

## THE GATHERING OF GOD'S PEOPLE

God's Kingdom Advocate Volume 3 No. 1

The coming of Jesus Christ to die for mankind marked a great turning point for good in the history of the world. The inhabitants of the earth who hitherto had walked in darkness and in the shadow of death suddenly had the chance of gaining perfect life, peace and happiness in God's Kingdom fully established. It was for this divine purpose that Jesus Christ, having been endowed with regal power and authority, is, along with the remnant of the saints in these last days, calling his people into his kingdom notwithstanding the devil's evil machinations to mislead the people through false religious organisations.

After the fall of man, the Perfect and All-wise God, in keeping with His divine promises, created the nation of Israel to serve as a means through which He will bring His people to walk in harmony with Him again. Unfortunately most of the Jews were stubborn and disobedient and so God scattered them across several nations as He had earlier warned them in Deuteronomy 28:25; 1 Kings 14:15, etc. This prophecy fulfilled to the letter as Israel was conquered, pillaged, humiliated and taken captive by their enemies, which include the Assyrians, Babylonians, and the Romans.

The nation of Israel was a Roman colony when Jesus Christ was born. He was sent by God to save the entire human race including the natural Jews. But being that they were in captivity they looked for political freedom instead of spiritual freedom. (John 8:31,32,36; Luke 4:16-18; John 6:15; Acts 1:6) As a result, only a few of them believed in him. Because they rejected him, Jesus Christ cursed Jerusalem when he said "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." -Matthew 23:37-39.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ declared that the stubbornness of the Jews would bring upon them misery and anguish. Speaking of the fate that would befall them he asserted: "And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." - Luke 21:24.

The words of Jesus Christ fulfilled on Jerusalem in AD 70 when General Titus, a Roman commander, marched into the city destroyed its temple, killed many of the Jews, and forced most of them into captivity. Thus, the last vestiges of the state of Israel were wiped out. Most of the Jews then went into Diaspora, a word which means dispersion. It was not until May 14, 1948 that the state of Israel was reborn. This followed the historic decision by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 29, 1947 to partition Palestine into two other independent states, one for the Jews, the other for the Arabs.

### Return

The proclamation of the state of Israel in 1948 was the fulfillment of the Scriptures that the Jews will in course of time regain their land. But the major fulfillment of that

prophecy is the gathering of the people of God in various parts of the world into His Kingdom to serve Him in truth for their blessing and salvation in the end by His grace and power as it is written: “My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country.” - Ezekiel 34: 6,11-16.

It goes without saying therefore that what God did for the natural Jews in gathering them to their own land was only a type of what He promised to do in a greater measure to His children the world over through Jesus Christ, the antitypical seed of Abraham. (Galatians 3:16) The sacrificial work of Jesus Christ opened the door of salvation to both the natural Jews and those who were not Jews by birth, then known as the gentiles. All those who believe in Jesus Christ, from any part of the world are today spiritual Jews. In his letter to the Christians in Galatia, St. Paul declared as much when he stated: “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:7-9, 26-29. See also Romans 2:28,29) Thus, faith and not blood relationship has become the mark by which the true children of Abraham the spiritual Jews are identified. These spiritual Jews are also known as the “Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16.

## **The Gathering work**

Referring to His children the world over, God Almighty declared in Isaiah 43:5-7,21 “Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him. This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.” The work of gathering the people of God has been entrusted to Jesus Christ who is referred to as Shiloh (which means Peaceful One) in Genesis chapter 49 verse 10 as it is written:

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah nor a law giver from between his feet until Shiloh come. Unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” Similar prophecies to the effect that God will use Jesus Christ to bring light to the gentiles are contained in Isaiah 11:10; 42:5-8, etc.

This gathering work will go on despite the devil's opposition. In John 11:49-53 we read of how the chief priests and the Pharisees convened to discuss how to check the popularity of Jesus Christ. They declared: “What do we? for this man doeth many

miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation. And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.”

Moreover, God Almighty used picture language to describe how He would use Jesus Christ to call those of the apostle' class, and through them, all people of goodwill to Himself as it is written: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.” (Zechariah 8:20-23) The “Jew” is Jesus Christ. “The skirt” refers to the anointed Christians who constitute the body members of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:27) The “ten men” that would take hold of the skirt stand for all people who love truth and righteousness from all parts of the world, that is, “the Other Sheep” who are gathered to God through the preaching of the apostles.

