire our good life. With all due respect to Mother Teresa, who reflected love through her works of charity, I say this—she has gained an admiring place in the hearts of many unbelievers because she was not quite active in verbally communicating the gospel and motivating people to believe in Christ alone for their salvation. She did acknowledge the name of Jesus in what she did, but like Paul who said in 2 Corinthians 5:11, "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men," she is not known for persuading people to believe in Christ for their eternal life, even though she had great opportunities to do so.

You see, when we proclaim the gospel of Jesus, apart from people believing in Christ, we will inevitably produce many enemies. Perhaps, this is one reason why many are not proclaiming the gospel of Christ and simply focus on minding their business in living a good life.

Preach the Gospel through Word and Deed

Friends, we should be careful of bringing notions which contain more human fat than biblical vitamins. Such beliefs do more damage than good, such as living a good life to the exclusion of preaching the gospel. According to the Holy Scripture, we are commanded to preach the gospel through word and deed.

Take note of this—How we live confirms the life changing power and the reality of the gospel but it does not eliminate the necessity to preach the gospel. To believe words are not as essential as living is like "telling a reporter he should broadcast the news but that words are optional." [I borrow this phrase from Justin Taylor]

So, let us preach the gospel at all times, with both words and life, not with either. Jesus exhorted us to do both. He not only said, "You are the light of the world. . . let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven," but also, "Go into all the

world and preach the good news to all creation” (Matthew 5:14-15; Mark 16:15).

Moreover, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that while they preached the gospel to them, they were not a burden to anyone and lived holy, righteous and blameless among them (1 Thessalonians 2:9-10). Have you observed—both words and life go together, not alone? In obedience to God’s word, are we willing to carry the responsibility of holy living and also of proclaiming with our mouth the gospel of Christ Jesus? Let us be found faithful and diligent by the Lord in both living the gospel and sharing the gospel.

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S. Work is Ministry: Simple Cautions

Work is Ministry: Simple Cautions For centuries, this notion has been deeply ingrained in Christianity—work/job/business is secular and Christian ministry is spiritual. This led many to consider that ministry is a spiritual activity, a life lived for God, but work is a secular thing, a life lived for oneself. Consequently, the Christian workers are viewed as the most blessed people, for they are called to serve God, while the believers who hold jobs are simply the ordinary ones.

Fortunately, this perspective is now slowly changing.[1] I am glad to see a revival in the marketplace (workplace) today, emphasizing that work is not secular but spiritual, and it is also a ministry to the Lord. Praise God! As good and necessary this teaching is, however, it ought to be taught with utmost balance, particularly considering certain cautions, for when God moves, Satan too moves. Where the wheat is sown, the devil tries to sow the weeds as well. When good is desired to be spread, evil seeks to lurk beneath it.

So, what are the cautions we need to consider to avoid certain blunders?

Caution 1

Since work is also a ministry, which is Biblically true, a working believer may subtly justify himself for not being actively involved in church ministry, evangelism and missions. He may be completely absorbed in his work, reasoning "Is not work a ministry to the Lord?" and neglect the Great Commission of our Lord. There is a high possibility for spiritual lethargy and negligence toward missions to creep into the believers, for it is more comfortable to stay in a job than to suffer in a mission field. If some are required to go to missions, they may say, "Is not my work a service to the Lord, so why should I think about going elsewhere as a missionary?"

Well, we know from God's word that some of His people are called to devote themselves to missions, leaving jobs that confines them to a particular place and getting involved in planting churches and making disciples.[2] Therefore, the missionary movement should not suffer in our zeal to spread the word that work is a ministry. Challenge to consider foreign missions (national or overseas) should not decline due to belief that work is a ministry to the Lord.

Although the Holy Scripture mentions that work should be done as a service to the Lord (Colossians 3:23-24; Ephesians 6:5-6), even a cursory reading of the entire New Testament makes one to grasp its prime emphasis, which is – preaching the gospel of Jesus, making disciples, planting churches and edifying the body of Christ for the glory of God. Although Paul mentioned in Acts 20:34 about working with his own hands to supply his own needs, his passion was obviously evident in Acts 20:24, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

Don't you suppose this should be the passion of God's children in whichever field they are placed? I think, every Christian in the workplace should be God's missionary, passionate to spread the

kingdom of God through the gospel of Christ Jesus.

