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“Ye are complete in Christ”

by
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About the Author



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YE ARE COMPLETE IN CHRIST

The greatest Gift the loving God has given to mankind is His only begotten Son (John 3:16). Sadly, many people ignore this precious Gift and are seeking or pursuing the empty things of this world: fame, power, wealth, popularity, worldly wisdom, philosophies, values, lifestyles, lusts, pleasures, entertainments, etc., which can never satisfy them nor save them! *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). They cannot see God’s great salvation in Christ due to the corrupt, depraved and sinful nature of human beings and the blindness of their hearts and minds (2 Cor 4:4).

We thank God for His grace and mercy alone that He has opened our eyes and delivered us from sin and the power of the darkness of Satan unto His marvelous light (Acts 26:18; Col 1:13; 1 Pet 2:9) so that we may find not only our salvation in Christ but also our All in All (Col 3:11), and we are *“complete in him”* alone. Many believers have found their salvation in Christ but after that fail to continue seeking Christ for their All in All. They just try to live a Christian life or do God’s work with their own strength and efforts. No wonder, they fail and fail again until they realise that their sinful nature and the attacks and temptations of Satan prevent them from living a victorious life in Christ.

Jesus is not only our salvation, but also our righteousness, our holiness, our eternal life, our strength, our wisdom, our victory, our peace, our joy and our All in All. Only in Him are we complete, lacking nothing. Having Him we have All. Without Him, we have nothing. Therefore, the more we know Him, trust in Him, look unto Him, rely on Him and humbly submit ourselves to Him and His Word, the more we have His life and His All. Then we will turn our eyes unto Him alone (Heb 12:2), and be *“rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith”* (Col 2:7). Then we may live for Him, serve Him, and walk as He walked (Col 2:6; 1 John 2:6), and taste that the Lord is gracious and precious (1 Pet 2:3-4).

THOUGHT: We are only complete in Christ, our All in All.

PRAYER: Father, open my eyes that I may see and appreciate Thee more.

YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

The Pharisees were rebuked by the Lord Jesus for their hypocrisy (Matt 23). However, in John 3, we see a good Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews (v 1) and a teacher of Israel (v 10), coming to see Jesus by night. Why by night? Maybe he did not have enough courage to see Jesus by day for fear of the Jews. He did not want other rulers and Pharisees to see him associating with the Lord Jesus, whom they envied, hated and persecuted. But after this meeting with the Lord, his life was changed. Later we see him having the courage to stand up for Jesus while the high priests and other Pharisees were against Him (John 7:50-51). And finally, when Jesus died, he had the courage to bring with him 100 pounds of perfume for the burial of the Lord Jesus (John 19:39-42).

In John 3, Nicodemus said to Jesus, *"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."* What do you do when someone comes to you and says nice words to praise you, "Oh, you are so good. I can see the Lord in you!" It is easy for you and me to feel good and not want to say anything offensive to that person. But here, Jesus concerned for Nicodemus's salvation, said to him, *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* Nicodemus was very surprised, asking Jesus, *"How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"* Jesus confirmed, *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,"* and then Jesus said to all who were present there, *"Ye must be born again."* This is the key condition to see the Kingdom of God and to enter the Kingdom of God, to see the truth, to understand God's Word and to enjoy God's salvation. Are you and I sure that we are born again?

THOUGHT: Make sure that we are born again and then be concerned for others' salvation.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for Thy concern for my salvation.

MONDAY, JULY 3

JOHN 1:1-13

1 PETER 1:23-25

*“being born again...
by the word of God.”*

BORN AGAIN BY GOD AND HIS WORD

How can we be born again? The Bible confirms, *“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”* (v 12-13), and *“Being born again,... by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever”* (1 Pet 1:23). We must be born of God and by God’s Word to *“be partakers of the divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). There is no other way. We are not born again of *“blood”* or by our relation to our Christian parents. Our parents cannot give us that *“divine nature,”* God’s nature, or eternal life. Many deceive themselves by thinking that they are saints by their own efforts and merits or by their strict religious practices while their hearts are still sinful and corrupt because they can never produce that *“divine nature.”* Knowing this, we parents or pastors will teach God’s Word to our children and members and pray hard for them until they are born of God.

Thank God and praise the Lord for His gracious work in us by the Holy Spirit and His Word, helping us repent of our sins and receive Jesus as our Lord and Saviour (Titus 3:5). When Jesus says, *“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,”* we understand that the Holy Spirit uses God’s Word, *“the washing of water by the word”* (Eph 5:26) to regenerate those who submit themselves to the Lord and His Word like the clay in the porter’s hand. Can we be born again if we still doubt, question or criticise God’s Word? May God help us read, study, and meditate on His Word with our faith, trust, reverence and submission so that the Holy Spirit may freely do His gracious work in our hearts and lives and transform us unto the image of our Lord Jesus Christ day by day till He comes.

THOUGHT: *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”* (John 3:6).

PRAYER: O Father, help me to submit myself to Thee and Thy Word so that I may be born again and be partakers of Thy divine nature.

TUESDAY, JULY 4

1 JOHN 3:4-10

1 PETER 2:1-3

*“As newborn babes,
desire the sincere milk.”*

HOW I KNOW THAT I AM BORN AGAIN

Can we be sure that we are born again? How? What are the signs of a truly born-again Christian?

A baby naturally needs and depends on his mother and her milk. A baby can never live independently by himself. Likewise, a born-again Christian naturally needs and thirsts for the Lord and His Word and he cannot live without the Lord and His Word. That is the first sign. Do we need and thirst for the Lord and His Word? *“My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”* (Ps 42:2), and *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby”* (1 Pet 2:2). Do we live by the Lord and by God’s Word? *“As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me”* (John 6:57).

Next, a truly born-again Christian will not purposely and habitually live a life of sin. *“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God”* (1 John 3:9). This is not perfect sinlessness since he is still living on earth, and is not perfect yet (Phil 3:12-14). But when convicted by the Holy Spirit, he repents right away to restore his fellowship with God (1 John 1:7-10) because he cannot stand being separated from the Lord, crying like David, *“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin”* (Ps 51:1-2).

With these basic signs of a born-again Christian, we can examine ourselves and see if we are born again.

THOUGHT: It is so wonderful that a sinner like me is born again by God and His Word and that I am His child now!

PRAYER: O Father, I thank Thee for Thy gracious work in my life.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 5

PSALM 51

MATTHEW 5:3

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

**TRUE HAPPINESS IN CHRIST:
REALISE YOUR SPIRITUAL POVERTY**

Many think that they can have happiness when they have what they want: health, wealth, fame, popularity, position in society, a good job, a nice family and a lot of money in the bank. But sadly, when they get all these material blessings, there is still emptiness in their heart. Without the Lord and His blessing, no one can find true and lasting happiness. King Solomon had great wisdom, power, fame, wealth and everything he liked. Moreover, he was very talented (1 Kgs 4:32). But in the end what did he say? *“I hated life; for all is vanity and vexation of spirit”* (Eccl 2:17).

Thank God that we can find true happiness in Christ Jesus. His first Beatitude is, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* The poor in spirit refer to those who are in spiritual poverty and helplessness. They realise that they lack God’s glory and spiritual qualities, they lack love for God and for mankind, they lack holiness, righteousness, wisdom, patience, humility, obedience, etc. If we realise that we are spiritually poor, then we are the blessed, for the kingdom of heaven is ours. The Lord Jesus rebukes the church of the Laodiceans, as they say, *“I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”* (Rev 3:17). Sadly, the philosophy of the world today is to promote “self” with self-esteem, self-confidence, self-image, self-importance, etc., with positive thinking, “I am good, I am able, I am smart,” and never, “I am bad, I am helpless, I am hopeless.” How can they humble themselves and come to the Lord Jesus in repentance and submission? They miss His true happiness!

THOUGHT: *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief”* (1 Tim 1:15).

PRAYER: O Father, help me to see my own spiritual poverty and Thy riches in me.

THURSDAY, JULY 6

2 CORINTHIANS 7:5-11

MATTHEW 5:4

*“Blessed are they that mourn:
for they shall be comforted.”*

TRUE HAPPINESS IN CHRIST:
MOURN AFTER A GODLY MANNER

The second blessing is for those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. While people seek happiness, Jesus' blessing is for those who mourn. What does it mean to mourn? The verb “mourn” here means *“be sad, lament, grieve.”* It is not enough to realise that we are sinners and spiritually poor. Many realise this, but they just ignore it. They are not sad or sorrowful. Neither are they willing to deal with it. Others are so sorrowful or sad about their sins or their great mistakes that they want to end their lives like Judas Iscariot, who hanged himself for betraying the Lord. That is not godly but worldly sorrow, *“for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation... but the sorrow of the world worketh death”* (2 Cor 7:10).

We shall be blessed when we are sad and sorrowful about our spiritual poverty, and then come to the Lord Jesus in repentance. This is godly sorrow that works out repentance to salvation. Peter, who denied the Lord three times, wept bitterly and repented and was forgiven. Godly sorrow always leads to repentance and salvation.

When we mourn over our spiritual poverty, over our sins against God, our disobedience, our unrighteousness, our lack of love, faith, holiness, and righteousness, we shall be comforted by the Lord and His Word and by what God has done for us in Christ. We shall be comforted for knowing that Jesus came into this world and died for our sins, and was risen for our justification and is praying for us now in heaven and will come back again for our full redemption. Having received the comfort and salvation from the Lord and His Word, we shall sympathise with those who mourn over their sins and spiritual poverty, pray for them and help them find comfort and salvation from the Lord and His Word, too.

THOUGHT: It is good to examine myself, mourn over my sins and repent.

PRAYER: Search me, O Father and let me see my spiritual poverty and help me mourn after a godly manner that leads to repentance.

FRIDAY, JULY 7

PSALM 25:1-14

MATTHEW 5:5

*“Blessed are the meek:
for they shall inherit the earth.”*

**TRUE HAPPINESS IN CHRIST:
BE MEEK, TEACHABLE AND RECEPTIVE**

The third blessing is for the meek. It refers to those who are humble, gentle, teachable and receptive to God's truth, God's love, and God's salvation. Many realise that they are sinners, and mourn, but they are not meek enough, humble enough, and receptive enough to receive God's salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. They try to save themselves and establish their own merits and righteousness by doing good works or observing some religious rituals. Many others are not meek enough to believe and receive God's Word with faith, reverence, and submission. They even dare to question and criticise God's Word! It is a sinful arrogance for sinners to question the holy God, or for sinful creatures to question their Creator and His Word! Doing this, they miss the blessing from the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the very God and yet is *“meek and lowly in heart”* (Matt 11:29).

It is not enough to realise our spiritual poverty and mourn over it, as we cannot be saved by it. We must be humble and teachable to receive God's Word of grace and salvation for our souls. Then it is a blessing for us to know our spiritual poverty and helplessness, to mourn and to be sorry for the wrong we have done against God's Word as well as for the right we have not done for the Lord, and then to humbly repent and receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. The reward of the meek is to inherit the earth or land, which refers to the promises of God, including the Millennium kingdom of Christ on earth when He comes back again to be the King of kings. Let us receive God's salvation in Christ today so that we may enjoy His Kingdom of peace when Jesus Christ comes back in the future.

THOUGHT: To be meek, gentle, humble, teachable, and receptive to God's truth and salvation is really wise.

PRAYER: Father, give me a meek and teachable heart to receive Thy Word.

SATURDAY, JULY 8

ROMANS 3:19-31

MATTHEW 5:6

*“Blessed are they which do hunger
and thirst after righteousness:
for they shall be filled.”*

TRUE HAPPINESS IN CHRIST: HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS

The fourth blessing is for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. This is not human righteousness but divine righteousness or the righteousness of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:22). The Pharisees tried their best to keep the law with their extra rules and traditions of men in order to establish their own righteousness. Sadly, their good works were only external, and the Lord Jesus rebuked them as hypocrites (Matt 23). Jesus tells a parable about a Pharisee who trusted in himself that he was righteous and despised others. He stood and prayed to God, boasting of his good works, while the tax collector humbly pleaded for mercy, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” but Jesus says that this tax collector is justified rather than the Pharisee, *“for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”* (Luke 18:9- 14).

To hunger and thirst after righteousness means to have a strong desire for a right stand before God, a right relationship with God. We are to acknowledge our sins and our unrighteousness, then humbly come to the Lord Jesus in repentance and hide ourselves in His righteousness (2 Cor 5:21). Thank God for accepting us in Christ (Eph 1:6), and *“of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Cor 1:30- 31). Jesus Christ is our righteousness before God!

Moreover, to have a right relationship with God, we are to live according to His will. This means we are to read His Word and thirst for His Word as a newborn baby thirsts for milk (1 Pet 2:2) so that we may know God’s will and do God’s will through Jesus Christ our Lord, who strengthens us (Phil 4:13).

THOUGHT: Only in Christ and His righteousness am I acceptable unto God.

PRAYER: Father, please help me seek Thee and Thy righteousness first.

LORD'S DAY, JULY 9
MATTHEW 18:23-35
MATTHEW 5:7

*“Blessed are the merciful:
for they shall obtain mercy.”*

TRUE HAPPINESS IN CHRIST: BE MERCIFUL

The fifth blessing is for the merciful who shall obtain mercy. Mercy is an attribute of God. Psalm 136 has 26 verses and each verse repeats the phrase, *“for His mercy endures for ever.”* Truly we are to give thanks to our God for His mercy endures for ever. Our Father in heaven is “the Father of mercies” (2 Cor 1:3), and that *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”* (Titus 3:5). Then what does “merciful” mean? It means to be actively compassionate and sympathetic in mind, in thought and in action. It means to withhold punishment from offenders who deserve it and to give help to the helpless who do not deserve it. God showed mercy in saving us from the condemnation to Hell while we deserve it and He helps us and blesses us while we do not deserve it.

As God has mercy upon us, we are to show mercy to others (Luke 6:36). The servant who enjoyed great mercy from the king but did not show mercy to his fellow-servant was rebuked and punished (Matt 18:23-35).

It is a blessing for us to forgive others and to show mercy to others. And we can never do this if we do not acknowledge our own spiritual poverty and our eternal condemnation to Hell, and we do not see and appreciate God's great mercy upon us while we do not deserve it. Thank God that we are encouraged to trust and come to our Lord Jesus Christ, our merciful and faithful High Priest, to obtain His grace and mercy in time of need (Heb 2:17; 4:16), and then through His mercy, we may show His mercy to others.

THOUGHT: *“He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he”* (Prov 14:21).

PRAYER: Father, please help me be merciful as Thou art merciful.

MONDAY, JULY 10

PSALM 15

MATTHEW 5:8

*“Blessed are the pure in heart:
for they shall see God”*

TRUE HAPPINESS IN CHRIST: BE PURE IN HEART (I)

The sixth blessing is for *“the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”* Many people challenge that only when God reveals Himself to them clearly will they then believe. Did God reveal Himself to mankind? Yes, He did. God has revealed Himself through His creation, through His Son Jesus Christ, and through His Word the Holy Bible. Can human beings see God? Moses desired to see God’s face, but God said, *“Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live”* (Exod 33:20). Why? Because God is so great, so holy, so righteous, so glorious that sinners with impure and corrupt hearts cannot see Him. There was a man who was in a dark prison cell for a long time. When he was released and brought out to daylight, his eyes could not stand the glare and brightness of the sunlight. He closed his eyes and required a pair of sunglasses. The Bible tells us about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in the last days, all people even the kings, the rich men and chief captains and the mighty men will say to the mountains and rocks, *“Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”* (Rev 6:15-17). Nowadays people may challenge, deny or blaspheme God, but when Jesus Christ comes back, they cannot stand before His glorious and holy presence!

It is a blessing to have a pure heart that we may see God now with our spiritual eyes and will see Him with our physical eyes when Jesus comes back again. “Pure” here means “clean” from the pollution, defilement, and guilt of sin. Do we have a pure heart without sin? *“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can know it?”* (Jer 17:9). God looks into our hearts and minds and thoughts and motives, and He condemns sin in the heart (Matt 5:28). How about our heart? Is it pure? Are our minds, thoughts and motives clean? We thank God that our Saviour Jesus Christ is able to cleanse our hearts from all our sins and unrighteousness by His own blood and give us a new heart (Ezek 36:25-27; 1 John 1:7-9).

THOUGHT: (Read Hebrews 12:14.)

PRAYER: (Use Psalm 139:23-24.)

TUESDAY, JULY 11

EZEKIEL 36:25-38

MATTHEW 5:8

*“A new heart also
will I give you.”*

TRUE HAPPINESS IN CHRIST: BE PURE IN HEART (II)

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” With our sinful, deceitful and wicked heart (Jer 17:9), no one, no human methods, no human efforts, no religious practices, meditation or yoga can make our heart clean and pure (Rom 8:7). We need a new heart that only our Creator can give to us when we acknowledge not only our sins but also our sinful nature, and come to the Lord Jesus in full repentance and submission. God will search our hearts, cleanse us and give us a new heart so that we may fear Him and keep His Word (Ezek 36:25-27). That is God’s precious promise and blessing for us.

God has accepted us in His dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ, and we have a right and holy position before God in Christ, and are called His *“saints”* (1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:10; Jude 14), but we are not yet perfect while we are still in this sinful world (Phil 3:12-14). Therefore, we do need the gracious work of sanctification of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives day by day until our Lord Jesus comes back again.

Thank God that we are sanctified by the Lord Jesus Christ and by His blood (Heb 13:12), by the God the Father (Jude 1), by the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:16) and by God’s Word the Truth (John 17:17). Our part is to commit our hearts and lives to the Lord with our full submission to Him and His Word. There is no other way.

Then with a cleansed and sanctified heart, we may see God with our spiritual eyes, or our eyes of faith, like Moses, we can stand firm, seeing God who is invisible (Heb 11:27). And then when Jesus Christ comes back again, we shall see Him face to face (1 John 3:2-3). Do we have this hope? Then we are to purify ourselves!

THOUGHT: Without God’s gracious work in me, I am undone!

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy work of regeneration and sanctification.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 12
2 CORINTHIANS 5:12-21
MATTHEW 5:9

*“Blessed are the peacemakers:
for they shall be called the
children of God.”*

TRUE HAPPINESS IN CHRIST: BE PEACEMAKERS

The seventh blessing is for *“the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”* Through the Beatitudes of our Lord Jesus, we see the proper steps of our Christian life: Knowing our spiritual poverty, mourning over our sins in repentance, humbly receiving God’s salvation in Christ, being born again and thirsting for God and His righteousness, growing up in His Word, showing mercy to others, being sanctified and now serving the Lord as peacemakers. Many are serving the Lord without going through the earlier steps. Not having been born again nor sanctified, they can never be true peacemakers, but are troublemakers!