The inspired words of the prophet Zechariah found fulfillment when Jesus Christ came to the world and started the work with the 12 apostles as recorded in Luke 6:12-15; 12:32 and Mark 3:14. Before his passion Jesus Christ stated: “

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” (John 12:32) After his resurrection therefore, he anointed and commissioned the apostles to continue the work of gathering the people of God “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) The gathering of people of other nationalities to God besides the natural Jews took a major dimension on the day of Pentecost when Peter and other apostles preached the word, and people of diverse nations were converted. (Acts 2:1-41) Indeed the Lord had begun to fulfil His promise through the prophet Isaiah to wit: “ The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.” (Isaiah 56:8) In other words, both the natural Jews who were dispersed abroad and the gentiles will be gathered to Jesus Christ. See also 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

God used other apostles who were called later, such as Stephen, Paul, Cornelius among others, to continue the work. St. Paul affirmed that God had through Jesus Christ committed the work of reconciliation to the apostles when he said: “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.” - 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; see also Ephesians 2:11-22.

The gathering work did not end in the days of the early apostles. Jesus Christ said at the time of his second presence, he will choose the remnant of the saints from all parts of the world. (Matthew 24:31) These are the “fishers” and “hunters” whom God will send to rescue His people “from every mountain and from every hill and out of the holes

of the rocks.” (Jeremiah 16:16) The complete number of the apostles' or saints' class is 144,000. -Revelation 7:4-8; 14:1-5.

## **The Kingdom of God**

God promised to set up His Kingdom on earth in this period known as the last days into which He will gather His people through the remnant of the saints as it is written: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.” (Isaiah 2:2) “The Mountain of the Lord's House” symbolizes God's Kingdom belonging to Jesus Christ and his body members (the apostles or saints) who constitute the spiritual house or temple of God according to Luke 12:32; 22:28-30; 1 Corinthians 3:16,17; Hebrews 3:6. The “mountains” represent Satan's entire organization both visible and invisible. The hills denote worldly clubs and societies. “All nations” stand for all lovers of truth and righteousness the world over. What the prophecy is saying in effect is that in this age we are now living, known as the last days, the Kingdom of God belonging to Jesus Christ and the saints will be established on top of Satan's entire organization and that this Kingdom will in course of time outgrow all other worldly societies and clubs as all people of goodwill will flow into it, obviously for safety and protection. Ultimately, all individuals and institutions outside the Kingdom of God will be destroyed. The signs of the times now staring everyone in the face show that we are now in the last days and that the prophecy has fulfilled. - Daniel 12:4,8-10; Matthew 24:3-8,21; Luke 21:25-36; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

The Bible shows that any church that preaches the truth in any part of the world in this age of the end of the world, having been set up by one of the remnants of the saints is the Kingdom of God. By virtue of the fact that she preaches the truth unmixed with lies, having been founded by one of the remnant of the saints in person of St. Gideon Meriodere Urhobo, we have no doubt in our minds that the God's Kingdom Society (GKS) the Church of the Living God is part and parcel of God's universal Kingdom which He promised to set up in these last days as stated in Isaiah 2:2. Giving account of His call in February 1933 he stated "After three and half years' diligent and prayerful studies of the Holy Bible, Jesus Christ revealed himself to me in a vision and commanded me to go and proclaim the good news of God's Kingdom (or 'Gospel of Peace') to all nations as the only remedy for all human sufferings and woes; to expose all the false doctrines which Satan had used to deceive the people and to keep them in ignorance of God's Kingdom and purpose of creation; and to pronounce God's written judgment against all wickedness." In spite of intense persecutions, the GKS was set up in the year 1934 in Lagos. She has since been championing the revealed truth of the Bible as expounded by Saint Urhobo.

It is of utmost importance that those gathered to God should strive to do His will at all times else they will not be saved. Our Lord Jesus Christ emphasized this so clearly in the parable of the nets as well as that of the wheat and tares, on which, in concluding he said: “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” - Matthew 13:, 24-30, 39-43, 47-50.

Moreover God admonished His children through His prophet Zephaniah: "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD's anger come upon you. Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger." - Zephaniah 2:1-3; Isaiah 26:20,21

May the Almighty God JEHOVAH help those gathered to Him to prove themselves worthy of their calling by holding fast to the end by God's grace so that He will fulfil on them "all the good pleasure of His goodness" through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. - 2 Thessalonians 1:11.

## THE CHRISTIAN ARMOUR

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Any one who has given himself to the service of God, will, of necessity, be in conflict with numerous wily and powerful foes, at the head of which is satan the devil. It is vital therefore for every Christian to be protected to be able to fight on until the battle is over, by the grace of God. This was the kernel of St. Paul's exhortation to the Christians at Ephesus, in which he not only highlighted the nature of the spiritual warfare Christians have to contend with, but also exhorted them on how they would escape the snares of the devil and his agents.