Hence, this wonderful movement in the marketplace, that work is a ministry to the Lord, should challenge believers to be faithful and diligent in their jobs or business, to live a blameless life, to shine as God's witnesses, to become active in church ministry and to spread the kingdom of God by preaching the gospel and making disciples of Christ. But a believer who believes that his/her work is a ministry to the Lord and neglects other aspects of Christian/mission/church responsibilities has been deceived by the Enemy of our soul.

Caution 2

Since work is a ministry to the Lord, a believer may use this belief to have his focus on work only to procure more money and possessions with a purpose to live a more comfortable life on earth. This temptation is great among those who are in white-collar jobs with a good paycheck.[3]

Now, there is nothing wrong in earning money and buying possessions to meet the essential needs of our life. It is no evil in moderately enjoying at times some earthly comforts. However, we know that our hearts can easily be obsessed with such things, going beyond needs to pursue our untamed wants. We need to understand that our heart is deceptive above all things and we can use a good belief as a means to gratify our selfish ambitions. We may easily pay lip service to the belief 'work is a ministry to the Lord' but our ulterior motive may be to seek comfort zone and cozy lifestyle.

It is important, therefore, that a believer is led by the following biblical principles as he/she works or does business:

- 1 Corinthians 7:31, "Those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away."
- 1 Timothy 6:6-10, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it..... For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."
- 1 Peter 2:11, "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul."

Furthermore, I believe, the belief that work is ministry should help believers to become good stewards of God's blessings on earth. This should lead them to be wise in how they spend money on themselves, to be generous in giving to the missions and to be kind in helping the poor and needy. This ought to motivate them to be passionate for God's will to be done and His kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. Those who live this way prove to be Christ-centered and kingdom-minded. O, such are the ones who will make a tremendous difference in the marketplace for the glory of the Living God!

Finally, dear child of God, if you sincerely examine your heart in the light of Holy Spirit, how do you judge yourself in this regard?-----

Notes:

[1] In fact, this transformation began in the reformation period and in Puritan movement.

[2] Of course, Paul worked and earned his living, though he had a right to be supported by the churches. This is a wonderful ministry but this does not mean everyone itinerant worker should do the same, for there were other apostles who were receiving support from the churches (1 Corinthians 9:5-6).

[3] Christian workers too are not immune from this temptation where ministry can become a means to earn money and indulge in earthly comforts.

ENQUIRIES:

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S. Your Daily Life Matters to God

Your Daily Life Matters to God

After having church fellowship, my wife and I were returning back home along with our children. As we were waiting at the crossroad to take the right turn, the vehicles before me started to go ahead. I began to follow them, but when I saw the red signal still on, I immediately stopped. There were honks behind me, signaling me to keep going, but I didn't move. My eldest son, Joy, began telling me, "Papa, let's go. Vehicles are going. Why did you stop?" I replied, "The red signal is still on." He said, "So what? No problem. Others are going. Go." I was trying to explain to him how as Christians it is not the right thing to follow the crowd in doing wrong. Then he said, "This is just signal; it is not Jesus. This has nothing to do with obeying God."

I find many of us are like my seven year old kid who assumes how we live our daily life and what daily choices we make has nothing to do with God and spirituality. How many of us act (we may not admit) according to the following myths?

How I shout at my wife has nothing to do with God! Am I shouting at God?

How I disrespect my husband has nothing to do with God! Am I disrespecting God?

How negligent I am at my workplace has nothing to do with God! Am I neglecting the church?

How I gossip about others has nothing to do with God! Am I speaking evil about God?

How I dishonestly earn money has nothing to do with God! Am I robbing God's money?

How I misbehave with my neighbor has nothing to do with God! Am I behaving harsh with God?

How I lie to people has nothing to do with God! Am I lying to God?