The term peacemakers appears only once in the Bible, in Matthew 5:9 and it carries the meaning of the one who has received the peace of God in his own heart and then brings peace to others. He is not simply the one who makes peace between two parties or two people, but the one who spreads the good news of peace or the Gospel of peace which he has experienced. Are we peacemakers? Do we have the peace of God in our hearts and share with others the Gospel of peace which we have experienced? This is the ministry God has given to His children. We are in the world, but we are not of the world, and we have the King’s business to do, to bring people back to God Himself (2 Cor 5:20).

To be peacemakers, we must be first reconciled to God and have the peace of God in our submissive hearts. There should be no conflicts between God’s will and our will. If we can say that God’s will be done in all things, then we truly have the peace of God in our heart.

To bring peace to others, we are to be humble and meek enough to live in peace with them; and as ambassadors of Christ, we share His gospel of peace with others, let them know that God loves them and has sent His Son Jesus to die for them and to rise again to save them. Constrained by Christ’s love, we beseech them to be reconciled to God.

THOUGHT: (Read Romans 10:15.)

PRAYER: Father, let me have Thy peace and be Thy peacemaker.

THURSDAY, JULY 13

HEBREWS 12:1-14

MATTHEW 5:10

*“Blessed are they which are
persecuted for righteousness’ sake:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

**TRUE HAPPINESS IN CHRIST:
BE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS’ SAKE**

Jesus’ teachings about true happiness even when one is under persecution seems to contradict the thinking, concepts, expectations and values of the world. Unbelievers assume that a happy life cannot involve troubles, problems, hardships, afflictions, trials or persecutions. Therefore, many church leaders today do not want to preach Biblical separation from sins, worldliness, and wrong doctrines. Instead, they preach a health and wealth gospel to attract people to an easy and broad way, believing in the Lord Jesus to be healthy and wealthy but not requiring full submission to the Lord and His Word! But here, not only did our Lord Jesus teach us to suffer but He Himself suffered for us (1 Pet 2:21).

Even though the blessings in verse 10 and 11 are for those who suffer persecutions, we see there are two levels: one is for those who live a godly life and the other is for those who bear the name of the Lord Jesus and glorify and magnify Jesus’ Name and propagate their faith in Jesus’ Name in whatever they do. May God help us to be willing to suffer persecutions for righteousness’ sake and for His Name’s sake.

When we hunger and thirst for God Himself, for His righteousness in Christ Jesus, for His Word, and for a right relationship with Him, we will try, by God’s grace, to live according to His will and His Word. Suffering persecutions for righteousness’ sake means suffering persecutions when we keep our right relationship with God and live a godly life according to God’s Word, separated from sins and self and worldliness. We should not be surprised when people hate us and persecute us, as our Lord Jesus lived a godly life, a perfect life, a very good life, but He was envied, hated, despised, persecuted and in the end was crucified shamefully on the cross. God’s Word confirms that, *“all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”* (2 Tim 3:12).

THOUGHT: Nothing can separate me from Christ’s love (Rom 8:35-39).

PRAYER: Father, help me live a godly life no matter what may happen.

FRIDAY, JULY 14
1 PETER 4:12-19
MATTHEW 5:11

*“Blessed are ye,
when men shall revile you,
and persecute you,... for my sake.”*

TRUE HAPPINESS IN CHRIST:
BE PERSECUTED FOR CHRIST’S SAKE

The last blessing is for those who are persecuted for Jesus’ Name. The Bible teaches, *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Cor 10:31), and *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”* (Col 3:17). God wants us to say and do all things in Jesus’ Name and all to His glory. What are our proper attitudes when we are reviled or persecuted for His name?

- Be not surprised by the wickedness of men (John 3:19-20). Jesus says, *“The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you”* (John 15:20), and *“think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you”* (1 Pet 4:12).
- Look unto the Lord Jesus, *“lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”* (Heb 12:2-3), follow His steps and commit ourselves *“to him that judgeth righteously”* (1 Pet 2:21-23).
- Rejoice, and be exceeding glad with endurance *“for great is your reward in heaven”* (Matt 5:12). *“If we suffer, we shall also reign with him”* (2 Tim 2:12), and *“If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified”* (1 Pet 4:14). We will glorify God when we do not give up but are still faithful to Him and His Word unto death.
- Count it a great privilege to bear our Lord’s name and suffer for His sake (Phil 1:29 and Phil 3:10), and to be refined and *“be counted worthy of the kingdom of God”* (2 Thess 1:5; 1 Pet 1:7; 4:1). No suffering, no glory (Luke 24:26).

THOUGHT: It is a privilege to be persecuted for Jesus’ sake.

PRAYER: Father, please help me rejoice and endure unto the end.

YE ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH (I)

What does Jesus mean when He tells us that we are the salt of the earth? We know that all men including us are sinners and have our sinful and corrupt nature. When we repented and accepted Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, our lives are changed and transformed into His image day by day. Then our new life in Christ with the characteristics of a true Christian is like the salt of the earth in this sinful world.

Our Lord Jesus prays to His Father, *“I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world”* (John 17:15, 18). Are we living witnesses of our Lord Jesus like the salt of the earth? We must not be *“conformed to the world”* (Rom 12:2), but to influence the world. Some basic benefits of salt are enhancing flavour, preventing corruption, cleaning and healing, and being faithful and trustworthy.

(a) Enhancing Flavour: With a right amount of salt, it will enhance the flavour and make the food tasty. Job asked the question, *Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt?* (Job 6:6). This speaks of the effective function of salt. In this world of sin and sorrow, people cannot find true happiness and meaning of life. Can they see true happiness and meaning of life in us? We live here with a purpose to glorify God, enjoy Him, live for Him and serve Him. Without this purpose, our lives are meaningless. Thanks be to God for His grace and abundant life given to us so that we may live a meaningful life for Him in this sinful world! Are others influenced by our lives?

THOUGHT: Only Christ can help me live a true Christian life.

PRAYER: Father, please live in me and manifest Thy holy and gracious life through me, and make me a blessing to others, all for Thy glory. Amen.

YE ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH (II)

(b) Preventing Corruption: Salt is used to preserve food. Do we have a godly and holy influence on unbelievers? When we are among a group of people telling lies and dirty jokes, smoking, drinking, gambling, striving, embracing sinful lusts, do they see a godly and holy manner in our lives? Are they embarrassed or ashamed and scared of us even though they may hate us, despise us and persecute us? God wants to use our godly and holy lives to prevent the corruption. When the Holy Spirit takes up the Church to meet our Saviour Jesus at His Coming, this world will be under Satanic influence and be very corrupt and wicked (2 Thess 2:6-12). Until that time, are we the salt of the earth, having godly and holy influence on this sinful world?

(c) Cleaning and Healing: Salty water can be used to wash wounds and prevent infection. We are living among people or brethren, many of whom are broken hearted, hurt or offended by others or even by their loved ones. Our Lord wants us to bring true comfort and healing to them through our kind concern, prayers, telling how the Lord Jesus can help them and what He can do for them, and sharing with them God's Word and our testimony.

(d) Being Faithful and Trustworthy: God made a covenant with His people and called it "a covenant of salt for ever" (Num 18:19) to remind His people of His faithfulness in keeping His covenant. If we are the salt of the earth we are to be faithful: faithful to the Lord, to His perfect Word, and in everything we do. Do people trust us for our faithfulness? Are we trustworthy and reliable in this world?

THOUGHT: A true Christian life must have good influences on this world.

PRAYER: Father, keep me faithful unto Thee and Thy Word unto death.

MONDAY, JULY 17

HEBREWS 6:1-8

MATTHEW 5:13

“but if the salt have lost his savour.”

WHAT IF SALT LOSES ITS SALTINESS?

Along the South and Southwest of the Dead Sea, there is a long ridge of rock salt. When it is contaminated with other minerals it may lose its saltiness and it is thrown onto the road, trodden under the feet of men.

Can we lose our saltiness in this world? The answer is “yes,” as our Lord uses the possible condition “if.” However, those who are truly born again, will never lose their salvation, as the Lord Jesus has promised (John 10:28-30). However, when they are backsliding, they cannot be a good testimony for the Lord. They lose a godly influence and cannot be trusted. When they repent and come back to the Lord, He is able to make them salty again.

Our Lord says that we are the salt of the earth (v13) after He teaches the qualities of God’s children (vv3-12):

- (1) Realising spiritual poverty: When we are proud and despise others, we may lose some saltiness in our spiritual life.
- (2) Mourning: We may lose some saltiness if there is still a known sin in our lives that we have not mourned over and forsaken!
- (3) Being meek, teachable, and receptive to God’s Truth: We may lose some saltiness when we doubt God’s Word.
- (4) Being hungry and thirst for God’s righteousness: We may be losing saltiness if we do not desire God’s Word and a right stand before God.
- (5) Being merciful: We may lose some saltiness if we are unforgiving and unkind toward others.
- (6) Being pure in heart: We may be losing some saltiness when we are compromising and contaminated with sins, worldliness, wrong doctrines, etc.
- (7) Being peacemakers: We may be losing some saltiness if we are ashamed of the Gospel of peace and unwilling to share it with others.
- (8) Being faithful in persecutions: We may be losing some saltiness when we are not faithful to the Lord and His Word unto death.

THOUGHT: Take heed or I may lose the quality of a true Christian life.

PRAYER: Father, help me be alert and live a true Christian life in Thee.

TUESDAY, JULY 18

1 JOHN 1:1-10

JOHN 8:12

"I am the light of the world."

JESUS CHRIST AND GOD'S WORD: TRUE DIVINE LIGHT

Light is so vital for our lives. God created light on the first day of His literal six 24-hour days in His creation (Gen 1:3-5). And on the fourth day God made the sun, the moon and the stars to be lights in the firmament (Gen 1:14-17).

As God's natural light is free and available, many people take it for granted. In darkness how can we see each other? How can we find a way to walk safely in the right direction? *"O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever"* (Ps 136:1,7).

Seeing that the natural light is good and vital for our lives, let us now consider God's Divine Light for our spiritual life and how we can reflect that light and shine it before men in this world of sin and darkness. Through God's Word, we know that the true source of Light is from God alone (1 John 1:5, James 1:17, John 1:9; 8:12, Ps 119:105). Therefore, in order to get the true Divine Light for our spiritual life, we are to come to our living and true God of the Bible, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and to His Word alone. Many religions and cults and occult groups are deceiving themselves by believing that their gods, their leaders and their books are true light! No marvel, even Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

How can we discern truth from lies? Only God's Word, which God has perfectly inspired and perfectly preserved for us, and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, can illumine our hearts to see the Truth in His light and then help us show it to others (2 Cor 4:6; Eph 1:18). There is no other way.

THOUGHT: Without the Lord Jesus and God's Word, I am in spiritual darkness. How terrible!

PRAYER: Father, help me seek Thee and Thy Word always, for Thou art my living Light.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 19

EPHESIANS 5:1-20

MATTHEW 5:14

“Ye are the light of the world.”

YE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

What does it mean when Jesus says that His followers are the light of the world? Is it the same meaning as He says that He is the light of the world? Absolutely not. We used to be under the power of darkness of sins and Satan. Thank God for His grace and mercy that we have been turned *“from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God”* that we may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Jesus (Acts 26:18).

Thank God that we are now the children of light (Eph 5:8) and can reflect the Light of God and shine it in this world of darkness like the moon or a mirror reflecting the light of the sun. Saying *“Ye art the light of the world,”* our Lord expects us to reflect exactly the same light, the same truth, the same love which we have received from Him. Then, are we reflecting our Lord Jesus Christ and His truth in this world of darkness?

Being born again, we have new motives and purpose of life different from those of unbelievers (Matt 6:23). We do all things for God’s glory alone (1 Cor 10:31). We will not be isolated and hiding ourselves in a corner or in a monastery or in a convent. Our Lord wants our lives and our good works to be seen by men like a city set on a hill or like a candle on a candlestick so that they may glorify our Father in heaven, not ourselves, as our Lord commands, *“let shine your light before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”* Do others see God’s light in our lives? They may see our goodness, our smart abilities, or our good works, but more important, can they see the Lord and His truth, His goodness and His wisdom (James 3:17-18) in our lives? Do they see our good works as a result of a new life in Christ? Do they glorify God through our lives?

THOUGHT: It is a great privilege to reflect the Lord and His Truth to others.

PRAYER: Father, please help me reflect Thy light of truth to others.

THURSDAY, JULY 20

2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-18

1 JOHN 1:5-7

“Beholding as in a glass
the glory of the Lord.”

HOW TO REFLECT GOD’S LIGHT

How do we reflect our Lord’s light to others?

(a) *Separation from darkness:* The first and important step to reflect God’s Light is to separate ourselves from the darkness of sins, unbelief, ungodliness, worldliness, and wrong doctrines, even among brethren (2 Cor 6:14-18; 2 Thess 3:6-15), and have no fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them (Eph 5:11). Then, let us just follow our Lord Jesus and His Word and stop walking in darkness (John 8:12).

(b) *Walking in the Light:* Walking in the light means humbly walking with God and living in His holy presence, in His truth and in His love. Only living in God’s holy presence will we appreciate the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the light lets us see more of God and His truth as well as more of ourselves, our unrighteousness and our sins. Thank God that Christ’s blood keeps on cleansing us so that we may maintain our fellowship with Him in His light!

(c) *Nothing between us and the Lord:* To have a good reflection, it requires a highly polished surface such as a mirror. Holding a mirror facing the sun, we can see a strong reflected light shining and flaring. How can a mirror reflect well if it is dirty or its back faces the sun or there is something between it and the sun? Likewise, our lives have different levels of reflection from God’s light depending on how much we know the Lord and His truth, how submissive we are to the Lord, and how close we keep our fellowship with Him. Are we clear mirrors facing the Lord? Is there anyone, anything, any sin, or any idol (even “self”) between us and the Lord? Moses had very close communion with the Lord and his face reflected God’s glory (Exod 34:35), and so did Stephen (Acts 6:15). May our lives reflect His glory and His truth to others in this world of darkness.

THOUGHT: We live in this world of darkness to reflect our Lord’s light.

PRAYER: Father, keep me in Thy light and let me reflect Thy light.

FRIDAY, JULY 21

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-11

1 CORINTHIANS 6:11

“But ye are washed.”

BUT YE ARE WASHED

We are to meet some qualifications to enter a country as an immigrant. How about the kingdom of God and the qualifications? God is holy and righteous, and His kingdom is holy and righteous, so His citizens are to be holy and righteous. Then who is qualified to enter God’s kingdom? Sadly but truly, no one is qualified because *“there is none righteous, no, not one”* and that *“all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:10, 23). But thank God for His gracious work of salvation in Christ Jesus, *“but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Cor 6:11).

Truly, we are washed and cleansed by the blood of our Lord Jesus, by God’s Word, and by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost (John 15:3; Eph 5:26; Tit 3:5; 1 John 1:7). However, God will not cleanse us if we do not acknowledge our sins, forsake them and confess them before Him. (1 John 1:9; cf. Ps 32:5). Therefore, there are commandments requiring us to wash or cleanse ourselves, *“wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved”* (Jer 4:14) and *“Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded”* (James 4:8). Are there still any sins that we have not confessed and forsaken? *“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy”* (Prov 28:13). The more we read God’s Word, the more we shall see and be convicted of our sins and unrighteousness and the more we shall need the Saviour Jesus Christ and the washing and cleansing by His blood. That is the way the Holy Spirit uses God’s Word to minister to our souls and hearts, and this is the first step of regeneration to enter into the kingdom of God, *“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”* (John 3:5). The qualification to enter into God’s kingdom is to be born again in Christ.

THOUGHT: To be washed by Christ’s blood and be born again by the Holy Spirit are the qualifications to enter into God’s kingdom.

PRAYER: Father, wash me and keep me clean always in Thy blood.

BUT YE ARE SANCTIFIED, BUT YE ARE JUSTIFIED

(a) But Ye Are Sanctified: This verb “sanctified” is in the passive voice, denoting that it is a total work done by God alone. Our part is to commit our lives to Him with our trust and submission to Him and His Holy Word. In our position in Christ, we are sanctified and called saints (1 Cor 1:2), but it is also a process of transforming us into the image of the Lord Jesus until we shall be like Him when He comes. It is a process of separating us from sins, self and worldliness, a process of cleansing us from sins and unrighteousness, and a process of filling us with His divine nature, His mind, love, holiness and goodness. Thank and praise the Lord that *“he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Phil 1:6). Shall we not wisely trust in the Lord, commit our lives to Him and submit to Him and His Word like the clay in the Potter’s Hand?

(b) But Ye Are Justified: The verb “justified” is also in the passive voice, indicating that the total work of grace is from the Lord. Justification takes place once for all when we sincerely repent and receive Jesus as our personal Lord and Saviour (Rom 3:20). What does it mean to be justified? It means to be declared righteous before God, and be truly clothed with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus on account of His obedient life on earth and His sacrificial death on the cross, and His resurrection. How wonderful God’s grace is for us poor and helpless sinners. Thank God for His amazing grace upon you and me!

THOUGHT: Without Jesus and God’s Word we are still dead in sins.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for having washed, sanctified and justified me.

LORD'S DAY, JULY 23
MATTHEW 11:25-30
MATTHEW 11:28

*“Come unto me, all ye that
labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.”*

COME UNTO ME, ALL YE THAT LABOUR

Through the Bible, we know that no one nor anything in this world can give our souls true rest, except our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”* How precious is Jesus' rest! It is not only the inner tranquility and peacefulness in our souls but also the satisfaction, refreshment, renewal, restoration from Jesus' comfort, grace and strength.

(a) Come to Jesus: *“Come unto Me”* is the invitation from our God and our Creator! He has graciously invited His rebellious creatures to His rest! Let us come to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, not to any man, nor to any human organisation or religion.

(b) Take Jesus' Yoke: *“Take my yoke upon you.”* His yoke means His control, direction, and teachings. We are to submit to Him, to His control, direction, and to His words in order to find rest for our souls. The Lord knows our weaknesses, and His grace is sufficient for us to carry His yoke. Moreover, Jesus' burden is light, good, holy, righteous, and gracious.

(c) Learn from Jesus: *“Learn of me”* means to follow the Lord Jesus as our perfect Divine Teacher and Example and to accept His Word as the perfect rule and foundation of our faith, beliefs, doctrines, practices, service and conduct. How can we learn from Jesus? We have to read and study His Word with a teachable, submissive and prayerful heart. Through the Bible and with the illumination of the Holy Spirit we shall know our Lord Jesus, His perfect life, His teachings and His perfect example.

THOUGHT: “Thou (God) madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose (finds its rest) in Thee” (Augustine).

PRAYER: Father, may I take Thy yoke and learn from Thee always.

AFTER THIS MANNER YE PRAY (I)

Normally, the unbelievers do not have any idea of prayer to God until they face great dangers, fatal illnesses, or sudden disasters in their lives. After being disappointed at themselves and at their last resort, they cry to any “god” who is able to help them. Sadly, they are rarely concerned for the salvation of their souls. The Bible confirms that there is no salvation outside Jesus (Acts 4:12).