Using the imagery of the armour of a typical Roman soldier, he stated thus: "Finally, my brethren, 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. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." -Ephesians 6:10-17.

As could be seen from the text under reference, St. Paul enumerated the different parts of the Christian armour, consisting of defensive and offensive implements. This is typical of every war situation, the soldier has to defend himself against the attack from the enemy and at the same time be able to go into the offensive in order to secure victory. However, Christians are not fighting a literal war, their battle is spiritual, as St. Paul stated: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." (2 Corinthians 10:3-6) The spiritual nature of the warfare Christians are engaged in is amply illustrated by the case of David who as a young lad had to fight Goliath almost barehanded as he found it difficult to move with the heavy armour soldiers used in those days. God granted David victory as a result of his faith in Him so that all "shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S..." -1 Samuel 17:38, 39, 45-47.

The persecution of the people of God by the devil and his agents has become more intense in this age, called the last days, because satan is full of wrath, knowing that having been driven down from heaven, he has but a short time to live. (Revelation 12:7-12) Because the devil will inspire people to be godless and evil, Daniel the prophet under the inspiration of God declared that in this time of the end, "the wicked shall do

wickedly”(Daniel 12:12) and that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” - at the instance of the devil. (2 Timothy 3:12) Knowing this therefore, Christians must be properly equipped so as to “fight the good fight of faith.” - Proverbs 24:5,6; 1 Timothy 6:12.

Just as all parts of a literal armour are necessary in warfare, so a Christian needs to be fortified with all that are needful for spiritual battle. In giving the parable of a master and his servant, Jesus Christ stated that we should strive to do “all that is required of us” and to remain humble about it. (Luke 17:7-10). See also Ecclesiastes 11:1, 2, 6; Matthew 3:15; Matthew 23: 23.

## **Knowledge of the truth**

St. Paul exhorts Christians in the book of Ephesians chapter 6:14 to have their loins girt about with truth. The soldiers of old used the girdle, which went about the loins to secure the various pieces of armour and hold them tight to the body. Without such a device, the various items would not be in their proper places and the soldier would not be ready for the fight. By the same token is the truth the basis of Christian beliefs and practices. Jesus Christ told the Scribes and Pharisees in his days on earth, that they were worshipping God in vain in as much as they were teaching “for doctrines, the commandments of men”. - Matthew 15:7-9.

In view of the fact that the truth can only be obtained from Churches founded by God through the instrumentality of the saints. Jesus Christ stated “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” (Matthew 7:16-18) Writing on the benefits of studying the Word of God St. Paul said: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” - 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. See also Psalm 19:7-11.

It is the knowledge of the truth that gives one courage to fight on boldly in the raging battle against sin and deceit. (Proverbs 6:23; 28:1; Psalm 119:105) The Scripture says, “A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.” (Proverbs 24:5, 6) Moreover the Bible says: “When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things.” -Proverbs 2:10-12.

## **Righteousness**

The next piece in the armour mentioned by St. Paul is the breastplate, which is used for covering the mid-section of the body, where the heart is located. A good heart

condition is crucial to meeting God's standard of righteousness. This is because one could make a pretence of being spiritually inclined whereas his mind is evil. Some people, out of self-will and pride, do only those things that suit their interests and desires or that feed their ego - and yet they claim to be in the way of God. That is personal righteousness, and, as Apostle Paul explained, there is a world of difference between personal righteousness and the righteousness of God. (Romans 10:1-3; see also Isaiah 55:6-9) The righteousness of God is based on the honest, heart-felt desire to do the will of God, while personal righteousness is based on mere pretence and self-will. It could therefore be understood why Jesus Christ stated that it is what comes out of the heart that defiles a man, not what he eats. He further said: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." (Matthew 15:18-20) He also told the unbelieving Jews in those days: "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". (Matthew 12:34) Also, when the truth resides in one's heart it will be hard for the person to be deceived by false doctrines and godless philosophies. (Psalm 119:9-11) For these reasons the Bible exhorts us thus: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." - Proverbs 4:23.

Some people say there is no righteous person on earth. This is wrong. One who understands and does the will of God as clearly spelt out in the Holy Bible is righteous by the grace of God. (1 John 3:7) Such ones will be saved from several harmful acts which lead people to sickness and untimely death; above all, they will be protected by God from the assaults of the devil. Apostle Peter declared: "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. **And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?**" - 1 Peter 3:10-13.