How I avenge those who offend me has nothing to do with God! Am I not being nice with God?

How I cheat on taxes has nothing to do with God! Am I not giving my tithes to God?

How I refuse correction from people has nothing to do with God! Am I not listening to the Holy Bible?

And on and on and on.....

Many think spirituality is just about praying, reading the Holy Bible, going to church, singing songs, listening to a sermon and giving an offering...etc. We suppose these are the only things that matter to God. We don't realize that our daily life, i.e. how we live at home, at workplace, on streets and in our private life, matters to God and speak a lot about our spirituality. Are you aware of the following instances?

Do you know when Paul persecuted the believers, the Lord said, "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me"? (Acts 9:4)

Do you know when David committed adultery with Bathsheba, he said with repentance, "Against you only have I sinned"? (Psalms 51:4)

Do you know when the righteous did good to His people, the King said, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me"? And to the wicked who didn't do good to His people, the King said, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me"? (Matthew 25:32-46)

Do you know, out of The Ten Commandments, six are related to how you treat your fellow human beings? (Exodus 20:1-17).

Do you know, to the slaves who were working for their earthly masters, Paul said, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men"? (Colossians 3:23).

I can go on and on and cite Scripture after Scripture. But what do all these Scriptures reveal? God is concerned about how we treat others and how we follow the right standards in this corrupt world. When we misbehave with others, we are ultimately offending God. And when we don't follow the right standards, we are eventually disobeying God's word.

Friends, how we live on earth and conduct our daily affairs matters to God and reflect our love for Him and reverence to His word. We cannot put God out of our daily life in whatever we do. And our life and choices not only matters to God but as the Scripture says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Therefore, "whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

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S. Your Salvation - Biblical or Self-Induced?

Your Salvation - Biblical or Self-Induced? The term 'salvation' is not uncommon to the professing Christians. Although it is often heard and spoken word, I wonder how many are really familiar with its meaning and significance! Remember, in matters like this, ignorance is no bliss; it is a devastating disease. It saddens me to witness people becoming victims of the diluted and distorted gospel which produces false conversions and carnal Christianity. Well, generally speaking, when we carefully observe the professing Christians today, are they not noticeably similar to the corrupt world, except in external religious activities!

Everyone who professes Christ as his Savior ought to know what salvation is and what it means to believe in Him. It is unwise to use words ignorantly, right? It seems to me that many do not have the knowledge of what salvation truly is and thus developed false notions. They blindly and boldly claim to receive salvation, but the knowledge of what it truly means is far from them.

What Salvation Isn't

Let me begin with what salvation isn't. Salvation is not being born in a Christian family. Multitudes of traditional people have deceived themselves believing that being born in a Christian family gives them a license to inevitably become a Christian with an entry into heaven. Think: Will you become a doctor by birth just because your parents are doctors? What does your common sense say?

Salvation is not receiving miracles or material blessings. It is true that God does perform miracles and healings; He does bless and solve problems. Hallelujah! Nevertheless, to be frank with you, these are not the definite signs of salvation. One may receive earthly blessings and admire Jesus without being saved!

Salvation is not believing the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by believing in Christ we receive salvation, not otherwise. Moreover, it is quite possible to have intellectual faith without saving knowledge, a mental assent to gospel truth without being transformed by that truth. Salvation is not even doing good works. It is possible to do some good works without salvation and yet remain in sin unforgiven to face eternal consequences.

Furthermore, salvation is not taking water baptism, going to church services, worshiping, fasting, praying and reading the Bible. Salvation is not even believing the doctrines of the Holy Bible and participating in the Lord's Supper. Salvation is not preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ at all. Though all these are good and essential practices, however, that is not what salvation is. In fact, all these things are followed after receiving salvation, yet it is terribly possible to practice them without salvation and eventually perish.

What Salvation Is

So, what then is salvation? What does it mean to be saved? The word for 'salvation' used in Greek is 'soteria,' which means, 'deliverance'. Biblical salvation is basically deliverance from the power of sin, from the power of Satan and from eternal damnation (Acts 26:17-18; John 3:16). There is no

true salvation without deliverance from these three perilous bondages.