In Jesus’ days, our Lord rebuked the hypocrites who loved doing religious duties including praying before men to obtain the praise from men (Matt 6:5; 23:14). Our Lord taught His disciples how to pray properly (Matt 6; Luke 11). Then what proper attitudes should we have in prayers?

(a) Pray with an Obedient and Needy Heart: Some believers who are weak or lazy in praying think that God is all-knowing and He knows all their needs, so it is fine if they trust in the Lord and just sometimes come to the Lord in prayer when they have big problems or difficulties. Are they correct? Only God is correct, they are wrong. Prayer is not just to come to the Lord for our need but it is a means to keep us in touch with God, who is our life and strength. Prayer is our spiritual breath. No one can survive without breathing. Besides our action of prayer in the morning, before meals or bedtime, we are commanded to have a constant attitude of prayer in our hearts wherever we are (1 Thess 5:17). Praying is communicating with God. We are to listen to what God is saying to us through His Word. How about those who question or criticise God’s Word? Do you think that God will listen to their prayers? Absolutely not! For those who refuse His Word, God will not answer their prayers (Prov 1:24-31, Prov 28:9).

THOUGHT: We cannot live without breathing and without praying.

PRAYER: Father, help me to learn to pray according to Thy will.

TUESDAY, JULY 25

JAMES 4:1-10

JOHN 14:13-14

*“If ye shall ask
any thing in my name,
I will do it.”*

AFTER THIS MANNER YE PRAY (II)

(a) Pray with Humility, Reverence and Faith in Jesus’ Name: We have learnt that the humble and repentant prayer of the tax-collector is accepted while the proud and self-righteous prayer of the Pharisee is rejected (Luke 18:10-14). We have to pray with a humble and reverent heart (Eccl 5:2). God is our Creator and Maker while we are His creature. God is holy and righteous while we are sinners. We are to humble ourselves before Him (James 4:6).

We are also to pray in the name of our Lord Jesus. Without His death, resurrection and intercession for us, we cannot stand before the holy God. Our Lord Jesus says, *“If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it”* (John 14:14). What does it mean to pray in Jesus’ Name? It means praying in His merits and righteousness. We are undone and we and our prayers are acceptable to the Father only through Jesus Christ. Regardless of who we are or what we have done, every time we come to God in prayer, we are to trust in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Praying in Jesus’ Name also means praying just as the Lord Jesus prayed: with faith and full submission to His Father’s will (Heb 11:6; Matt 26:39). If we pray according to our own lusts (Jam 4:3), we are taking Jesus’ Name in vain!

(b) Pray with a Thankful, Pure and Forgiving Heart: Praying is a part of our worship with thanks and praise to the Lord (Ps 100:4; Phil 4:6). It is a good time for us to examine ourselves and confess our sins so that we may be forgiven and cleansed (Matt 6:12; 1 John 1:9). If we do not repent nor forsake our known sins, our prayer will be rejected (Ps 66:18). And as we have received forgiveness from the Lord, we must have a forgiving heart so that our prayer may not be hindered (Matt 6:14-15).

THOUGHT: Without the risen Lord Jesus and His Name, our prayer is in vain.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for listening to my prayers in Jesus’ Name.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 26
LUKE 11:1-13
1 JOHN 5:14

*“If we ask any thing
according to his will,
he heareth us.”*

THE LORD’S MODEL PRAYER (I)

Our Lord Jesus teaches us how to pray properly with His model prayer.

(a) *Be Born Again*: Only when we are born again by the Holy Spirit may we cry to God, “Abba, Father” meaningfully (Rom 8:15). If not, the first step is to cry unto the Lord for forgiveness and salvation (Rom 10:13).

(b) *Acknowledge God’s Sovereignty*: To express “*Our Father which art in heaven*” is to acknowledge our Father is above all things. He is our Creator and Maker, the living and true God, who is all-knowing, all- powerful, all-present and sovereign. With this knowledge and conviction, we will come to our Father with trust, humility, reverence and submission.

(c) *Seek God and His Kingdom First*: (Matt 6:33). Here, we are taught to put God first, “*thy name,*” “*thy kingdom,*” and “*thy will,*” not ours. This is our worship in prayer. God’s holy Name must be our concern. God’s kingdom must be our expectation and longing and while looking forward to the coming of our King and Saviour Jesus Christ to establish His millennial kingdom of peace on earth, we are to be watchful and prepared to meet the Lord and labour hard to accelerate His coming (Matt 24:14; 2 Pet 3:11-14). Furthermore, no matter what our needs, our plans, our desires may be, we are to submit ourselves to God’s will and pray, “*Thy will be done*” not only in our lives but also “*in earth as it is in heaven.*” When our strongest desire is God’s will alone rather than ours, our “will” will be like God’s and we will pray according to God’s Word and will (John 15:7). God’s will is always the best!

THOUGHT: Prayer time is a blessed and sweet time of communion with God.

PRAYER: Father, help me seek Thee and Thy kingdom first in my prayer.

THURSDAY, JULY 27

EPHESIANS 6:10-20

PSALM 56:9

*“When I cry unto thee,
then shall mine enemies turn back:
this I know; for God is for me.”*

THE LORD’S MODEL PRAYER (II)

(a) Present Our Daily Need: *“Give us this day our daily bread.”* We present our daily needs to our Father, both spiritual and physical needs, trusting in His loving care and provision. We are to be contented and thankful to the Lord for each day. As we need food for our bodies, we do need God’s Word for our souls. Moreover, we also need God’s guidance, wisdom, grace and strength to live for Him and do His will each day. We are also to pray for our brethren, God’s servants, the ministry, the salvation of others, the governors, etc. (Acts 4:31; Eph 6:18-19; Col 1:3; 4:3-4; 2 Thess 1:11; 3:1; 1 Tim 2:1-4).

(b) Ask for Forgiveness: *“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”* The next prayer item is to ask for God’s forgiveness through our repentance and confession of sins. Receiving the forgiveness and mercy from the Lord, we should show His grace and mercy to others, willingly and wholeheartedly forgive those who have wronged us personally (Matt 18:21-35).

(c) Ask for Protection: *“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”* God is holy and loving, so *“God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man”* (James 1:13), but He did allow Satan, the tempter, to tempt and test Job and our Lord Jesus Christ (Job 1:12; 2:6; Matt 4:1-11). Realising our weaknesses, we pray that God will protect us and deliver us from Satan, evil and sins (Jude 1:24-25) while we submit ourselves to the Lord and *“resist the devil”* (James 4:7) and *“abstain from all appearance of evil”* (1 Thess 5:22).

(d) Praise the Lord: Our prayer ends with our praise to Him: *“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”* Truly, so be it!

THOUGHT: Prayer is a good weapon in our battle against Satan and sins.

PRAYER: Father, help me to pray as I have been taught in Thy Word.

FRIDAY, JULY 28

2 CHRONICLES 34:1-7, 14-19

JOHN 17:17

“Thy word is truth.”

REFORMATION SUNDAY

Once a year, our church sets aside the last Sunday of October as Reformation Sunday when we give thanks to God for the 16th Century Reformation. We thank and praise the Lord for raising His godly servants like Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox. The Reformation was vital for the Truth which has to be proclaimed. In those days people did not have the Word of God in their own languages and in their hands; as a result, they were misled by unbiblical doctrines, practices, and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. Their salvation was not by grace through faith alone but mixed with good works, their worship was not in spirit and in truth based on God’s Word alone but mixed with human traditions, unbiblical rituals and sacraments, their loyalty was not to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and to God’s Word alone but to the Pope, to his words and to the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), etc. If we were under such bondage today, how miserable we would be!

We thank God for giving His servant Luther strength and courage to stand alone for God’s truth and even to contend for his faith in God’s Word against the RCC. If Luther had compromised and worked with the RCC to reform it, God would not have used him. Ironically, today we see many compromising and desiring to go back to Rome, even thinking that the 16th Century Reformation was a mistake! Disappointingly, many take God’s Word for granted with their spirit of compromise, ecumenism and even apostasy!

We thank God that through the Reformation we have our English King James Bible today, which was translated by godly and talented servants of God from His perfectly inspired and perfectly preserved texts (Traditional Masoretic Hebrew text for the OT and Received Greek Text for the NT). Sadly, many so-called Christians even leaders and scholars question and criticise God’s Word!

THOUGHT: Our battle today is for the verbal plenary preservation of the Bible.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the 16th Century Reformation and for the KJB.

SATURDAY, JULY 29

JOHN 8:31-45

JOHN 8:36

“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

JESUS CHRIST, THE DIVINE REFORMER AND SAVIOUR

We thank God for sending His only begotten Son, not only to bring us back to His truth, but also to die for our sins and to rise again for our justification. Our Lord Jesus says, *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. ... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”* Are we free indeed?

The Jews said to the Lord Jesus, *“We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man.”* They have forgotten that their fathers used to be in bondage to the Egyptians, the Philistines, the Midianites, the Babylonians, etc., and in their days they were in bondage to the Romans, to their sins and their man-made traditions! Many people also think that they are free and not in bondage to anyone or anything. They think that they are enjoying so much freedom that they do not need a Saviour. Is that true? Jesus says, *“Whosoever committeth sin is a servant of sin.”* *“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning”* (1 John 3:8), and *“for of whom (or of what) a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage”* (2 Pet 2:19). Therefore, if we are defeated by sin and Satan, we are slaves of sin and Satan. Many are slaves to their own sinful nature with sexual lusts, sinful desires or bad temper. Many are slaves to their selfishness, proud ambitions and they cannot deny themselves nor submit themselves to the Lord and God’s will. Many are slaves to worldliness and materialism, running after fashion and modern lifestyles. Many are slaves to drinking, smoking, drugs, or gambling. Many are slaves to worldly pleasures and entertainments, to movies and video games. Many are slaves to unbiblical beliefs, practices or superstitions and saying that they have to keep some practices or rituals or do some good works to be saved. Sadly, outside the Lord Jesus, their souls cannot find true peace, true freedom and true salvation!

THOUGHT: True freedom comes from Jesus and His Truth alone.

PRAYER: Father, please set me free from sin, self, worldliness and Satan.

LORD'S DAY, JULY 30

JOHN 8:31-36

JOHN 8:32

*“And ye shall know the truth,
and the truth shall make you free.”*

YE SHALL BE FREE INDEED (I)

Jesus says, *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* How can we know the truth? Only through God's Word with the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit can we know the truth. We are to *“continue”* in God's Word first and then we *“shall know”* the truth. The verb *“continue”* is the same verb *“abide, continue, remain”* in John 15:4-16, carrying a meaning of full submission and total dependence of the branch (believer) on the Vine (Christ). We are to read and study God's Word with a humble, teachable, submissive and prayerful heart as well as with faith and reverence, and then the Spirit of Truth will guide us *“into all truth”* (John 16:13). Once we know the truth, the truth will make us free.

What is truth? Through the Bible, we know that God's Word is truth (John 17:17), the Lord Jesus Christ is the truth (John 14:6), and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, is truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6).

(a) God's Word: When the Bible was translated into German, most of the Germans came back to God's truth and enjoyed God's salvation in Christ by grace through faith alone despite the fierce persecutions from the Roman Catholic Church. The same blessings to the English and the Scottish when the Bible was translated into English! It is God's Word that made them free from the bondage of unbiblical doctrines, traditions, practices and rituals of the RCC!

Through God's Word we know the truth that God is a Spirit (John 4:24) and that He forbids us to worship idols. Then we shall be free from worshipping idols. Through God's Word we know the truth that God is sovereign and that He is taking care of us and is able to make all things work together for good unto us. Then we shall not fear any “bad luck” under the shadow of superstitions. The more we know God's truth through His word and the Holy Spirit, the more liberty we enjoy in Christ.

THOUGHT: Knowing God's Word, God's Truth, is true liberty.

PRAYER: Father, please help me know Thy Truth through Thy Word.

MONDAY, JULY 31

ROMANS 7:14-25

ROMANS 8:2

*“For the law of the Spirit of life in
Christ Jesus hath made me free
from the law of sin and death.”*

YE SHALL BE FREE INDEED (II)

(a) The Lord Jesus Christ: Our Lord Jesus says, *“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”* Our Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification (Rom 4:25), so He is able to set us free from sins, the curse of the law and condemnation, *“who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree”* (1 Pet 2:24). Many know God’s Word and believe in Jesus Christ, but they are still slaves of sins. Why? They are trying to overcome their sinful nature by their own strength. Our Lord Jesus is able not only to save us from sins but also to deliver us from our sinful nature (Rom 7:24-25). Like Paul, we are not to trust ourselves but humbly turn to the Lord Jesus alone with our trust and surrender (John 15:5).

When I was studying at the Far Eastern Bible College in Singapore, I met several students who have been set free from drug addiction by their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Lord is using their lives in the ministry! Praise the Lord! He is our great Deliverer and Saviour!

(b) The Holy Spirit: The Bible says, *“Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”* (2 Cor 3:17). David acknowledged that he was sinful and cried to the Lord in repentance (Ps 51:10-12). The Holy Spirit is able to regenerate us and sanctify us and fill us with His divine nature so that we may overcome sins and bear His fruit (Rom 8:2; Gal 5:22-23). Shall we not wisely submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit’s control?

THOUGHT: Submission to God’s Truth is Christian true liberty.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for making me free through Thy Truth.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 1
JOHN 4:19-26
JOHN 4:23

*“The true worshippers
shall worship the Father
in spirit and in truth.”*

TRUE WORSHIPPERS: BE BORN-AGAIN

In this world, there are so many religious groups, and all claim that their religions, their “gods,” their books, their beliefs and practices are true. Then what are the criteria to help us discern and judge which group is true or who are the true worshippers of the living and true God? The criteria must come from God’s Word (John 17:17). Only through God’s Word can we know how to worship the living and true God properly as He wants us to.

John 4:23 tells us that God is seeking “*true worshippers*” who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. What does it mean to worship the Father in spirit and in truth?

The Bible says that we “*were dead in trespasses and sins*” (Eph 2:1). A physically dead man cannot do anything. Likewise, a spiritually dead man cannot communicate with God and cannot worship Him properly. Through God’s Word we know that God created Adam and Eve but they disobeyed God and were cursed. Sin and death came into the world: physical death (separation from soul), spiritual death (separation from God), and eternal death (condemnation to Hell forever on the Judgment Day). Separation from God means separation from His truth, spiritual light and life. And Satan deceived them and misled them to worship all kinds of false “gods” and idols. “*But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils*” (1 Cor 10: 20). The first condition to be true worshippers is to be born again with a new heart and a new spirit to worship God properly (Ezek 36:26).

THOUGHT: To be true worshippers, we must first be born again.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for saving me so that I may worship Thee properly in spirit and in truth.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 2

JOHN 4:19-26

MATTHEW 18:20

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

TRUE WORSHIPPERS: WORSHIP IN JESUS' NAME

Many think that to worship the Father in truth means to worship God with a sincere and honest heart. That's right, but not enough as many are “sincerely” worshipping their false “gods” and even willing to die for their beliefs. We have learned that God's Word is truth, the Lord Jesus is the truth, and the Holy Spirit is truth. Then to worship God in truth means to worship Him in Jesus' Name, according to His Word and through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says, *“I am the way, the truth and the life”* (John 14:6) and *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Matt 18:20). He confirms with the Samaritan woman, *“Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.”* The focus is not on the place of worship, but God Himself and the spirit of worship: *“worship the Father in spirit and in truth.”* Thank God that as He is the Divine “Spirit” all-knowing, all-mighty and present everywhere, we can worship Him wherever we are without the need for statues, images, or pictures which He forbids (Exod 20:4-5).

God is holy, righteous and glorious. How can we sinners worship Him in a way that is acceptable to Him? Without the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we ourselves and our worship will surely be rejected by God. We are to humble ourselves, acknowledge our sins, and receive the Saviour Jesus Christ as our Substitute before God. When we gather together to worship God, we are to humbly look unto our Saviour Jesus Christ and trust in His Name and merits so that our worship may be acceptable unto God, *“to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet 2:5). True worship must be a Christ-centred worship. Christ must be glorified alone, not anyone else. Christ must increase (John 3:30), and Christ must be preached (2 Cor 4:5).

THOUGHT: Without Christ, all worshippers are not acceptable unto God.

PRAYER: Father, may my worship be a Christ-centred worship always.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 3

PSALM 138:1-8

PSALM 56:10

*“In God will I praise his word:
in the Lord will I praise his word.”*

**TRUE WORSHIPPERS:
WORSHIP ACCORDING TO GOD’S WORD**

To worship the Father in truth, we must also worship according to God’s Word. Then will He accept our worship. David worshipped God properly, saying, *“I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name”* (Ps 138:2). We are to magnify God’s Word in our worship. Our worship must be Word-centred. Paul charged Timothy, *“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine”* with this warning, *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables”* (2 Tim 4:2-4). Sadly, nowadays many “Christians” blindly follow “scholars” or “scholarly leaders” who criticise and cast doubt on God’s Word! They like to hear quotations from “great men” and interesting stories rather than God’s Word, which is able to transform their lives! How can we discern the true preaching of God’s Word? We should have the right attitude like the brethren in Berea, *“they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so”* (Acts 17:11).

We worship the Father according to God’s Word and also in our singing and praising of God. *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”* (Col 3:16). *“And be not conformed to this world”* (Rom 12:2). Disappointingly, many churches are pleasing men and not God, trying to draw people through entertainment. But God is seeking true worshippers who will *“worship the Father in spirit and in truth.”*

THOUGHT: True worshippers must worship God according to God’s Word.

PRAYER: Father, may my worship be a Bible-centred worship always.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 4
PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11
JOHN 6:63

*“It is the spirit that quickeneth;
the flesh profiteth nothing.”*

TRUE WORSHIPPERS: WORSHIP THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

To worship through the Holy Spirit is not to worship with wonders and signs or with “speaking in tongues,” or “being drunk or slain in the Spirit,” or “new revelations,” or “prophetic utterance,” etc. We should not be deceived by such fake “spiritual gifts,” as sign gifts have ceased (1 Cor 13:8-10) and God’s revelation is complete and sufficient. No one is to add anything to or subtract anything from God’s Word (Rev 22:18-19). Moreover, the Holy Spirit comes to glorify Jesus Christ alone (John 16:14) not any human agent, and He is the Divine Author of the Scripture, so He cannot contradict the Scripture. Truly, *“God is not the author of confusion, but of peace”* (1 Cor 14: 33).