The people who are given to doing the righteousness of God are always respected and happier than others. Indeed, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people". (Proverbs 14:34. See also Exodus 19:4) It should be pointed out that it is when the worshipper continues to do what is right that the blessing of God will continue to be with him. The words of Azariah the prophet under the inspiration of God Almighty are relevant here: "The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you."- 2 Chronicles 15:2

### **Readiness to spread the word**

St. Paul goes on to enjoin us to have our feet shod or covered. The soldier needs to have his feet properly protected from injury by rough terrain. With such protection for the leg, the soldier is prepared to move without fear, to wherever he is called upon to serve. By advising us to have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, Apostle Paul meant that we should be ready to dispense the gospel whenever and



wherever the opportunity arises. One should be able to confess what he knows, in that the person who is afraid or too shy to do so because he wants to please men or because of fear of losing one benefit or the other will lose his reward. Jesus Christ said: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the Holy angels." (Mark 8:38) As St. Paul says, it is with the mouth "confession is made unto salvation". (Romans 10:10) Furthermore St. Peter declared: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" - 1 Peter 3:15; see also Jude 3.

The work of inviting others to know the way of Truth is part of the duty of every Christian which he should be ready to do at all times. This calls for knowledge, faith and understanding. St. Paul charged Timothy thus: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." (2 Timothy 4:2) Moreover it is written: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Revelation 22:17; See also Psalm 68:11) In the text the spirit is Jesus Christ while the bride are the anointed Christians.

## **Faith and hope**

St. Paul's treatise also requires Christians to have the shield of faith. Faith is strong and unwavering trust in God. In the words of Apostle Paul, "without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him". -Hebrews 11:6.

The fact is that the devil is bent on discomfiting the people of God by subjecting them to harrowing conditions with the hope that they will thereby lose their confidence in Him. The troubles a Christian may encounter may be so intense that St. Peter called it a "fiery trial". (1 Peter 4:12) As the shield protects the soldier from attack, so faith enables him to resist or ward off the assaults of the devil. (James 4:7) St. Peter exhorted us thus: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." -1 Peter 5:8, 9.

The Holy Bible is replete with examples of people of God who were faced with various persecutions at the instance of the devil. These include Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brethren; the three faithful Jews - Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - who were thrown into the fiery furnace; Job who lost his children and property; Daniel who was cast into the lion's den; the early apostles who were mobbed, beaten, cast into prison, while some were even killed. (Genesis 39:7-20; Daniel 3:1-30; 6; Job 1:7-22; Acts 5:17-19, 40; 2 Corinthians 11:24-33; see also Hebrews 11:4-40) But God Almighty always helps His people to cope with the challenges and to gain victory in the end.

Our heavenly Father will always protect, strengthen and save those who have firm trust in Him. One who lacks faith cannot secure the protection required to overcome what St. Paul called the “fiery darts of the devil”. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.” - 2 Chronicles 16:9; see also Nahum 1:7 and James 4:7.

The helmet is a defensive part of the armour. It covers the head. This represents the hope of the Christian in the salvation of God. Hope gives one encouragement and strength to carry on even in the face of odds. Without hope one is disillusioned and spiritless. Solomon, a prophet and king in Israel said: “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?” (Proverbs 18:14) It is because of the importance of hope that St. Paul exhorted: “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” –Romans 8:24, 25.

### **The two-edged sword**

The sword is an offensive instrument. St. Paul applies it to represent the word of God. The word of God is likened to a two-edged sword because it judges both the speaker and the listener. The learned apostle said: “the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12,13) As David the prophet said, it is through the word of God that His worshippers are warned. (Psalm 19:11; see also 1 Corinthians 14:24) The word of God, the Truth, is made up of doctrines, judgments, instructions and divine promises. It exposes insincerity, unbelief, hypocrisy, and so on, among worshippers of God and non-believers and makes bare the deceit of false prophets.

What happened when St. Paul appeared before Governor Felix is illustrative of the power of the word of God to convict consciences. The record states: “And as he (Paul) reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” – Acts 24:25; see also Acts 19:18-20; Acts 2:37; James 2:12, 13.

Those who follow the word of God until the end will get life as Jesus Christ himself stated: “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.”- John 8:31,32; See also John 6:63.