Now this is only half of the description. We have heard deliverance from but to what? It is to fellowship with God (once separated and now reconciled); to become obedient to God (once lived a disobedient life and now submit to His Lordship) and to inherit God's eternal kingdom (2 Corinthians 5:18; Romans 6:16-18; Colossians 1:12).

Everything said, but how is salvation received? Salvation is received when we sincerely repent of our sins and genuinely put our faith on the finished work of Christ on the Cross (His death and resurrection) which He accomplished for the atonement of our sins. It is not received by having mere knowledge of who He is and what He did but by recognizing our desperate and sinful state and our inability to save ourselves apart from Jesus Christ. It is received when we acknowledge the fact of our unworthiness and that salvation is only a gracious gift of God. All of these are interwoven in the reception of salvation. I wonder how many who claim to be saved had really gone through such life-changing experiences!

Well, if you profess yourself to be a Christian, permit me to pose some questions: Have you received biblical salvation or self-induced salvation? Are you delivered from the power of Satan, from the power and penalty of sin and from eternal damnation? Are you walking in the freedom to obey God? Do you have, what is called - a penitent heart? Are you passionate to live a holy and righteous life? Do you have love for God and for people? It is awful to see how many are comfortably practicing the religious activities bypassing the true salvation of God. One of the worst deceptions of the devil is to make people believe they are already the children of God and on the way to heaven, when they are actually not. O how many people have membership in the church but no citizenship in heaven!

Repentance

Just as a new baby born from his mother's womb without wailing is an unhealthy sign, so is a person who claims to be born-again without repentance. It is surprising to see many people, these days, declaring to believe in Jesus without repenting over their sins. The Holy Scripture explicitly says, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Corinthians 7:1). The old revivalist, Charles G. Finney (1792-1875), reminds us:

What did the apostles tell sinners when they asked what they must do to be saved? What did Peter tell them at Pentecost? What did Paul tell the jailer — to repent, forsake their selfishness, and believe the gospel. This is what men must do to be saved.[1]

Anyone who genuinely receives the salvation of God will go through – CONVICTION of sin, CONFESSION of sin and CHANGE from his former sinful life. These are the unavoidable steps toward repentance and the undeniable signs of salvation. Without repentance, no doubt a person is unsaved, for it is because of sin man has been separated from God and had caused Jesus to suffer brutally to lay His life on the Cross. J.C. Ryle (1816-1900) wrote: The plain truth is that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Without it such doctrines as justification, conversion, and sanctification are "words and names" which convey no meaning to the mind. The first thing, therefore, that God does when He makes any one a new creature in Christ is to send light into his heart, and show him that he is a guilty sinner.[2]

Nowadays, people are quite uncomfortable to admit themselves as sinners while the tax collector cried out, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Today’s Christianity has turned from crying for the Lord’s mercy to chasing God’s blessings. Before hearing the good news of Jesus Christ one should hear the bad news that he is a sinner—separated from God, for no one gratefully receives the goodness of God without realizing his own wretchedness.

It is regretful to see, when people desire to come to Christ, sin and repentance are least considered. There is a great emphasis on what Jesus can do—He can comfort; He can satisfy; He can bless; He can give peace—without any requirement of repentance. In fact, Jesus does awesome wonders so that people would repent. The gospel of Matthew records, “Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent” (Matthew 11:20).

Jesus Himself said, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations”(Luke 24:46-47). What is it that should be preached in Christ’s name and what is it that people should know to come to Christ? Repentance and forgiveness of sin, without which there is no salvation and peace.

It is interesting to notice, although Jesus and the apostles performed signs and wonders, their message was centered upon repentance, not on miracles and blessings. Jesus preached, “Repent for the Kingdom of God is near” (Matthew 4:17; Luke 13:3; Luke 15:7); and the apostles declared, “Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus” (Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30; Acts 26:20). Ah, they did wonders and preached repentance!