It is the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth (John 16:13), helps us understand spiritual things (1 Cor 2: 10-16), regenerates us and sanctifies us (John 3:5; Rom 15:16) and helps us worship God and serve Him (Phil 3:3). To worship through the Holy Spirit is to trust in Him, not in our ability, and pray earnestly for His presence, guidance and blessing upon our worship, as without His presence, our worship, prayers, preaching and singing are dead! It is the Holy Spirit who teaches us to pray, tunes our hearts to sing praises to the Lord meaningfully, illumines our hearts to understand the message and be edified. Realising this, we must humble ourselves always and trust in the Holy Spirit, not in ourselves. When I preach a message, surely I must pray earnestly for the guidance, illumination and anointing from the Holy Spirit. Otherwise my preaching is dead. The hearers may understand with their mind but their hearts may not be touched and their lives not transformed! Why? *“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing”* (John 6:63). Sadly, many “great speakers” nowadays have much confidence in the flesh, in their credentials and scholarship, thinking that they are qualified to preach God’s Word with their arrogant textual criticism! *“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble”* (James 4:6).

THOUGHT: Only the Holy Spirit gives life, and the flesh profits nothing.
PRAYER: Father, keep me humble and trusting in the Holy Spirit always.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 5

JOHN 15:1-5

COLOSSIANS 3:4

“Christ, who is our life.”

**JESUS CHRIST:
THE TRUE VINE, TRUE SOURCE OF LIFE**

The farmer is only happy when he sees the good harvest from his fields. God had done what He could for His people and expected them to bear good fruit of righteousness so that they might be His witnesses and a blessing to the world. He gave them the law, the promises, the covenants, and the worship of God, and sent His servants, the prophets, to instruct them and guide them in His way, but they persecuted His prophets. In the end, God sent His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus, to teach them God's Word and bring them to true worship in spirit and in truth, but they despised, rejected, and crucified Him on the Cross. Through the failure of Adam and Eve as well as that of the people of Israel, we know that human beings with their sinful nature can never please God nor obey His Word. *“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Rom 8:6-8). Then who can save us and help us produce good fruit of obedience, holiness and godliness?

Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! What does Jesus mean when He says, *“I am the true vine”*? First, He is the covenant God, Jehovah, **“I AM THAT I AM”** (Exod 3:14), the eternal, unchangeable, and faithful God. He is the same I AM, yesterday, today and forever as He says, *“Before Abraham was, I am”* (John 8:58; Heb 13:8). Religious leaders are only human beings. They cannot save us nor give us new life. Second, Jesus, as the true Vine, is the only true Source of spiritual life and eternal life. Religious leaders can give empty promises and dead teachings, but they can never give life. Without Jesus, no one can live a true Christian life! Finally, Jesus Himself, the living Divine Person (not a thing) is our new life. Only when we have the Lord Himself do we have His life (1 John 5:11-12). Shall we not rely on Him always to have Life?

THOUGHT: Without Christ, no one can live a true Christian life.

PRAYER: Father, help me rely on Thee always to have Thy true Life.

LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 6

JOHN 15:1-17

JOHN 15:5

"Without me ye can do nothing."

YE ARE THE BRANCHES (I)

Jesus says, *"ye are the branches."* What does it mean? First, we thank God that He has chosen us and grafted us onto Him, the true Vine (v 16). As the branches, we are parts of the Vine and partake of Jesus' life and strength just as we are members of Christ's body. Praise the Lord for His grace and mercy! Next, we should always be humble, knowing that it is the root that supports the branches, and not the branches that support the root, so *"be not highminded, but fear"* (Rom 11:18-20). As the branches cannot bear fruit by themselves, without the Lord Jesus we can never produce any true spiritual fruit nor do God's will and God's Word. We are to be attached to the Vine all the time for life and nutrition. Truly, as Jesus says, *"without me ye can do nothing."*

In order to bear much fruit, there are two conditions: (1) Abide in Jesus, and (2) Let Jesus and His words abide in us. To abide in Jesus means to trust in Him, to depend on Him, and to look to Him for life and strength. To let Jesus and His words abide in us means to let the Lord and His words control and direct our whole being. There are three kinds of branches in John 15. One is detached, another is fruitless and the other is fruitful. Which kind are you?

(a) Detached Branches: Our Lord Jesus says, *"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."* This refers to unbelievers and professing Christians. They might have heard the Gospel, go to church and profess Jesus on their lips, but in their hearts, they do not trust in the Lord Jesus. They are not born-again Christians. They may think that they have been saved once they confess their sins to the Lord in prayer, but they are still kings of their lives. They plan and do whatever they please regardless of the Lord and His Word. They will be cast out, wither and burned in fire.

THOUGHT: How can a branch survive without the Vine?

PRAYER: Father, please keep me abiding in Thee always.

MONDAY, AUGUST 7

JOHN 15:1-17

JOHN 15:8

*“Herein is my Father glorified,
that ye bear much fruit.”*

YE ARE THE BRANCHES (II)

(b) Fruitless Branches: Jesus says, *“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.”* This is for those who believe in the Name of the Lord Jesus but do not submit to Him and His Word. They are professing Christians but not born-again yet like Judas Iscariot. They claim to be serving the Lord, preaching the Bible, and even performing “miracles, signs and wonders” in Jesus’ Name, but what they have done is according to their own will, ways and terms. They pray God to bless their own plans but have never waited for nor submitted to God’s will or God’s Word. They may be proud of the fruit of their labour. But is it true fruit from the Lord? In the end, they will be rejected (Matt 7:21- 23).

(c) Fruitful Branches: Jesus says, *“every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit...He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.”* This refers to truly born-again Christians whom the Lord has chosen. They do thirst for the Lord and God’s Word and have vital fellowship with Him. They not only trust in and depend on the Lord but also submit to Him, realising that without Him they cannot do anything acceptable unto the Lord nor bear any true fruit. Thank God for His true spiritual fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Gal 5:22-23), goodness, righteousness, truth (Eph 5:9), obedience, holiness and Christ-like life (Rom 6:16-22; 8:29).

We only glorify God by bearing much fruit, and because of this our Heavenly Father has to prune and purge unnecessary twigs and leaves. Thank God for His chastisement through which we may become more humble, teachable, and submissive to the Lord and His Word and through which we may bear more fruit. It is comforting to know that when the branch is pruned, the Vine also suffers the pain! Our Lord is touched with the feeling of our infirmities!

THOUGHT: God is only satisfied and glorified when we bear much fruit.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy chastisement and Thy loving care.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 8

ROMANS 6:1-14

GALATIANS 2:20

*“I am crucified with Christ:
nevertheless I live; yet not I,
but Christ liveth in me”*

I AM CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

The philosophies of this world teach people to promote “self.” They say, “You should cultivate positive feelings and thinking of yourself.” Most religions also promote “self.” Even though some of them may realise that men have sinned, they still think that men have a good heart or good nature and that men are bad or become bad due to the bad environment or society around them. Therefore, they try to keep themselves from sinful deeds and to make themselves better and holier. They regard themselves as saints and despise others as common or sinful people! Sadly, they fail to see their sinful heart with their lustful desires and pride. They are deceiving themselves (1 John 1:8).

The Bible confirms that the heart of men is *“deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”* too depraved and corrupt to be improved or changed by themselves. *“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil”* (Jer 13:23; 17:9).

Although we are born-again and have a new heart in Christ, our sinful nature is still with us. To deal with this sinful nature, the Biblical way is to keep it dead and not to improve it (Rom 6:6). If our eyes are opened to see our Lord Jesus bearing our sins, see also our sinful nature on the cross (Rom 6:11)! Like Paul, we can say, *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”* (Gal 2:20). Being crucified with Christ on the cross is the only way to set us free from our sinful nature, selfishness and worldliness (Gal 5:24; 6:14). The Holy Spirit can help us do this (Rom 8:13) while we *“die daily”* (1 Cor 15:31).

THOUGHT: No death to sin and self, no resurrection in new life in Christ!

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee that I have been crucified with Thee.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 9

COLOSSIANS 3:1-11

COLOSSIANS 3:1

*“If ye then be risen with Christ,
seek those things which are above.”*

IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST

If we are one with Christ in His death, we are also one with Him in His resurrection (Rom 6:4-5). And the evidence is that you will *“seek those things which are above... set your affection on things above.”*

(a) Keep on seeking *“those things which are above, where Christ sitteth (is sitting) on the right hand of God.”* It means to keep on seeking the Lord Himself and His face and His strength (Prov 8:17; Ps 105:4), His precepts/His Word (Ps 119:45; Acts 17:11; Col 3:16), His kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:33), His will and His glory (John 5:30,44), His grace and mercy (Heb 4:16), His spiritual blessings (Eph 1:3-14), wisdom from above (Prov 3:13; James 1:5; 3:17-18), godly virtues in Christ (Col 3:12-14; 2 Pet 1:4-8), etc. Truly, when we keep on seeking the Lord diligently with faith, He is our Rewarder (Heb 11:6), as *“they that seek the LORD understand all things”* (Prov 28:5) and *“shall not want any good thing”* (Ps 34:10). What are we seeking for?

(b) Keep on setting your affection (mind) *“on things above, not on things on the earth.”* The unbelievers love this world and have a worldly mindset (1 John 2:15-16), but God’s children are not to do so. We are in the world but not of the world, nor are we to be conformed to this world (John 17:14-16; Rom 12:2). We are to live for the Lord and *“do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men”* (Col 3:17,23), and *“do all to the glory of God”* (1 Cor 10:31). Are we living for the Lord and His glory?

God does not give us new life or eternal life as a separate gift from His Son, but *“God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life”* (1 John 5:11-12). It is not enough to seek after the Lord only in our daily devotion or on Sunday worship, but every moment. The life of a branch is hid in the Vine. Likewise, our new life, resurrected life, eternal life is *“hid with Christ in God.”*

THOUGHT: Evidence of new life: Seeking the Lord and living for Him.

PRAYER: Father, help me seek Thee and live for Thee and Thy glory.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 10

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-8

1 CORINTHIANS 5:6

*“Know ye not that a little leaven
leaveneth the whole lump?”*

YE ARE UNLEAVENED (I)

Leaven or yeast is a substance that is added to dough to make it rise. In biblical times, leaven was usually a piece of fermented dough retained from a previous baking that was placed in the new dough to cause it to rise.

Leaven in the Bible refers to an influence whether good or bad that permeates or spreads. Telling about the good influence of the Gospel, Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal (flour) till it was all leavened (Matt 13:33).

The leaven we learn today carries a bad sense and influence. In this Bible text, we are commanded to purge out the old leaven and the leaven of malice and wickedness. Jesus also warns us to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees and of Herod. What does this leaven mean to us? Are we unleavened?

Perhaps most of the believers in Corinth knew leaven but did not notice its pervasive impact, so Paul had to remind them: *“Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?”* Sadly, they not only failed to notice the bad influence of immorality and sin among themselves but were even boasting about it. Paul had to admonish them, *“Your glorying (boasting) is not good”* (v 6). Actually, all boastings are bad and evil (James 4:13-16), except boasting in the Lord (1 Cor 1:27-31).

Leaven has a very powerful and pervasive influence or impact. It works secretly, quietly and slowly but it spreads by contact until the whole lump is affected and rises. Do you notice how bad and pervasive the influence of leaven is in the spiritual sense?

THOUGHT: Leaven has a quiet but very powerful and pervasive influence.

PRAYER: Father, keep me from all kinds of bad leaven.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 11

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-8

1 CORINTHIANS 5:7

*“For even Christ our passover
is sacrificed for us.”*

YE ARE UNLEAVENED (II)

In order to keep our Christian life pure from “leaven,” Paul reminds us of our Lord Jesus, the Passover Lamb, *“For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.”* What is the Passover? When the Israelites were under the bondage of slavery in Egypt, God sent Moses to lead them out (Exod 2-3). Although Moses performed miracles and carried out God’s judgment upon Egypt, Pharaoh did not let the people of Israel go. In the end, God sent the last plague, the death of the first born of both men and animal in the land of Egypt. God instructed His people to take a lamb without blemish, kill it and take its blood and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses in the evening. And that night, the angel of the Lord passed through the land of Egypt and killed all the first born, but passed over the houses with the token of the blood on the doors. They were also seriously instructed to put leaven out of their houses and to eat unleavened bread for seven days (Exod 12:19). Only with this plague, Pharaoh let the people of Israel go.

When on earth, Jesus performed many miracles to prove that He was the Messiah sent by God. He knew that His miracles could not save any soul. Religious leaders today claim that they may draw people to Christ through signs and wonders. However, miracles, signs and wonders can never deliver any soul from the power of sin and Satan. Only the Passover sacrifice, the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus and His blood and His Truth can set us free from the power of sin and Satan.

Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper on the night He was arrested. While other Jews killed the lambs for the Passover, our Lord Jesus knew that He was that Lamb and that Sacrifice (Matt 26:26-28; 1 Cor 11:23-25). As Jesus commanded, the Lord’s Supper is an ordinance we are to keep in place of the Passover. *“Therefore let us keep the feast.”* Are we keeping the feast now? How can we keep the feast? The requirement is: *“as ye are unleavened.”* Are we unleavened?

THOUGHT: Only Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is our Passover Sacrifice.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy sacrifice.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 12

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-8

1 CORINTHIANS 5:7

*“Purge out therefore the old leaven,
that ye may be a new lump,
as ye are unleavened.”*

YE ARE UNLEAVENED (III)

“Purge out therefore the old leaven.” “Purge” is a command to cleanse completely, urgently and effectively. “Old leaven” refers to our sinful nature, sinful lusts, selfishness, self-will, pride, etc.

(a) Leaven of Malice and Wickedness: the leaven of malice denotes habits of evil thought, mind, and character while the leaven of wickedness indicates evil deeds and words that hurt others.

(b) Leaven of Hypocrisy: The leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), not practising what they preach or say, loving the honour and praise of men, looking righteous outwardly, loving honoured positions, etc.

(c) Leaven of Unbelief: The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, angels or spirits (Acts 23:8), and they only accepted the five books of Moses as the Law. Many churches today do not believe God has preserved His Word perfectly for His children. Many do not believe in Christ’s premillennial Kingdom of peace on earth. The leaven of an unbelieving few can cause many to have a spirit of unbelief and criticism (Num 14:34-37). Such a leaven of unbelief has quietly and secretly spread to many Christians, churches, seminaries!

(d) Leaven of Compromise and Politics: The Herodians, regarded as a political party, sided with the Sadducees, and joined with the Pharisees to plot against the Lord Jesus (Mark 3:6; 12:13). Their goal was to gain power and influence. Thus they were willing to compromise regardless of truth and justice. Sadly, today, many leaders play politics in the church, trying to win the hearts of members through their compromises and man-pleasing ways.

(e) Leaven of False Teaching: The believers in Galatia were influenced by the leaven of unbiblical doctrines (Gal 1:6; 5:9). So are many churches nowadays!

THOUGHT: Beware of and purge out all kinds of bad leaven.

PRAYER: Father, keep me unleavened so that I may keep the feast.

LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 13

2 PETER 1:1-11

2 PETER 1:4

*“Ye might be partakers of
the divine nature.”*

YE MIGHT BE PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

“Ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” This promise does not mean we may become gods, but we may have His eternal life and be like Him in His holiness and righteousness (1 John 2:25, Heb 12:10). The process is that of sanctification: growing more in God's nature and dying more to self and sin and worldly lusts. Thank God for sharing with us His divine nature, the eternal life He is living! It is impossible to force a monkey to cite Psalm 23 in a spirit of worship, or a fish to live on dry land, or a pig to fly in the air because their natures are different. Likewise, it is impossible for sinful human beings to live a true Christian life. God knows this much better than we, so the most important requirement for human beings to be Christians is to be born again through the gracious work of God alone (John 1:12-13, 3:5)

Being born again and partakers of God's nature by His grace, we are to keep on growing in His grace and knowledge and divine nature (2 Pet 3:18). To grow in Christ, we must give all diligence to add to our faith the virtue of Christ. Just as Christ lived on this earth, we are to do the same (1 John 2:6): with His moral perfection, goodness, gentleness, meekness, humbleness, kindness, courage, submission and obedience to His Father unto death. Then add to virtue, knowledge of God and His Word. This requires us to seek Him and His Word daily. Then add to knowledge temperance or self-control, which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Then add to self-control, patience or endurance, never giving up our faith, trust, and hope in the Lord. Then add to endurance, godliness with our devotion, loyalty, reverence, and piety toward God. Then add to godliness brotherly kindness or brotherly love. And finally, add to brotherly love, divine love from God, which is based on His holiness and truth, loving everyone and desiring them to come to the saving knowledge of God and His Word.

THOUGHT: How wonderful to be partakers of God's nature!

PRAYER: Father, help me grow in Thy grace, knowledge and nature.

MONDAY, AUGUST 14
1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-15
1 CORINTHIANS 3:11

*“For other foundation can
no man lay than that is laid,
which is Jesus Christ.”*

JESUS CHRIST AND HIS WORD: THE FOUNDATION OF OUR SALVATION AND SERVICE

Before we build a house, we should make sure that we have a firm foundation. How about the foundation of our salvation and service? First, it is the Lord Jesus Himself. And He is not a thing, but a living Person, and we must have living fellowship with Him, truly relying on Him for whatever we do. Then we have His life (1 John 5:11-12), and a living and firm foundation. Jesus means Saviour. His incarnation, His virgin birth, His death for our sins, and His resurrection for our justification secure our salvation for ever. Christ means the Anointed One. There are three anointed offices: the priestly, the kingly and the prophetic. When we say that Jesus Christ is our Anointed One, we must mean that He is our Saviour as High Priest, King of kings, and Divine Prophet.

Truly, Jesus is your Saviour and my Saviour, but how about Christ? Is He our High Priest, our only Representative before God? Thank God that Jesus is our High Priest, who has sympathy with our infirmities and through His intercession and His blood we can have fellowship with the Holy God. Is the Lord Jesus our King, the King of our hearts, our minds, and our lives? Does He have full authority and full control over our lives? If we still say, hear, read, watch, believe, or do what we like or go wherever we like regardless of His will, His Word, and His Name, He is not our King. Finally, is Jesus our Divine Prophet, the Divine Spokesman from God? If yes, then we are to be submissive to the authority of His Word completely. Do we receive and obey all His words seriously, faithfully and reverently without any doubts or questions?

THOUGHT: Only Jesus Christ and God's Word are our firm foundation.
PRAYER: Father, help me trust and submit to Thee and Thy Word always.

TAKE HEED HOW WE BUILD

“But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.” The term *“take heed”* means “pay close attention to, carefully notice, consider something carefully to do accordingly and properly.” We must be careful how we build and what materials we choose to use. We must be careful because some day when the Lord Jesus comes back, we are to give account of what we have done. The materials listed here are gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay and stubble. None of us want to build with materials that can be easily burned away like wood, hay and stubble. Surely we will choose good materials like gold or silver or precious stones, as they can withstand the fire. Next, how should we build?

(a) Do everything according to God’s Will: *“And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever”* (1 John 2:17). We can know God’s will through God’s Word with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We must ask the Lord to guide us according His will. Remember that doing God’s will is like gold, silver, and precious stones, but doing our will or what we like will be burned away like wood, hay and stubble.

(b) Do everything for the Lord and His Glory: How about the motives behind our service? Whatever we do, *“do all to the glory of God”* (1 Cor 10:31) and do it *“heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men”* (Col 3:23).

(c) Do everything in love for God and men: Love never fails (1 Cor 13:8). All the sign gifts like tongues and prophecies have ceased, but love remains forever as God is love and He remains forever. This is divine and holy love not human love, love that does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in truth (1Cor 13:6). It is wonderful to be constrained by Christ’s love in everything we do (2 Cor 5:14)!

THOUGHT: Love God and do His will, all for Him and for His glory.
PRAYER: Father, help me take heed how I build my spiritual life and ministry.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 16

EPHESIANS 5:1-20

EPHESIANS 5:15

*“Ye walk circumspectly,
not as fools, but as wise.”*

YE WALK CIRCUMSPECTLY (I)

Today, we can see a decline in standards of personal morality, sexual morality, social or public morality, and even “Christian” morality. Certain immoral behaviours that were regarded as serious sins fifty years ago are now becoming the norm. People used to be strongly against homosexuality, but now some churches even ordain homosexual bishops or solemnise homosexual marriages. Co-habitation is now a norm for young people. The rate of crime, divorce, abortion, and immorality is increasing. Worldliness has entered the church. This is only one of the signs of the last days (2 Tim 3:1-5).

The rejection of God and His Word is the core reason for the increasing immorality in the world and in the church today. God is light and holy and His Word is light and holy. When people reject God and His Word, they choose to walk in darkness. May God help us to live according to His will and Word.

(a) Walk Circumspectly as Wise: “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.” The term “wise” here refers to ability to apply with skill what we know. To know what is right or good is not enough but how to perform it properly does count. And it is good for us to realise that we lack this wisdom. So we must ask the Lord for it. *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him,”* and *“the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace”* (James 1:5; 3:17-18). We should wisely conduct our lives according to God’s will and God’s Word, redeeming the time and be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

THOUGHT: Conducting our life according to God’s Word is wise.

PRAYER: Father, please give me Thy wisdom to do Thy Will and Word.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 17

EPHESIANS 5:1-20

EPHESIANS 5:17

*“Understanding what the will
of the Lord is.”*

YE WALK CIRCUMSPECTLY (II)

(b) Redeeming the Time: “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

It means to make good use of time. If we have foolishly wasted our time in the past, then let us now use it meaningfully and wisely according to God’s will. *“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom”* (Ps 90:12). A person who is suffering from a fatal illness will count his days, even his hours and minutes. We should have the same attitude as today may be the last day of our life. Let us treasure our days to live for the Lord. Serve Him so that when He comes or when we give up our last breath, we will not regret! Many people waste their time watching TV and videos, listening to worldly music, doing window-shopping, chatting with friends, surfing the internet without any purpose, etc. We should be a living and holy sacrifice unto God every day until He comes.

(c) Understanding God’s Will: “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”

How not to be unwise? By understanding the will of the Lord and doing it. If we do not understand nor do God’s will, we are foolish in God’s sight. The Holy Spirit illuminates our hearts and helps us understand God’s will through God’s written Word, through God’s living Word (the Lord Jesus Christ), and through God’s faithful, mature and godly servants, and all are based on God’s Word alone. God wants us to live a holy and godly life in love, peace, faith, goodness, righteousness and truth. God also wants us to serve Him and imitate Him and follow Him through the perfect example of the Lord Jesus Christ. Before we do anything, it is wise for us to check whether it is according to God’s will or God’s Word. Failing to do this is being foolish before God!

THOUGHT: Our life is so short. Live wisely for the Lord!

PRAYER: Father, help me make use of my time wisely to live for Thee.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 18

EPHESIANS 5:1-20

EPHESIANS 5:18

“Be filled with the Spirit.”

YE WALK CIRCUMSPECTLY (III)

(d) Being Filled with the Holy Spirit: “Be filled with the Spirit” (v 18), or literally, “keep on being controlled by the Holy Spirit” not only on Sunday or during devotion time, but always and perpetually. A drunkard is controlled by alcohol, and he loses self-control, easily falls into temptations, and behaves foolishly. When we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, He will produce in us His good and spiritual fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance/self-control, righteousness and truth (Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:9).

We are to submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit and His will (1 Cor 12:11). The Holy Spirit is the Author of God’s Word, so when we say that we are submissive to the Holy Spirit we must be submissive to His Word as well. A Spirit-controlled Christian “*can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth*” (2 Cor 13:8), will “*glorify*” Jesus Christ alone (John 16:14), and magnify God’s Word above all (Ps 138:2). Surely he will never question nor criticise God’s Word. It is foolish to be controlled by our sinful nature, Satan or anything in this world. Let us be wise to be controlled by the Holy Spirit and His Word with our full submission.

(e) Singing Praises to the Lord and Giving Thanks Always: Under the control of the Holy Spirit, we shall not speak in tongues, but shall speak to one another in “*psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (v 19-20). Truly, it is the kingdom of heaven in our heart when our heart is tuned to the Lord in singing and praising Him with thanksgiving wherever we are and whatever we are doing. And we will not complain or murmur when something wrong happens to us or when we expect something to happen but it does not.

THOUGHT: It is foolish to be controlled by anything else except the Spirit.

PRAYER: Father, please help me submit to the control of the Holy Spirit.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 19

COLOSSIANS 3:15-17

COLOSSIANS 3:15

“Be ye thankful.”

BE YE THANKFUL (I)

The Lord Jesus teaches us to do all things as our duty, and as unprofitable servants without expecting any thanks from those whom we have helped (Luke 17:9-10). However, we are to be thankful to the Lord and to others who have helped us. Thankfulness or gratitude to the Lord from the heart is the fruit of a born-again Christian (Heb 13:15).

Unbelievers do not thank God because they think that what they have achieved is by their own strength, efforts, ability, or cleverness. The Bible says that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men because they did not glorify God, *“neither were thankful”* to Him, neither worshipped Him the Creator (Rom 1:18-21, 25) although He is kind to them (Matt 5:45; Luke 6:35).

God Commands Us to Be Thankful: Certainly, giving thanks to the Lord is God’s commandment as well as God’s will, *“be ye thankful”* (Col 3:15), and *“offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High”* (Ps 50:14), and *“in every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”* (1 Thess 5:18).

Our Lord Jesus healed the ten lepers only by the word from His mouth when they cried unto Him, *“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us”* (Luke 17:12-19), and our Lord was surprised when only one of them, a Samaritan, came back to give Him thanks. Jesus asked, *“Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.”*

It is God’s will and commandment for us to give thanks to Him *“for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Eph 5:20), *“without ceasing”* (1 Thess 2:13), and *“for ever”* (Ps 30:12). It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD (Ps 92:1) as by doing this we *“magnify Him”* (Ps 69:30) and *“give glory to God”* (Luke 17:16, 18).

THOUGHT: The Lord saved me from sin and eternal Hell!

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy grace, mercy and salvation.

LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 20

COLOSSIANS 3:15-17

COLOSSIANS 3:16

*“Let the word of Christ
dwell in you richly.”*

BE YE THANKFUL (II)

How can we be thankful to God?

(a) Let the Peace of God rule in your hearts (v 15). We cannot separate the peace of God from the God of peace (2 Thess 3:16). Therefore, letting the peace of God rule in our hearts means letting the God of peace rule in our hearts. If every child of God is submissive to the God of peace, the church will have peace and be one body in unity (v 15). The next command is *“Be ye thankful,”* or *“Keep on being thankful”* all the time. We are thankful to the Lord for everything, His grace, mercy, His salvation, protection, provision, guidance, His peace, joy, even His sovereignty. He is able to make all things work together for good to us (Rom 8:28).

(b) Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly (abundantly) in all wisdom (v. 16). The Word of Christ is the very Word of God, His Father (John 17:8;14). What does it mean that God's Word dwells in us? It means we are to keep on letting God's Word, control and direct our whole being. We are to live by God's Word, read and meditate on God's Word every day, understand it and keep it, obey it, put it into practice and submit ourselves to God's Word. How can God's Word live in us if we doubt, question or criticise it?

Sadly, many “Christian leaders or scholars” do that and mislead and confuse many young believers! But God's Word does transform our lives and sanctify us (Ps 19:7; John 17:17; 1 Pet 1:23) and give us true wisdom (Ps 19:7; Ps 119:98).

THOUGHT: Let the God of peace and His Word rule my heart.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy peace and Thy Word.

BE YE THANKFUL (III)

It is so important to give thanks to the Lord that each verse reminds us of this obligation. We can express our gratitude to the Lord by letting Him and His Word rule and live in our hearts as well as by honouring our Lord Jesus' Name and doing all in His Name.

Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus with thanksgiving. It is a great privilege as well as a great obligation and responsibility for us Christians to bear the Name of the Lord Jesus in our lives. This requires us to be careful in what we say and do. *“Will Jesus say or do this if He is here in our situation?”* When Satan tempts us, it is wise for us to look unto our Lord Jesus, who never murmured but trusted in His Father's will and timing with His humble submission, then overcame Satan by God's Word, and obeyed His Father unto death (Matt 4:4-11; Phil 2:8).

Those who cast doubt on God's Word are doing what the Lord Jesus has never done. [There were no extant original manuscripts of the Old Testament (autographs) except copies (apographs) in His days.] It is Satan who questions and casts doubt on God's Word (Gen 3:1-5)! Some brethren have not given up bad habits like smoking by arguing, “Smoking is not a sin, and the Bible does not forbid smoking.” The Holy Spirit can help us understand God's will through other verses and through Jesus' example. First, we cannot smoke in Jesus' Name, as Jesus would never do that. It is our responsibility to prove, test, or discern *“what is acceptable unto the Lord”* and will understand that God does not approve smoking because it enslaves us and is harmful to our body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit; as a result, we break the sixth commandment, *“Thou shalt not kill”* (Exod 20:13). Furthermore, it does not edify others nor glorify God and Jesus Christ's Name.

No one can live as Jesus did without His help as He confirms, *“without me ye can do nothing.”* Then we are to “give thanks” to the Lord for enabling us to say and do as He did in His Name, all glory to Him.

THOUGHT: It is a great privilege and responsibility to do all in Jesus' Name.

PRAYER: Father, help me do everything in word or deed in Thy name.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 22

1 JOHN 5:18-21

1 JOHN 5: 21

“Keep yourselves from idols.”

KEEP YOURSELVES FROM IDOLS (I)

“For all the gods of the people are idols: but the LORD made the heavens” (1 Chron 16:26; Ps 96:5). The God of the Bible is the living and true God, and He hates idolatry as it is an abomination to Him (Deut 7:25, 16:22; 1 Thess 1:9). When Paul was in Athens, *“his spirit was stirred (provoked to anger) in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry”* (Acts 17:16). We can see the world is full of idolatry, not only in man-made religions with statues, images and pictures but also in the hearts of men with all kinds of “idols” such as their loved ones, their self image, name, fame, titles, popularity, high positions, wealth, worldly entertainments or pleasures, a movie star, a pop star or a sports star, etc.

God is very angry with idolatry, so was His servant Paul. How about us? Do we have that same spirit? On the Judgment Day, idolaters will be condemned to Hell (Rev 21:8). God commands us to *“flee from idolatry”* (1 Cor 10:14), and *“keep yourselves from idols”* (1 John 5:21).

God’s first and second commandments say, *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”* and *“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God”* (Exod 20:3-5). And our Lord Jesus summarises the first and great commandment, *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength”* (Mark 12:30). Truly, if we love God first and above all, we will worship Him alone without any image or idol, honour and exalt God’s Name alone, keep His Day holy, and obey His Word (John 14:21, 23).

THOUGHT: God hates idolatry. All idolaters will be condemned to Hell.

PRAYER: Father, please keep me from all idols.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 23

1 SAMUEL 15:10-23

1 SAMUEL 15:23

*“Stubbornness is as
iniquity and idolatry.”*

KEEP YOURSELVES FROM IDOLS (II)

Idolatry is our failure to love God and obey His Word, to exalt God's Name alone, and to learn to be content in Him.

(a) Failure to Love God and Obey His Word: It is idolatry when we love our own will more than God's Word. King Saul thought that it was fine to obey God partly, but God said to him through Samuel, *“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, ... For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry”* (1 Sam 15:22- 23). God has magnified His Word above all His Name (Ps 138:2), so if we disobey His Word, we disobey Him. If we question God's Word, we question God Himself! Disobedience to God's Word is idolatry!

(b) Failure to Exalt God's Name Alone: God is not pleased when we glorify His Name while harbouring secret motives to have our own names praised by men (Matt 23). The proper attitude is, *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (John 3:30). If we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, we will glorify Jesus alone (John 16:14). The apostle John did not need to mention his own name in the Gospel and in his three epistles when the early Church already knew him. But when necessary for the authentication of his writing, he put his name in the book of Revelation. Sadly, many church leaders still desire their names to be promoted unnecessarily. Their names have become an idol to them!

(c) Failure to Learn to Be Content in the Lord: The Bible speaks about *“covetousness, which is idolatry”* (Col 3:5) and the *“covetous man, who is an idolater”* (Eph 5:5). An idolater wants more and more, he wants what others have, he is greedy for wrongful gain. When a person is so greedy for fame, power, position, money, or any precious thing in this world, his heart and mind are pre-occupied with these things and there will be no room for the Lord or His Word! Are we learning to be content in the Lord, our All in All? (Phil 4:11, 1 Tim 6:6)

THOUGHT: Am I guilty of being an idolater?

PRAYER: Father, please forgive my idolatry.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 24

1 JOHN 5:18-21

1 JOHN 5:18

*“he that is begotten of God
keepeth himself...”*

KEEP YOURSELVES FROM IDOLS (III)

1 John 5:18-21 gives us some precious instructions on how to keep away from idols.

(a) Be Born Again: A born-again person (v18) will not sin habitually (1 Thess 1:9). When he fails to do God’s will, he will repent right away.

(b) Keep Oneself: *“He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not”* (v 18). The Greek Text underlying KJV is correct with the reflexive pronoun *“heauton”* (*“himself”*) instead of the corrupt text *“auton”* (*“him”*). Surely the Lord will keep His children from Satan (John 10:28-29), but truly born-again believers are to keep themselves from Satan, too, and resist Satan (James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8-9). Eve and Adam failed to resist Satan, so they fell into sin. Our Lord Jesus resisted Satan by God’s Word until he fled away. We must not go to a place full of temptations or read a book or watch a program full of temptations and then expect God to keep us clean! *“Keep yourselves from idols!”*

(c) Be of the Lord: We belong to God (v 19) and our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are to glorify God in our body and our spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20).

(d) Grow in the Knowledge of God: We thank God that the Lord Jesus gives us understanding (v 20) so that we might experientially know the living and true God. The more we know God the more we love Him, trust Him, fear Him, obey Him and want to glorify Him.

(e) Be in God and in His Son Jesus Christ: *“And we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life”* (v 20). Outside of Christ, we have nothing!

THOUGHT: It is safest to hide ourselves in Christ.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee that I belong to Thee and I am in Thee.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 25

JAMES 1:12-15

JAMES 1:12

*“Blessed is the man that
endureth temptation.”*

ENTER NOT INTO TEMPTATION

This world is full of temptations, and every one of us has been tempted many times. We have read or heard or seen many people, young and old, male and female, fall into temptations. Many a high-ranking official has lost his reputation due to bribery, corruption or a sex scandal. Young ladies and men have been lured into sexual immorality. Others have been tempted to commit sins like theft, murder, drug trafficking, fornication, adultery, suicide, etc. Even in the churches, many leaders have been tempted to compromise God’s truth, God’s Word and biblical principles for the sake of being accepted, recognised, accredited, popular, or for personal gains or selfish ambitions.

The word *“temptation”* in James 1 not only refers to temptation to sin (v 13) but also to testing, trials, afflictions, persecutions, etc (vv 2, 12). God allows Satan to tempt us as he did to Adam and Eve (Gen 3). Even our Lord Jesus was tempted (Matt 4). The Lord wants to prove us to see if we fear Him, love Him, and obey Him or not (v 12). Temptation and testing are opportunities for us to prove our love, obedience and loyalty to the Lord. So, we are taught to endure the testing with perseverance (v 12) and to resist and overcome Satan the tempter through our faith in Christ and through the Word of God (James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9; 1 John 2:14; 5:5).

Sin is real, Satan is real and temptations are real, and those who really want to live a holy life according to God’s Word can see how intense the battle is! Our Lord Jesus still warns us, *“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matt 26:41). May the Lord help us to overcome temptations so that we may be blessed (v 12).

THOUGHT: Being tempted is not sin, but yielding to temptation is sin.

PRAYER: Father, please help me overcome temptations to glorify Thee.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 26

GENESIS 3:1-15

JOHN 8:44

“He is a liar, and the father of it.”

SATAN THE TEMPTER & HIS APPROACH (I)

Satan is the great dragon, the old serpent, the Devil, the accuser of our brethren (Rev 12:9-10), a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44), the adversary of believers (1 Pet 5:8), the tempter (Matt 4:3; 1 Thess 3:5), etc. He is very subtle and cunning (Gen 3:1; 2 Cor 11:3), he *“deceiveth the whole world”* (Rev 12:9). Satan’s purpose is to draw us away from the Lord and His Word, His truth and salvation (Luke 8:12; 2 Cor 4:4; 2 Thess 2:8-10) and to tempt us to be independent from God by doing what we please according to our lusts *“as gods”* (Gen 3:5).

God’s Word is truth (John 17:17) while Satan is a liar, so he has attacked God’s Word since the beginning.

(a) Satan cast doubt on God’s Word with a question, “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Gen 3:1). God said, *“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”* (Gen 2:17).

(b) Satan twisted God’s Word, “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4-5). Sadly, Eve was deceived, and Adam listened to her and fell too!

(c) Satan misused God’s Word to tempt our Lord Jesus to cast Himself down from the top of the temple, omitting *“to keep thee in all thy ways”* and adding *“at any time”* (Ps 91:11-12). Today, Satan still attacks God’s Word, particularly the perfectly inspired and perfectly preserved Hebrew and Greek texts underlying the KJV and through modern English versions with many additions, subtractions, misinterpretations, and modifications based on corrupt texts, dynamic equivalence technique of translation, and ungodly translators. For example, Mark 16:9-20, John 7:53-8:11, 1 John 5:7 are cut off or doubted. The term *“only begotten Son”* is replaced with *“one and only Son”* (John 3:16) to undermine Christ’s eternal Sonship, etc.

THOUGHT: God’s Word continues to be the target of Satan’s attack.

PRAYER: Father, help me to listen to Thy Word only.

SATAN THE TEMPTER & HIS APPROACH (II)

As Satan is the attacker of God's Word, we must be cautious or else we may be deceived by unbiblical articles, journals, magazines, books, websites, and modern versions of the Bible!