Now, repentance itself does not save any person but God doesn’t forgive people without repentance. Repentance for living sinfully is what people must do and forgiveness of sins is what Christ offers when they repent. This is what the apostles preached and the early church heard, not to mention—this is what people neglect to heed in our day.

Jesus, the Savior of Sinners To many, Jesus is seen as a healer, miracle-worker, problem-solver and a blessing-giver. He is not predominantly focused as the One who will save them from their sins. Most of the people who went after Jesus with such an attitude, left him and no longer followed Him (John 6:66).

I have keenly observed those who claim to believe in Jesus just for the sake of receiving a blessing, healing or a miracle—without undergoing conviction and transformation from sinful life—either not remain in the church for a long time or continue to live a carnal life in the name of being a Christian. Such people intellectually believe in Jesus and live more of a problematic, selfish life without passing through life-changing experience.

It is important to consider that the major problem of mankind is not financial crisis, sickness, situations, people and other difficulties. So what is it then? It is SIN. It is because of sin the world is in the worst, depraved condition. One of the major reasons people who claim to come to Christ do not find complete fulfillment in Him is because they have come for some personal gain rather than for personal deliverance from sin. May the reader understand that the primary purpose of Jesus’ coming is not to heal, perform miracles, to give desirous blessings or to make us feel good about ourselves—but to save people from their sins. When an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph to

announce the birth of Christ, do you remember what he proclaimed: “.....you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins”(Matthew 1:21).

Following Jesus

Anyone who decides to believe in Jesus must be aware that he is committing his life to follow Him. It seems many who endeavor to believe in Jesus do not think about following Him at all or at least learn later. If a person believes that he is saved and yet has no desire or passion to follow Jesus, he is not a true believer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) put it rightly, “Only those who obey can believe, and only those who believe can obey.[3] The Holy Scriptures not only encourages to confess and believe in Jesus (Romans 10:9) but also exhorts, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness” (2 Timothy 2:19). How many of those who declare to believe in Christ have actually turned from evil? We cannot burn for God unless we turn from sin. This doesn't mean one will become perfect after coming to Christ but there will be an obvious, progressive growth in the holiness of God and ongoing repentance.

Jesus Christ plainly said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). The one who sincerely believes in Jesus and by the power of God's grace constantly grows in his obedience to the will of God revealed in His word is the one who inherits God's kingdom. True, we are not saved by good works but if there is no confession of evil works before salvation and no accompaniment of good works thereafter (in obedience to God), we are certainly not saved.

These days Jesus is used as a means to prosper, to become successful and to fulfill every desire of 'self', when in fact He said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Rather than naming and claiming to get everything from Him, Jesus said, “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). Oswald Chambers (1874-1917) said it well, “The Salvation of God is deliverance out of self entirely into union with Himself.”[4] Do those who claim to be saved experience this freedom?

Finally, there is a capturing interest in the numbers these days. Great emphasis is laid upon great multitudes coming to Christ. Even though it is wonderful to see multitudes coming to the church meetings, we should not be quick in concluding they are all genuinely saved. True Salvation always results in the change of heart. The early church not only grew in numbers but also lived in the fear of God.[5] It is written, “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord”(Acts 9:31). Is there a fear of the Lord these days in the growing numbers of people in the church? Surveys of contemporary Christian beliefs and conduct tell us that most Christians do not act much differently from non-Christian people.[6] Ah, many seek favor from the Lord to bless them but have no desire to walk in the fear of God!

I believe we need another reformation to get back to the essentials of biblical teaching in regard to salvation. May the Lord have mercy on our generation and bring a mighty transformation. Amen!

Notes:

1. Charles G. Finney, *Crystal Christianity* (Pennsylvania: Whitaker House, 1985), pg.63.
2. J.C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan Publishers. 2001), pg.1.

3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Tiruvalla : Suvartha Bhavan), pg.60.

4. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Chennai: Evangelical Literature Service, 2000), pg.79.

5. Of course there were problems but the apostles made every effort to exhort them to walk in the holiness of God.

6. James Montgomery Boice. *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), pg.191.

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