(a) Satan Disguised as an Angel of Light: Satan may disguise himself as an angel of light, so nice, so brilliant and so powerful in order to lure people away from God and His Word through deceiving signs and lying wonders (Matt 24:24; 2 Cor 11:14; 2 Thess 2:9-10), through unbiblical doctrines (Col 2:22; 1 Tim 4:1; Heb 13:9), through a different gospel (Gal 1:6-9; 2 Cor 11:4), etc.

(b) Satan the Tempter: Satan is very cunning. He tempts man with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (Gen 3:6; Matt 4:3-11; 1 John 2:16).

Truly, *“Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed (allured by bait). Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death”* (James 1:14-15).

(c) Satan the Persecutor: When Satan sees that it is more effective to threaten believers, he will be fierce and cruel like a roaring lion, threatening, discouraging, and scaring believers so that they may give up their faith due to shame, persecutions, tribulations, afflictions, trials or death, etc (Matt 13:21). Enduring testings is a blessing with the reward of the crown of life (James 1:12).

(d) Satan the Accuser: Satan may trouble believers with his accusations before God as he accused Job, Joshua the high priest, etc (Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5; Zec 3:1-3; Rev 12:10). The best way to overcome his accusations is to put on the breastplate of Christ's righteousness (Eph 6:14) and to trust in His Blood (Rev 12:11).

THOUGHT: Satan is very subtle. Without Christ, we will be his victims.

PRAYER: Father, please help me humbly trust in Thee to overcome Satan.

MONDAY, AUGUST 28
EPHESIANS 6:10-18
JAMES 4:7

*“Submit yourselves therefore to God.
Resist the devil, and
he will flee from you.”*

HOW TO OVERCOME TEMPTATIONS

(a) Acknowledge One’s Weakness: Our Lord Jesus knows our weaknesses more than we do, saying (John 15:5). When hearing Jesus’ warning, Peter said with much self-confidence, *“Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended,”* and then, *“Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee”* (Matt 26:31, 33-35). Peter did not acknowledge his weakness, so he did not watch nor pray. In the end he fell into temptation. The Bible warns us, *“Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor 10:12). Let us be humble, watchful and prayerful (Matt 26:41).

(b) Look unto the Lord for Strength and Deliverance: As we are weak, we must put our trust in the Lord only and look unto Him for strength and deliverance (2 Cor 12:9). Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, so He can *“be touched with the feeling of our infirmities”* (Heb 4:15) and be *“able to succour (help) them that are tempted”* (Heb 2:18), and *“knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations”* (2 Pet 2:9), and *“will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”* (1 Cor 10:13). Thank the Lord for His grace, strength, help, and timely deliverance!

(c) Resist Satan with the Whole Armour of God: We are to *“be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil”* (Eph 6:10-11). We are safe with the defensive armour of God. However, Satan only flees when we resist him with the offensive armour of God: God’s Word, the sword of the Spirit and our prayer (Ps 56:9; Matt 26:41; Eph 6:13-18; James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9).

THOUGHT: We can only overcome temptations by the Lord and His Word.

PRAYER: Father, help me humbly trust in Thee and Thy Word and resist Satan.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 29

JOHN 16:28-33

JOHN 16:33

*“But be of good cheer;
I have overcome the world.”*

JESUS CHRIST HAS OVERCOME

No one wants to be defeated in battles but to win triumphantly. Christians who want to live a godly and holy life in faith and obedience to the Lord will have battles to fight. It is not a battle against human beings, but it is a spiritual warfare against our sinful nature, selfishness, and sins, against Satan and his attacks, temptations, accusations, and deception, against the apostasy and unbiblical doctrines, against superstition, ungodly trends and sinful attractions of the world (Eph 6:12).

No one is qualified to defeat Satan except the Lord Jesus. The victory of the coming Messiah or Christ was predicted from the beginning right after Adam and Eve were defeated by Satan, *“And I will put enmity between thee (Satan) and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed (Christ), it (Christ) shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”* (Gen 3:15). Satan tempted our Lord Jesus but our Lord defeated him through God’s Word (Matt 4). The Bible says, *“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil”* (1 John 3:8). Our Lord is the Conqueror through His death and resurrection, saying *“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death”* (Rev 1:18). Our Lord Jesus has overcome Satan and the world (John 14:30; 16:33; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14). Although Satan, apostasy, sins, ungodliness, immorality, worldliness are rampant with the majority in the world in these last days, in the end when our Lord comes back again, *“These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful”* (Rev 17:14). Then you and I should not be discouraged even though we are in the minority provided we are faithfully walking after our Lord in His narrow way and living a victorious life in Christ.

THOUGHT: Thank God that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Conqueror.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee that I may have a victorious life in Thee alone.

YE HAVE OVERCOME

Our Lord has overcome Satan and the world and He requires His followers to overcome them as well (Rom 12:21). The reward is only for those who have overcome (Rev 21:7). How can we have a victorious life?

(a) Be Born Again: *“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world”* (1 John 5:4). When seven sons of Sceva tried casting out the evil spirit in Jesus’ Name, the evil spirit *“leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them”* (Acts 19:16). Not being born again, we are only Satan’s victims!

(b) Have Faith in God, in the Lord Jesus Christ and in His Blood: We must have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, *“this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”* (1 John 5:4-5). *“If God be for us, who can be against us?... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us”* (Rom 8:31,37), and *“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). We also overcome Satan by Jesus’ blood (Rev 12:11).

(c) Submit to God’s Word with the Whole Armour of God: We are to take the whole armour of God for the battle, and submit ourselves to God’s Word. Many like to hear sermons with interesting stories or experiences. They are touched and encouraged and feel comfortable and good. However, their lives are not transformed. Why? Because they do not hear what God speaks to them, nor live by God’s Word, nor have any weapon to resist Satan! If we doubt or question God’s Word, we are defeated by Satan already! Sadly, many are trapped by this snare of Satan without even knowing it!

(d) Resist the Devil in Prayer: *“When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me”* (Ps 56:9).

THOUGHT: Thank God who gives us victory in Christ.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for being in me, with me and for me.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 31

1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-23

1 CORINTHIANS 3:16

*“Know ye not that
ye are the temple of God,”*

YE ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD

The word “temple” is usually understood as a place of worship. In the Bible, the temple consists of two main parts: the holy place of worship and the outer courts leading to it. Entering the holy place of worship, we will see the holy place or the sanctuary, where the priests do their service with the candlestick and the table of the showbread or unleavened bread. Behind the curtain of the holy place is the Holy of Holies, with the golden censer and the ark of the covenant, where only the high priest enters once a year, always with the blood of the sacrifice, to communicate with God (Heb 9:1-7).

Our bodies are the “*temple*” of the Holy Spirit. The original term “*temple*” in 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19 is the Holy of Holies or the Holiest. Shall we not give thanks and praise to the Lord, for choosing us to be His holy dwelling place? The believers in Corinth did not know that truth perfectly; as a result, they had many problems in their church. They did not love each other, but accused each other and sued each other before the secular court! They did not live a holy and godly life, but there was immorality and division among them!

In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, the word “*temple*” refers to the local church, to a group of believers as “*ye*” is in the plural and “*temple*” is in the singular. Truly, as our Lord Jesus says, “*where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*” (Matt 18:20). In 1 Corinthians 6:19, the word “*temple*” refers to individual believer’s body as “*body*” and “*temple*” are in the singular. Then, when we gather together to worship our God, we are the temple of God! And our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit wherever we are! It is amazing and comforting to know that the Holy Spirit is dwelling in us now, but do we truly appreciate His presence and submit ourselves to His control?

THOUGHT: How wonderful it is to know we are the temple of the holy God!

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for choosing me to be Thy holy dwelling place.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19

*“Know ye not that your body is
the temple of the Holy Ghost?”*

YOUR BODY IS THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Paul especially warns us against the sins of the body like fornication and adultery in 1 Corinthians 16:13-18, which is against our Lord Jesus Himself as we are the members of Christ and our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

(a) You Are Not Your Own: Many Christians are living without a full knowledge that they are not their own, but the Lord's. They do what they like without the guidance and approval of the Holy Spirit according to His Word. How can they be holy without the full control of the Holy Spirit? We are not our own because we have been bought with a price, the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28).

(b) Glorify God: “Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.” This is a command, and there is no other choice as we are the Lord's. Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, do all to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Our eyes are the Lord's, let us use them for God's glory. Our tongue is the Lord's, let us speak, sing, teach or preach for Him and for His glory. Our hands are the Lord's, let us do everything (even humble jobs) for Him and for His glory. Our feet are the Lord's, let us walk with the Lord and do His will for His glory wherever we go. Then, our bodies will be living and holy sacrifices acceptable unto the Lord (Rom 12:1). We must be determined to glorify the Lord alone by choosing to love and enjoy Him and not the world, to fear Him and obey His Word without any doubt or question no matter what men may say, to follow His voice and not the tempting voices of strangers nor of Satan, to look unto Him, wait upon Him, trust in Him, worship and serve Him faithfully until death.

THOUGHT: Our body is the Lord's and is His holy temple.

PRAYER: Father, keep me as a holy temple for Thy dwelling and glory.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 2
ROMANS 12:1-2
ROMANS 12:1

*“Present your bodies a living sacrifice,
holy, acceptable unto God,
which is your reasonable service.”*

OUR REASONABLE SERVICE (I)

We can see many “Christians” go to church to worship the Lord on Sunday, but on weekdays, they live and conduct themselves as unbelievers. Our Lord Jesus Christ expects His followers to be *“the light of the world”* and *“the salt of the earth”*! What is our *“reasonable service”* based on Romans 12:1-2?

(a) Voluntary Service: *“I beseech you...by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies...”* The verb *“beseech”* here means “appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage.” God does not force us to offer our bodies a living sacrifice. We are to do it voluntarily, prompted by God’s mercies and love.

(b) Reasonable Service: Paul wrote his letter to the Romans with systematic doctrines of God’s salvation to the Gentiles and to the Jews in the first eleven chapters. Then he beseeched the readers to present their bodies a living sacrifice in chapter 12. *“Therefore,”* (Rom 12:1) means as a result of salvation in Christ by grace through faith alone, now Paul exhorted *“brethren,”* both Jewish and Gentile believers, to *“present”* or *“offer”* their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is their *“reasonable service”* or worship.

(c) A Living Sacrifice: God wants us to offer our bodies a living sacrifice, not a dead sacrifice. It means to offer our lives to God as long as we are still alive and it must be our new life in Christ (Rom 6:13). A person who is not born again can never be a living sacrifice acceptable to the Lord *“for to be carnally minded is death... is enmity against God... cannot please God”* (Rom 8:6-8). Are you a living sacrifice unto the Lord?

THOUGHT: A living and holy sacrifice unto God is our reasonable service.

PRAYER: Father, keep me as a holy and living sacrifice unto Thee always.

LORD'S DAY, SEPTEMBER 3

ROMANS 12:1-2

2 CORINTHIANS 10:13-18

*“But he that glorieth,
let him glory in the Lord.”*

OUR REASONABLE SERVICE (II)

God expects us to willingly offer our bodies to Him a living and holy sacrifice.

(a) A Holy Sacrifice Acceptable unto God: This means all the members of our bodies must be separated from sin and worldliness, dedicated and reserved for God and His service. May God use our eyes to see opportunities to glorify and serve Him, to read and study His Word to minister to our souls and others. May we dedicate our ears for God's use and glory, listening to the sound preaching of God's Word for the nourishment of our souls, to traditional hymns and music for our comfort, to the needs of others to minister to them. May we dedicate our tongues to the Lord as an instrument for His truth, His Word and His glory, to sing praise to Him, to pray to Him for His kingdom, for ourselves and others, to share His Word with others, to say the words of comfort, encouragement and edification or godly warning and admonition to others. Then our hands and feet are also to be dedicated to the Lord to write, work, or walk according to His will and all for His glory to serve Him and minister to others, etc. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so we have to keep it pure from sexual immorality and from anything harmful to it like drugs, tobacco, alcohol, etc.

(b) The Good, Acceptable, and Perfect Will of God: Those who love the world and want to compromise will ignore the doctrine of Biblical separation, but true followers of Christ will see it good and acceptable, and the more closely they walk with God, the more they see it perfect. Therefore, to see the good, acceptable and perfect will of God, we are to keep these two commandments: *“be not conformed to this world”*, and *“be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind”* by the Holy Spirit and God's Word.

THOUGHT: It is God's good and perfect will that we are holy as He is holy.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy good, acceptable and perfect will for me.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

JOHN 15:1-8

JOHN 15:8

*“Ye bear much fruit;
so shall ye be my disciples.”*

SO SHALL YE BE MY DISCIPLES (I)

The term “*disciple*” means more than a mere pupil or learner. It is an adherent who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct (Zodhiates Spiros). Besides the special group of “the twelve” disciples (Matt 10:1-4) and later “the eleven” after Judas Iscariot’s betrayal (Mark 16:14), whom our Lord Jesus called, chosen, ordained and named apostles (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13), our Lord Jesus has also called many others, even us today, to be His disciples in the general sense. Our Lord says, *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed”* (John 8:31) and here in John 15:8, *“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”*

It is a great privilege to be a disciple of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, our Creator, our Maker, and our King. It is vital for us to keep in touch with Him all the time, relying on Him, looking unto Him, trusting in Him, submitting to Him and His Word so that we may bear much fruit to glorify God.

Today, our Lord still requires us to follow Him through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and His Word as He required His disciples (Matt 4:19; 9:9). Are we willing to follow Him wholeheartedly with our full commitment, love, loyalty, faithfulness, obedience, and submission? Our Lord does not count the quantity but the quality. It is easy for our Lord Jesus Christ to attract many people to follow Him by His miracles but He did not do so. He requires the commitment, faithfulness, loyalty and submission of His disciples, and He will not lower His expectations and standard. Jesus says that the narrow way leads to life, and few people find it (Matt 7:14). When many disciples murmured about Jesus’ teaching and then *“went back and walked no more with Him,”* our Lord did not run after them to please them, but challenged His twelve disciples, *“Will ye also go away?”* (John 6:60-68).

THOUGHT: We have to pay any cost to be Jesus’ disciples.

PRAYER: Father, please train me to be Thy good and faithful disciple.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

MATTHEW 10:37-42

LUKE 9:23

*“If any man will come after me,
let him deny himself, and take up
his cross daily, and follow me.”*

SO SHALL YE BE MY DISCIPLES (II)

Jesus did not teach His disciples to do what He had not done. He had a clear purpose in His life. He humbled Himself and came into the world to give His life, to serve and not to be served, to bear witness of the truth, to seek and do His Father’s will, to glorify His Father, and to obey His Father unto death for the salvation of mankind (Luke 22:42). He said, *“I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you”* (John 13:15), and Peter later encouraged Christians, *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”* (1 Pet 2:21).

(a) Take up the cross and follow Him: As our Lord is holy and righteous while we are sinners with sinful desires and selfish ambitions, He expects us to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Him (Matt 10:38; Luke 9:23). This means to be willing to die to our “self,” our selfishness, self-will, self-ambition, self-glory, self-promotion, self-love, even our self-righteousness, etc. in order to totally submit to God’s will. It also means to be willing to die to sinful lusts and to the world with all worldly attractions (Gal 2:20; 5:24; 6:14). Are we willing to take our cross and follow our Lord Jesus?

(b) Love God above all with full obedience: Our Lord Jesus loved Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:51; John 19:26-27), but He loved God above all by only doing God’s will according to His timing (Matt 12:47-50; John 2:4; 7:3-8). Jesus requires His disciples to love God and obey Him above all. Are we willing to do that?

(c) Be committed, loyal and faithful: Our Lord requires His disciples to be committed, loyal and faithful to Him and His Word unto death (Rev 2:10). *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed”* (John 8:31). Are we truly committed and faithful to Jesus?

THOUGHT: Take up our cross daily and follow the Lord faithfully until death.

PRAYER: Father, please help me love and obey Thee and Thy Word above all.

YE ARE OF MORE VALUE THAN MANY SPARROWS (I)

(a) *Ye Are of More Value than Many Sparrows:* God created the heaven and the earth and all things in it by His Word (Heb 11:3). However, God created human beings in a very special manner, *“God created man in his own image,” “and the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”* (Gen 1:27; 2:7) with his will, conscience, intelligence, power of reason, acts of worship, etc. Therefore, the value of man is much higher and different from animals including monkeys or apes. Animals have no soul, but human living souls are eternal. Because of God’s love and because our souls are of more value than not only many sparrows but even the whole world, the Lord Jesus came and died for our sins and rose again for our salvation. Saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are God’s dear children and must be of much more value in God’s sight!

(b) *God’s Sovereignty:* Our Lord confirms that *“one of them (sparrows) shall not fall on the ground without your Father.”* The fall of a little sparrow is also under God’s control and permission. God does care for every detail of our lives, *“But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”* We can see God’s sovereignty in the life of Joseph for in the end, he said to his brother, *“But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive”* (Gen 50:20). Sometimes we ask many “whys”: “Why am I in this situation? Why did this thing happen to me? Why and why?” However, we should give thanks to the Lord and rest in His peace if we trust in His sovereignty. God does know us and our situations much better than we do. Nothing happens to us without God’s permission.

THOUGHT: God is still in control no matter what may happen to us.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for creating me, saving me, and caring for me.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

ROMANS 8:28-39

ROMANS 8:28

“All things work together for good to them that love God.”

YE ARE OF MORE VALUE THAN MANY SPARROWS (II)

While we thank God for His sovereignty, we must not ignore our responsibility. We are to love God and obey Him (Rom 8:28). Loving God means obeying His words and commandments (John 14:15, 21, 23). We cannot drive carelessly and say that God will protect us.

When we make a mistake, we cannot blame God for not keeping us from sins. It is our fault as we did not fear God, nor love Him nor trust in Him enough nor have a close walk and fellowship with Him. We should learn to be humble and understand that God allows us to fail or to make mistakes in order to humble us and teach us to trust in Him more and more. God pays close attention to every detail of our lives and if we do the same with God's sovereignty in view, we may learn a lot of lessons from Him. Through the thorn in his flesh, Paul was humbled and made to depend on the sufficient grace and strength from the Lord.

This is a true story in my country many years ago: There was a brother queuing to buy a ticket. Then a young man came, cut the queue, and stood in front of him. That brother was not happy at all but he just kept quiet. He was very upset when the young man in front of him was the last person to be on the first coach, and he had to wait for the next coach. Later, he heard that the first coach exploded when it hit a land mine. How he thanked God for sparing his life!

Seeing God's sovereignty and loving care and believing that God is able to make all things work together for our good, we will be submissive and thankful to the Lord in all things. Even when God chastises us for our lack of love for Him and trust in Him, or for our pride, or for our sins, we must be thankful that God has dealt with us as His own children and that He wants us to be partakers of His holiness (Heb 12:10).

THOUGHT: Trusting God's sovereignty and not ignoring man's responsibility.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy sovereignty and loving chastisement.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

PSALM 23

PSALM 23:1

*“The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.”*

YE ARE OF MORE VALUE THAN MANY SPARROWS (III)

(a) God’s Loving Care: Our Lord says, *“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? ... For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”* (Matt 6:26,32). Let us trust in God’s loving care for our daily needs. This, however, does not mean that we can be lazy, not willing to work and still expect God’s provision. The Lord commands us to work hard. When we are jobless, we should be diligent to seek for a job and trust in the Lord and His good timing. With that proper attitude, we will not lack anything even when we are jobless because God will provide for all our needs. But in all things, *“seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you”* (Matt 6:33), and *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want”* (Ps 23:1).

(b) God’s Protection: Our Lord teaches us not to fear, *“Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell ... But the very hairs of your head are all numbered, Fear ye not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.”* (Matt 10:28, 30, 31). We should not be surprised when we are hated by the world, and even are persecuted and killed. God protects our souls, but He may allow our bodies to be killed for His Name’s sake and for His Word. God will never cast our souls into hell. Once we are saved, we shall never perish, and no one, not even Satan can harm our souls (John 10:28-29; 1 John 5:18). However, we are to be faithful to the Lord and His Word unto death, *“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”* (Rev 2:10).

THOUGHT: Work hard and trust in God’s loving care and protection.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy loving care and protection.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

MARK 4:35-41

MARK 4:40

“Why are ye so fearful?”

WHY ARE YE SO FEARFUL? (I)

There are several kinds of fears, some are good and some are bad. It is good to fear the Lord by departing from sin and evil as it is the beginning of our wisdom and knowledge (Prov 1:7; 9:10). It is good to fear that if we do not behave ourselves well or do our work properly, that we may not please God, glorify Him and edify our brethren.

However, it is not good to fear men or death (Matt 10:28). Some people are scared of darkness, snakes, old age, illness, etc. Usually, if we are rich, we may not be so fearful if we lose our job, but if that job is all that we have to earn our living day by day we may be very scared when we are sacked. The core of the problem is our “self.” We look to “self” and our “self” is so dear to us.

Our Lord Jesus challenges His followers to deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow Him (Luke 9:23-24). Many do not want to follow Jesus as they are scared of self-denial, shame, persecutions, rejection, separation, or death. They want to save their life, yet will lose it in the end (Rev 21:8).

Here, the Lord Jesus commanded his disciples to pass over unto the other side of the lake. As they sailed, suddenly there arose a great storm and Jesus was sleeping in the hinder part of the ship. They came and awoke Him, *“Master, carest thou not that we perish?”* Then Jesus arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, *“Peace, be still”*. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Jesus said to his disciples, *“Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?”* The adjective *“fearful”* our Lord used has only three occurrences in the NT. It was used in the same stormy incident recorded in Matthew 8:26, and in Revelation 21:8 to denote the cowardly. How can we overcome this cowardly fear and enjoy God’s peace even in the storms of our lives? Be in the Lord and His will!

THOUGHT: It is good to fear God and not anyone nor anything else.

PRAYER: Father, please help me fear Thee and trust in Thee in all situations.

WHY ARE YE SO FEARFUL? (II)

To overcome our cowardly fear, we should:

(a) Acknowledge God's Sovereignty: The disciples had witnessed the Lord Jesus turn water into wine, heal the sick, cast out demons, but they had not known Jesus had power over nature, so this was a good opportunity for them to know more about Him. We too can know our Lord more through the storms in our life. Acknowledging God's sovereignty and believing that He is able to make all things work together for good unto us will calm our troubled heart.

(b) Be in God's Will and Guidance: It was Jesus who commanded his disciples to depart and sail to the other side of the lake. The disciples just followed Jesus' instruction and Jesus was with them. We are to make sure that we are in God's will and guidance so that He is with us and He will see us through the storm in our lives. He will calm the storm and give us peace.

(c) Look unto the Lord: At first the disciples did not bother to wake Jesus. When the boat was full of water, in hopelessness and helplessness, they woke Him. Sometimes, we think we can manage to survive without seeking the Lord and His help until we are helpless. Then, we turn to the Lord. God always has a purpose in everything. We are to trust in Him and not in ourselves. We are to look unto the Lord and not at ourselves nor at the storms. After the Lord rebuked the wind and calmed the sea, He rebuked his disciples. If Jesus is the Object of our faith, why are we so fearful?

(d) Listen to God's Word: Jesus' Word is powerful. It calmed the storm. It is by His Word that God created the world and everything in it. It is also the Written Word which God has preserved for us today, that has built us up in our faith (Rom 10:17). Let us listen to our Shepherd's voice only!

THOUGHT: God always has a purpose in everything.

PRAYER: Father, help me to trust Thee and hear Thy Word.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

JOHN 15:9-17

JOHN 15:15

"I have called you friends."

JESUS CHRIST, OUR DIVINE AND LOVING FRIEND

People in the world may be proud of their "big" or "famous" friends. They may like to show their photos taken with a president, or a king, or a queen, or a movie star or a sports star, or a celebrity. Others may tell about their best friend or close friends from their childhood, from school, from work, or their life-partner, or boyfriend, girlfriend, etc. As devoted Christians, we will want to tell others about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, our best Friend! Are we proud of Him?

(a) Jesus Christ, our Divine Friend: Our Lord Jesus says, "I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." (John 15:15). Thank God that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Creator and King, is not ashamed to call us His friends!

(b) Jesus Christ, our Loving Friend: It is rare to see someone willing to die for a just or good man (Rom 5:7), but Jesus Christ, our God and Maker, because of love, He humbled Himself and came into this world to die for sinners, rebellious human beings whom He had created. A holy God died for His sinful creatures, the godly for the ungodly, the just for the unjust! (John 3:16; Rom 5:6; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:18) That is God's love for us (Rom 5: 8). Sometimes we take God's love for granted and forget that we deserve eternal condemnation in hell! We cannot find such a loving friend in this world. Our earthly friends may fail us but our Divine Friend will never. May God help us to know more about His love so that we may be rooted and grounded in His love (Eph 3:17-19) and be constrained by His love to live and die for Him (2 Cor 5:14-15). As Jesus is our Saviour and Friend, no one or anything can separate us from His love (Rom 8:35-39), and His perfect love will cast out all fear (1 John 4:18). Truly, the Lord Jesus is our Divine Friend, our best Friend, our loving Friend, and He never fails us even though our friends and loved ones may disappoint us.

THOUGHT: How wonderful it is that our God is our Friend!

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for being my best Friend and my loving Friend!

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

HEBREWS 13:1-8

HEBREWS 13:5

*“I will never leave thee,
nor forsake thee.”*

JESUS CHRIST, OUR BEST FRIEND

Our Lord Jesus Christ is not only our Divine Friend and our loving Friend but also our faithful and caring Friend, our wise and mighty Friend, our best Friend!

(a) Our Faithful and Caring Friend: When we have nothing, and no one understands or cares for us, and we may feel lonely or friendless, Jesus our faithful Friend is still with us and will never forsake us (Heb 13:5). Paul’s experience is so encouraging: *“no man stood with me, but all men forsook me... Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me”* (2 Tim 4:16-17), and Peter’s exhortation is very true: *“Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you”* (1 Pet 5:7). When we share our personal problems, burdens, feelings or desires with our close friends, we may become disappointed when they reveal our secrets to others (Prov 11:13). However, we can pour our soul out to the Lord who knows us well, understands us, and sympathises with us and our circumstances. We can surely find comfort and strength from Him, His Word, His faithfulness and His loving care.

(b) Our Wise and Mighty Friend: When we are in great trouble or difficulties and we need some guidance or deliverance, who can we turn to? Thanks be to God for our Divine Friend, who is present with us wherever we are and able to help us with His wisdom and power, making all things work together for good unto us according to His sovereignty and timing. Shall we not love and trust in such a Friend who never fails nor disappoints us?

It is a great privilege and honour for us to be called a friend of God. The closer we walk with Him, the more we are transformed to be like Him (Prov 27:17; 13:20, John 15:15; 1 John 3:2).

THOUGHT: Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is our best Friend.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for never leaving me nor forsaking me.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

JOHN 15:9-17

JOHN 15:14

*“Ye are my friends if ye do
whatsoever I command you.”*

YE ARE MY FRIENDS

Would you like to be Jesus’ friend?

(a) Faithful Obedience and Submission: Jesus says, *“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you”* (v 14). The verb “do” here means “keep on doing,” not just spasmodic obedience. “Whatsoever” and “command” are the same terms Jesus used in Matthew 28:20. So if we want to be Jesus’ friends, we are to keep on doing whatsoever He commands us to do (Acts 20:27). Even though we are called His friends (vv 14-15), we are to be His disciples (v 8) and His servants first (vv 15, 20). When we are fully submissive to our Lord as a bond-slave, then He will lift us up and call us His friends. We are to follow the example of our Divine Friend, the Son of God – *“he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”* (Phil 2:8). Abraham was called the friend of God (James 2:23, Isa 41:8), as he believed in God, feared God and obeyed God, not sparing even his only son Isaac (Gen 22). Our Lord says that he who loves Him keeps His commandments and His words (John 14:21, 23). Then, shall we not keep on obeying our loving, faithful, caring, wise, and mighty God-Friend so that we may enjoy a blessed friendship with Him for ever?

(b) Separated from Sins and Worldliness: The Bible says, *“Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”* (James 4:4). A friend of the world means to love the world, be conformed to the world, accepting and following worldly values, mindset, pride of life, lusts and pleasures. Our Divine Friend is not of the world, and neither are we. *“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”* (Amos 3:3). If we want to maintain our friendship with our holy Divine Friend, we are to separate ourselves from sin and worldliness and walk with Him in His light.

THOUGHT: We must be submissive to Jesus, our Divine Friend.

PRAYER: Father, help me obey Thee and walk with Thee in Thy light.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27

*“Now ye are the body of Christ,
and members in particular.”*

YE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST (I)

Many atheists put God their Creator and His Word aside from their mind and their lives and accept the evolution theory. However, Psalm 14:1 says, *“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.”* Looking at God’s creation, through God’s Word, with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we know for sure that God is our Creator and Maker (Ps 139:14).

Truly, we are fearfully and wonderfully made. When we look at any part of our body, we will be amazed at the wisdom and power of God, our Creator.

Paul uses the human body to illustrate the living and tight relation, connection, and unity of church members with one another as well as with the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Then what does it mean when the Bible says, *“Ye are the body of Christ”*?

We know from God’s Word that Jesus is 100% God and 100% Man (1 Tim 2:5, 3:16; Heb 1:8, 10:12). With a human body, He also felt tired, hungry, and thirsty. He felt the pain when nailed to the cross. He died and was buried. He was resurrected with a glorious body which we will also have when He comes back again.

However, when the Bible says, *“ye are the body of Christ,”* the body here refers to the Church while Christ is the Head (Eph 5:23; cf. Col 1:24). The living and vital connection between the Church and the Lord Jesus is *“a great mystery”* (Eph 5:32). The *“Church”* here consists of truly born-again Christians, redeemed by the Lord Jesus’ blood, *“out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”* (Rev 5:9). Do we have a living and close relation and connection with the Lord Jesus, our Head, and with each other as members of His body?

THOUGHT: The body is connected with and under the control of the head.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee that I am a part of Thee and Thy Church.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

EPHESIANS 5:21-33

EPHESIANS 5:25

*“Christ also loved the church,
and gave himself for it.”*

YE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST (II)

There are great blessings to be members of Christ's body. We receive His guidance, provision and protection.

(a) Christ's Guidance: The Head controls and directs the body according to His mind and will. It is a great blessing to enjoy the guidance and direction from our Divine Head, our Lord and our Good Shepherd (John 10:3-4). Our Lord still guides us today by the Holy Spirit and His Word the Bible (Rom 8:14, Ps 119:105). Many professing Christians do not hold fast to the Head (Col 2:19) but just do what they like. Surely they miss the blessed guidance of the Head. When we hear our Shepherd's voice (God's Word) and walk after Him step by step, we shall never go astray, as He always goes before us and His way is always good and perfect. Let us follow Him alone.

(b) Christ's Provision and Loving Care: It is a great blessing to be loved, nourished and cherished by our Lord. Truly, He comes so that we may have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). As members of Christ's body and His sheep, we can sing Psalm 23. Shall we not trust in our Lord and His loving care more and more?

(c) Christ's Protection: It is a great comfort to know that once we are saved and born again, we shall never perish, but are kept safe in our Lord's mighty hand (John 10:28-29). Truly, as members of Christ's body, everything that happens to us affects our Lord Himself. Let us trust in our Lord and His protection.

THOUGHT: The Church enjoys Christ's guidance, loving care and protection.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy guidance, loving care and protection.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

1 CORINTHIANS 12:20

*“But now are they many members,
yet but one body.”*

YE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST (III)

There is one God and Father of all, one Lord, one Holy Spirit, one Faith, one Baptism, one Hope and one Body (Eph 4:4-6). There is only one Body, one invisible and universal Church composed of truly born-again Christians (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28). However, there are many members with different gifts and functions to serve the Lord and to edify one another (Eph 4:12-15). Moreover, *“God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him”* (v 18). *“God hath tempered (joined) the body together ... that there should be no schism (division) in the body”* (vv 24-25). God desires and is able to join all members together in unity as long as they all submit to Jesus Christ the Head and His Word and do their parts faithfully.

(a) Subject to the Head: The body has only one Head. Christ is the Head of the Church (Eph 5:23-24). Sadly, there is division in many churches nowadays, caused by the church leaders and members who are not fully submissive to the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ and God’s Word.

(b) Do One’s Part Faithfully: God does not count how much we have done for Him but how faithfully we do our part according to His will (Matt 25:21, 23).

(c) Belong to One Another and Need One Another: The body cannot have only one member, and one member cannot establish the church, but at least two or three gathering in Jesus’ Name (Matt 18:20). In some cases, we are to walk alone with God to do His will against the majority, but we still need faithful brethren to fulfill God’s purpose (vv 15, 21). We need Christ our Head as well as one another.

(d) Care for One Another: All the parts of our body are related to one another and affect one another, so *“the members should have the same care one for another”* (v 25). We should pray for one another and care for one another.

THOUGHT: We need the Lord our Head and we need one another.

PRAYER: Father, please help me submit to Thee and do my part faithfully.

LORD'S DAY, SEPTEMBER 17

MATTHEW 23:1-12

MATTHEW 23:8

*"One is your Master, even Christ;
and all ye are brethren."*

ALL YE ARE BRETHREN

Some of us may have brothers and sisters and some may not. We are very proud of a successful brother with a high position in society. Then surely we want to be brethren of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Now we focus on the meaning of brethren in Christ or in God's family (Phil 1:14; Col 1:2). Do we appreciate this precious and blessed brotherhood?

In Matthew 23, our Lord rebuked the hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees. They claim to have authority to interpret and teach God's Word, but they do not practise what they preach. They want to perform their religious duties before the eyes of men to get respect. They appear clean, good, and righteous outwardly, but within is full of hypocrisy and iniquity. They love honoured positions in the synagogues, in the church, at the feasts and love to be called and greeted with a highly respected title like Rabbi (my teacher). Today, we also see religious leaders who want to be the greatest and love the honourable titles, requiring their followers to accept their words, mindset, beliefs and interpretations over against the Word of God.

Our Lord Jesus commands His disciples not to be called "Rabbi" nor "masters." The term "*Master*" here is used by our Lord only three times in Matthew 23:8, 10. It means a guide, a teacher, leader, equivalent to rabbi, a title of respectful address to Jewish teachers (Spiros Zodhiates). Only our Lord deserves to be our great Divine Teacher, great Divine Master and great Divine Leader. To be great in the sight of God, we should humble ourselves and exalt our Lord Jesus and God's Word alone, follow His example, to serve and not to be served.

Our Lord also commands His disciples not to call any man on the earth "father" (of their spirits or souls). We have fathers of our flesh and we call them "Dad" or "Papa," and we also have Father of our spirits (Heb 12:9) and we call Him, "Abba," "Father." We have only one spiritual Father in heaven, one spiritual Master and Leader, our Lord Jesus Christ, and all of us are brethren.

THOUGHT: Only one Father and one Master, and all are brethren.

PRAYER: Father, please help me to humbly serve and not to be served.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

HEBREWS 2:10-18

LUKE 8:21

*“My brethren are these which hear
the word of God, and do it.”*

BRETHREN OF JESUS CHRIST

To be Jesus' brethren, we must be born again to be children in God's family. Would you like to be a brother of the Lord Jesus?

(a) Be Obedient: Obedience to God's will and God's word is the fruit of a truly born-again and submissive Christian (Matt 12:50, Luke 8:21). Our human nature is sinful, corrupt, and *“enmity against God, not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be”* (Rom 8:7). However, through our Lord we can overcome this sinful nature to do God's will. Would you rather obey God and His Word than men and their ideas?

(b) Be Sanctified and Separated: To be sanctified means to be separated from sins, lusts, and worldliness, to be dedicated to the Lord for His own use and to be controlled by the Lord. A temple is holy only as it is separated from common use, dedicated to the Lord, and filled with God's holy presence. In this world of sin and deception, we are to beware of false teachers, false prophets, and false brethren as well (2 Cor 11:26; Gal 2:4) and separate ourselves from them who may claim to be Jesus' brethren but who live in sin (1 Cor 5:11) or walk *“disorderly”* not after God's Word (2 Thess 3:6,15).

(c) Loving and Caring Brethren: If we are truly born again, we will love God and the brethren who are born of Him (1 John 5:1). Paul, a Jew, preached the Gospel to the Gentiles, spent and was spent for them (2 Cor 12:15), and called them *“brethren”* (Rom 1:13)! In Christ, we will love and respect the brethren in the Lord without discrimination, prejudice or contempt!

THOUGHT: It is a great privilege to be a brother of Jesus!

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for not being ashamed to call me Thy brother.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

ACTS 1:1-11

ACTS 1:8

“Ye shall be witnesses unto me.”

YE SHALL BE WITNESSES UNTO ME (I)

Like the salt of the earth and the light of the world, we are expected to be faithful and true witnesses unto the Lord (v 8). A witness is expected to tell the truth of what he has seen, heard and known, is accountable for what he may say (Deut 5:20; 19:15-21; Matt 19:18). The word *martyr*, the same original term of *witness*, means the one who witnesses unto death (Acts 22:20; Rev 2:13). Our Lord expects us to be witnesses unto Him and His Truth faithfully unto death.

The disciples were so happy to see the Lord Jesus appear to them at least ten times after His resurrection from the dead, and they expected Him to restore again the kingdom of Israel on earth. Truly the kingdom of Israel will be restored at the second coming of the Lord Jesus according to His Father's timing, but the Lord Jesus wanted them to focus on the Great Commission, *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* The words of our Lord Jesus in Acts 1:8 were fulfilled exactly to the jot and tittle or to the very smallest details: the disciples received power of the Holy Spirit when He came upon them (Acts 2) and then they were witnesses unto the Lord in Jerusalem (Chaps 2-7), in Judea and Samaria (8:1-9:31), and to the uttermost part of the world (9:32-28:31). Our Lord called and trained His disciples to be His witnesses. They were with Jesus, heard what He said and taught, saw what He did, and were eye witnesses to His life, His works, His death and His resurrection. Our Lord Jesus was leaving them soon, and He expected them to be His witnesses. It seems that they were to go out and preach the Gospel to the lost right away, but our Lord asked them to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high (Luke 24:49), or the power of the Holy Spirit!

THOUGHT: Christ expects us to be witnesses to Him, His Truth and His Word.

PRAYER: Father, use me as Thy witness wherever I am.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20
ACTS 1:1-11
ACTS 1:8

*“But ye shall receive power,
after that the Holy ghost is
come upon you.”*

YE SHALL BE WITNESSES UNTO ME (II)

Why did the Lord Jesus ask His disciples to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit while the whole world really needed to hear the Gospel through them as soon as possible? Although they were with Jesus, taught and trained by Him, and given power to heal the sick and cast out demons (Luke 10:17), they were still not qualified for this great Mission without the power of the Holy Spirit.

Without the Holy Spirit and His power, how could the disciples open the eyes of the people and *turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God* (Acts 26:18)? How could they be strong and brave enough to encounter all the enemies of the truth and to preach the pure Gospel without fear or compromise? How could they be able to endure all sufferings, rejection, persecutions, and oppositions for the sake of the Lord Jesus until death? They needed the Holy Spirit and His power for their lives and ministry. Truly, after the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, they had the power to preach the Gospel, to stand firm before the leaders of the Jews (Acts 5:29), to rejoice even in their sufferings and persecutions for Jesus' Name and to press on with their teaching and preaching ministry (Acts 5:41-42).

Without the Holy Spirit and His power, we cannot be faithful and true witnesses unto our Lord until death. We need to submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit's control and guidance. The Holy Spirit guides us through God's Word, so we need to read, study, and submit to God's Word every day. He also may guide us through the timely preaching and advice of His godly servants or through the encouragement of His godly children or through His sovereignty and providence over our lives and our situations. Surely, He is our faithful Guide. Thank God for the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

THOUGHT: Without the Spirit, we cannot be faithful witnesses.

PRAYER: Father, help me to humbly submit to the Spirit's control.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

ACTS 1:1-11

ACTS 1:8

“Ye shall be witnesses unto me.”

YE SHALL BE WITNESSES UNTO ME (III)

We cannot witness for someone we do not know nor give others what we do not have. We must truly know Jesus, believe and receive Him as our personal Lord and Saviour. It is the Holy Spirit that testifies (bears witness) of the Lord Jesus and glorifies Him (John 15:26; 16:14) and also bears witness with our spirit (Rom 8:16). Then with the witness and power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to witness for our Lord Jesus.

Next, we are to testify of our Lord Jesus Christ, not only in our sharing or preaching but also in our lives. It is fine to tell others about our Lord, but only with the power of the Holy Spirit can we testify of our Lord Jesus by our lives (Gal 2:20; 5:24; 6:14). Do others see the death of our Lord Jesus in our lives as *“I am crucified with Christ”*? If we still love our “self” more than God and His will, still live in sin, or still love the world and are conformed to this world, how can we be true witnesses to His death? Every time we partake of our Lord’s Supper, we are to show the Lord’s death (1 Cor 11:26) through our lives. When others may see that in all things we only want to do God’s will, stop living in sins, and are not of the world, we are then living witnesses unto our Lord and His death. When others may see a new life in us – a holy, godly, humble but victorious life, then are we living witnesses unto our Lord and His resurrection. When others see that we are not building our home in this world but only living here as pilgrims and looking forward to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are living witnesses unto our Lord and His soon coming!

THOUGHT: It is important to be living witnesses for our Lord.

PRAYER: Father, please make me Thy living witness.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

REVELATION 22:6-21

REVELATION 1:9

*“For the word of God, and
for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”*

YE SHALL BE WITNESSES UNTO ME (IV)

We are called to be witnesses not only to the Lord Himself but also to God's Truth or God's Word through our lives. Our Lord is *the faithful and true witness* (Rev 3:14). He came into the world to *bear witness of the truth* (John 18:37). His Father's Word is truth (John 17:17), and Jesus Himself is the truth (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, who guides believers *into all truth* (John 16:13).

To be faithful and true witnesses unto God's Truth or God's Word, we are to know the truth in our heart (not only in our mind) correctly and properly, truly believe it, receive it, submit to it, live by it and then practise it, tell it, teach it and preach it correctly, faithfully and reverently. Many professing Christians or leaders can preach the Bible eloquently but their hearts and lives do not submit to God's Word. How can they be living witnesses unto God's Word without faith, humility and submission?

Our Lord Jesus Christ and His faithful apostles did nothing against the truth but for the truth (2 Cor 13:8), so must we. Moreover, only with the witness and power of the Holy Spirit can we have strong convictions to stand for the truth and contend for the truth faithfully unto death. Do others hear God's Truth or His Word from our mouth and see it in our lives?

Our Lord wants us to be His witnesses wherever we are. It is not a good testimony for a Christian to be godly in church on Sunday but ungodly at home, at school, at play or at work on weekdays. Are we true and faithful witnesses to the Lord Himself and God's Word through our lives wherever we are on all days?

THOUGHT: We must know God's Word properly to bear witness of it.

PRAYER: Father, train me to be a witness for Thee and Thy Word.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

LUKE 2:1-20

LUKE 2:11

*“For unto you is born this day
in the city of David a Saviour,
which is Christ the Lord.”*

NO ROOM FOR JESUS? (I)

Christmas is celebrated almost everywhere in the world today. For Christians, we celebrate with joy, reverence and thanksgiving while non-Christians celebrate with decoration, parties, entertainment, etc. For us, we know Jesus is not only the Perfect Man but also the Perfect God, the Saviour of the world. For non-Christians, Jesus is only a good man, a good teacher, a good prophet or a great religious leader like others. Many even celebrate Christmas without knowing anything about the Lord Jesus! How about you? The Christmas story is a true story with historical facts. It speaks of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Do you have any room in our heart for Jesus?

(a) Historical Facts: The whole Bible is the Word of God, which is perfect and true and worthy to have our wholehearted trust concerning not only salvation and doctrines but also science, history and geography. The story of Christmas is a true story with real historical and personal names like Jesus, David, Joseph, and Mary, Augustus, Cyrenius, and with real places like Syria, Nazareth, Galilee, the City of David or Bethlehem.

(b) God's Sovereignty: God's sovereignty can be seen in the fulfillment of God's promises concerning the Messiah in the New Testament. First, the Messiah was born of a virgin (Gen 3:15; Isa 7:14; Matt 1:18, 25; Luke 1:35; 2:6-7). Second, the Messiah came from the seed of Abraham (Gen 12:7) and of Isaac (Gen 17:19), from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10), from the lineage of David, the heir to the throne of David (Isa 9:7; 11:1-5). Finally, the Messiah was born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth. A long journey would really be difficult for Mary who was great with child. It was only by God's sovereignty that Augustus ordered all people in his empire to go back to their hometown to register their names in the tax list. Therefore, Joseph and Mary had to go back to Bethlehem, and Jesus was born there in fulfillment of God's prophecy!

THOUGHT: The Christmas story is a true story with historical facts.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for coming to save me.

NO ROOM FOR JESUS? (II)

(c) *Man's Responsibility* can also be seen in the Christmas story. First, the humble submission of Mary. They believed in God and humbly obeyed God without any fear of public opinion. A lady who was pregnant without a husband was to be stoned to death according to the law of Moses. Here, we see that God did take care of her when she believed in Him, and committed her life, her name, her reputation, her future to Him with full submission. God does regard your heart and my heart more than our positions in society, our education, or our nice appearance. When we hear God's Word, and we believe and obey His will no matter what other people may say, or ridicule, despise or forsake us, we will surely be blessed by our gracious God.

How about Joseph? The Bible says that he was a just man (Matt 1:19) and intended to put Mary away secretly and quietly when he recognised that she was expecting. However, an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him to take Mary his wife because the child was conceived in her by the power of the Holy Spirit. God could choose him and use him, because he was a just and obedient man. Actually, no man is just before God (Rom 3:10). Joseph was called a just man, as he had a right relationship with God through his faith in God, in God's Word and in God's coming Messiah. Likewise, we are justified and have a right relationship with God through our faith in our Saviour Jesus Christ and in God's Word. Today, we have the Bible, the complete, sufficient and final revelation of God, so we do not need an angel to appear to us in a dream, but we just read God's Word and seek His will with our prayerful and submissive heart.

How about the shepherds? When the angel appeared to them and announced the good tidings, they believed and went to Bethlehem, and found Mary, Joseph and the babe in the manger. They glorified and praised God and shared the good news with others. How about us? Shall we do the same?

THOUGHT: Man's responsibility is to trust God and obey His Word.

PRAYER: Father, please help me trust in Thee and obey Thy Word always.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

LUKE 2:1-20

REVELATION 3:20

*“Behold, I stand
at the door, and knock.”*

NO ROOM FOR JESUS? (III)

We cannot fully trust the one we do not know, so we are to know the Lord Jesus so that we may love Him, trust Him, worship Him, serve Him and tell others about Him. Jesus means “Saviour,” who came to die for our sins and rose again for our salvation. Christ means the Anointed One, whose office is as the High Priest, the King, and the Prophet. We believe and receive Him not only as our Saviour who saves us from sins but also as our High Priest who is our Mediator before the Holy God, and our King who reigns over our lives, and our Prophet whose words we trust and obey.

In verses 5 to 7, we learn that Mary was great with child. She really needed special care and rest. However, due to the decree from Caesar Augustus, many people went back to their hometown to register, all the inns were occupied. The owners could do good business by raising the rent or reserving the rooms for the rich, so there was no room for Mary and Jesus, who were so poor!

But how did people treat the pregnant Mary? They did not care for her nor have any mercy on her. In the end, by God’s grace and loving care, Mary delivered the baby, wrapped Jesus and put Him in the manger, among the animals, so smelly and dirty! The people did not know that Jesus was their Creator, coming to save them! They had no room for Mary and Jesus in their hearts. How about our hearts? Do we have any room for our Lord and Saviour? He loves us and wants to be the Saviour and King of our hearts. It is so heartless if we leave the Lord Jesus outside of our hearts while He is standing and knocking (Rev 3:20)! If we do not have any room for Him in our hearts today, He will not have any rooms for us in heaven (John 14:1-2)!

THOUGHT: The Lord Jesus is still standing and knocking!

PRAYER: Father, please be the Saviour and King of my heart always.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-5

2 CORINTHIANS 3:2

*“Ye are our epistle
written in our hearts.”*

YE ARE THE EPISTLE OF CHRIST (I)

Usually, when we go to a new workplace, we feel more confident with a letter of recommendation, as it speaks well of ourselves and introduces our credentials so that we may be welcomed warmly. Concerning spiritual matters, it is easier for us to welcome new preachers, teachers or pastors with a letter of recommendation from the leaders of our mother church. How about Paul? He was not new to the Corinthians, as he founded the church in Corinth in his second missionary journey (Acts 18). He wrote to them, *“for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel”* and *“for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord”* (1 Cor 4:15; 9:2). Therefore, Paul did not need to introduce himself nor to have any letters of recommendation to them or from them (2 Cor 3:1).

Paul, constrained by Christ’s love (2 Cor 5:12), wrote to the Corinthians, *“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men”* (2 Cor 3:2). Paul did not preach, teach or write to them just for the sake of preaching, teaching or writing, but his heart was for them and they were in his heart, not like those who *“glory in appearance, and not in heart”* (2 Cor 5:12). Truly, constrained by Christ’s love, Paul was so concerned for the salvation and spiritual growth of the Corinthians that he did not spare his life for them. What the Lord had done and written in his heart *“Christ speaking in me”* (2 Cor 13:3), Paul passed to the Corinthians with a desire that their lives might reflect what he preached, taught and wrote to them. That is what Paul meant when he said, *“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts.”* And many have read and known Paul’s loving heart and the fruit of his labour through the lives of the Corinthians! May Christ’s love constrain us so that what we do for others comes from our heart and touches their hearts according to God’s Word.

THOUGHT: If we are not constrained by Christ’s love, how do we serve Him and others?

PRAYER: Father, may Thy love constrain me to serve Thee and others.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-5

2 CORINTHIANS 3:3

*“Written not with ink, but with
the Spirit of the living God.”*

YE ARE THE EPISTLE OF CHRIST (II)

The Corinthians were not only Paul's epistle, but also the epistle of Christ, as he also said, *“Not I, but Christ”* (Gal 2:20). *“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ”* (2 Cor 3:3). Can others know that we are the epistles of Christ? To be the epistle of Christ is to reflect the life and the Word of Christ in our lives (1 John 2:6). Many people have not read God's Word, and many others might have read it but not properly or have been misled. Can they read God's Word when they come into contact with us? How can we be the epistle of Christ?

(a) A New Heart: We have learnt that the human heart is too depraved and corrupted to be improved or changed by men and that it needs to be cleansed by the blood of the Lord Jesus. The important condition for us to be a living epistle of Christ is to be born again (v 3; cf. Ezek 11:19).

(b) Written with the Holy Spirit: One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to write God's Word in our new heart. He speaks to us and writes in our heart when we read God's Word or when we hear God's Word (Heb 8:10). Then let us give our heart to the Lord (Prov 23:26), and humbly receive God's Word with our full obedience and submission so that He may freely write God's Word in our heart. It means we are to truly live by God's Word (Col 3:16).

(c) The Epistle of Christ: If we do not give our heart to the Lord, and fully submit ourselves to the sole authority of God's Word, how can the Holy Spirit write God's Word in our heart? We can be sure that those who dare judge, doubt, criticise or question God's Word can never be the epistle of Christ. Shall we not appreciate the gracious work of the Holy Spirit writing God's Word in our dedicated and submissive heart and transforming us into the image of our Lord Jesus?

THOUGHT: To be Christ's epistle, we are to totally submit to God's Word.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou freely write Thy Word in my heart.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-5

2 CORINTHIANS 3:3

*“Ye are manifestly declared
to be the epistle of Christ.”*

YE ARE THE EPISTLE OF CHRIST (III)

It is a great privilege and blessing to be the epistle of Christ, reflecting God’s Word and Christ’s life so that others may read Christ’s epistle through our lives:

It is a holy epistle: If we do not live a holy and godly life separated from sin, self, worldliness and wrong doctrines, we fail to be the epistle of Christ. The woman of Shunem said to her husband about the prophet Elisha, *“I perceive that this is an holy man of God”* (2 Kings 4:9) while he had not preached a word to her.

It is a living epistle: It is not written with ink in *“tables of stone”* (2 Cor 3:3; cf. Exod 24:12; 31:18), but with the Spirit of the living God in our new heart in Christ. Are our lives with all our activities a living epistle of Christ that others can read?

It is the gospel of Christ: Can sinners read the good news of Christ’s death for their sins and His resurrection for their justification through our lives and words (Phil 1:27)?

It is a loving epistle: Do others see God’s holy love in our lives? Love that *“rejoiceth not in iniquities, but rejoiceth in the truth”* (1 Cor 13:6).

It is a comforting epistle: Can others get some encouragement and comfort from us in their troubles and trials of life (2 Cor 1:3)?

It is a warning epistle: Can sinners and backsliders get some of God’s warnings through our lives (2 Thess 2:10-12)?

It is a hopeful epistle: Can others see we are not building our home on this earth but in heaven and looking forward to the coming of Christ (1 Tim 1:1; Titus 2:13)?

THOUGHT: How wonderful it is to be Christ’s epistle!

PRAYER: Father, make me Thy epistle that others may read.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29
JOHN 13:1-17
JOHN 13:15

*“I have given you an example,
that ye should do as I have
done to you.”*

HAPPY ARE YE IF YE DO (I)

We thank God that through the past three months we have learned God’s Word about what He expects us to be and to do. And surely, reading His Word, we will know more about His will and what He expects us to be and to do. Briefly, God wants us to be like His only begotten Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and to do as He did, trusting in God and His Word with full dependence, submission, and even obedience unto death. How happy we will be if by God’s grace and strength we can put into practice all that we have learnt and known from God’s Word!

In Jesus’ days in Palestine, most people wore sandals and walked on dusty streets, and their feet became dirty after a long-distance walk. It was a custom for them to remove their sandals and wash their feet before entering their house. And when they had their meals, they did not sit up at the table as we do today but they reclined on mattresses to eat. The painting by Da Vinci in the late 15th century on the Lord’s Supper is not biblical at all!

Here, our Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples were nearly finishing their supper. Then our Lord rose from the supper, laid aside His garments, took a towel, girded Himself, poured water into a basin, and began to wash His disciples’ feet and wiped them with the towel. And then He said to them, *“Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet, for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you”* (vv 12-15).

Our Lord Jesus is our God and Maker, but He humbled Himself and *came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many* (Matt 20:28). We are to follow His example if we want to be blessed!

THOUGHT: Do I desire to be like Christ and follow His steps?

PRAYER: Father, please help me to follow Thee and Thy example always.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

MATTHEW 7:21-29

JOHN 13:17

*“If ye know these things,
happy are ye if ye do them.”*

HAPPY ARE YE IF YE DO (II)

It is a great privilege to be like our Lord. We do thank God that He has not only delivered us and saved us from Satan and sins but also *“begun a good work” in us until we are “conformed to the image of his Son”* (Phil 1:6; Rom 8:29). *“We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him... And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure”* (1 John 3:2-3).

Are we transformed and more like our Lord Jesus day by day? It is vital for us to look unto our Lord Jesus. Many Christians are tempted to look at men, even other Christian brethren and leaders and then compare themselves with those men. Do we truly and sincerely and seriously desire to be like our Lord? Then it is wise to regard all things but loss and to follow our Lord alone so that we may win Christ and be found in Him and be like Him (Phil 3:8-10).

It should be noticed that when our Lord Jesus taught His disciples, *“If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet”* (v 14), our Lord did not teach them to do that job as a religious rite or ritual as some groups do today. Instead, we are to serve and help one another by praying for one another, forgiving one another, bearing one another’s burden, serving the Lord together, doing what we can for the Lord and for one another.

Truly, *“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do (keep on doing) them.”* We shall enjoy God’s love and presence in our lives (John 14:16,23), know more about Him (John 14:21), are wisely building our lives and ministry on a firm foundation (Matt 7:25), shall *“not be ashamed before him at his coming”* (1 John 2:28), but *“when he shall appear, we shall be like him,”* Our Lord Jesus Christ is coming very soon with His reward (Rev 22:12). Are we ready and eager to meet Him?

THOUGHT: It is a blessing to live for the Lord and for His coming!

PRAYER: Father, help me do everything for Thee.

Notes

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