### **Fighting until the end**

It could be noted that all the defences in the soldier’s armour are for the front part of the body. The back parts are not secured. Once engaged in the spiritual warfare, the Christian must continue to press on; there is no question of turning back, backsliding or of deserting until the war is-over. (See Philippians 3:14) We must continue until the end

even if iniquities abound and the love of many do wax cold. (Matthew 24:12,13) Apostle Paul had this frame of mind hence he declared at the end of his mission: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." -2 Timothy 4:6-8

May the Almighty God, the Preserver and Strength of spiritual Israel help His sheep everywhere to live up to expectation by resisting the devil and remaining steadfast in His way of life until the end by His grace through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

## **The Blood of Jesus, what does it signify?**

### **God's Kingdom Advocate Vol. 3 No. 3**

The blood of Jesus Christ, which he shed on the tree at Golgotha about 2000 years ago, provided the ransom required to free the people of God from the bondage of sin and death. However, because of the manner in which Christ's shed blood is being interpreted by a growing number of professed Christians, there is need for close study of the subject in the light of the Holy Scriptures.

The importance of the shed blood of Christ lies in the fact that it was the means God used to cleanse man from sin following the fall of Adam at the garden of Eden. It should be understood however that the blood of Christ is not a person or being anyone should pray to. It is not an end in itself as to take the place of the Creator.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Christians at Ephesus, explained that Jesus Christ had opened the door of faith to all the people of the world stating: "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us."- Ephesians 2:11-14.

While travelling these days it is common for one to see one of the passengers praying for the driver, the tyre, and even the windscreen through which the driver sees - to be "covered with the blood of Jesus". Also, people today cover their businesses, homes, villages, towns and every imaginable situation with the blood of Jesus. Writing on the scriptural basis for this relatively recent phenomenon in Christianity, Mahesh Chavda, a senior pastor of All Nations Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, at page 121 of his book, *The Hidden Power of the Blood of Jesus*, conceded that many believers are confused by the expression "pleading the blood of Jesus". He nevertheless argued that "when we say 'the blood of Jesus' our prayers are amplified millions and millions of times, until the demons tremble". He had earlier contended at page 20 of the book that "there is power in the blood of Jesus Power to move heavens and earth on our behalf in fulfilment of God's purposes".

We must point out right away that, contrary to Mr. Chavda's assertion, there is no other formula for effective prayer than strong faith in God based on the correct understanding and practise of the word of God. The Bible says: "The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth." (Psalm 145:18) And our Lord Jesus Christ declared: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24) It is misleading to say that "there is power in the blood" because it is to Jesus Christ as a person that God gave power to save mankind as it is written: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". - John 3:16; Matthew 9:6; Romans 5:18,19; John 11:25,26.

Those who claim to be Christians must make good their claim by doing things strictly in line with the will of God, and not behave like the natural Jews whom God Almighty said “take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit...” (Isaiah 30:1-3) Also, considering the way those who continually “plead the blood of Jesus” have been going about it, one could appreciate the more St. Paul's declaration in his letter to the Christians in Rome in which he observed that though the natural Jews had “a zeal for God” they were continually coming short of the righteousness of God because their zeal was “not according to knowledge”. He added: “For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” -Romans 10:1-3.

## **Misapplied Texts**

Bible quotations usually cited by those who plead the blood of Jesus for protection and blessing include virtually every text where blood is required for atonement, sanctification and deliverance. Among the most popular are Hebrews chapter 10 verse 19 and chapter 12 verse 24.

In Hebrews 10:19 Apostle Paul made reference to the images of the Temple service when he stated, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus...” What did he mean? Under the Aaronic Priesthood, the High Priest entered into the part of the Tabernacle known as the “Holy of Holies” once a year. The Holy of Holies pictured the Heaven of Heavens, the dwelling place of God, into which Jesus Christ, the High Priest, (Hebrews 5:10; 6:20; etc.) entered and sat at the right hand of God. This he did soon after his resurrection, when he went to present the merits of his ransom sacrifice to God Almighty in heaven. (John 20:17) It was with this understanding that St. Paul stated that in contrast with the Levitical Priests who offered sacrifices for sins daily, Jesus Christ, after “he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God”. (Hebrews 10: 12) Having been cleansed of inherited sin the worshippers of God, by virtue of the grace brought by Jesus Christ, are therefore candidates for the blessings which God promised would abound in His everlasting Kingdom. “For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:19; John 1:17

In Hebrews chapter 12 verses 22-24 St. Paul wrote about those who will be inheritors of the capital part of God's Kingdom in heaven known as Mount Zion. Apart from God Almighty, the Owner of the Kingdom, and the saints who constitute the “general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven”, St. Paul spoke of Jesus Christ, “the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel”. Those who believe in calling on the blood of Jesus for help hold to this last part (“the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel”) as the basis for their contention that by means of the blood “they could overcome all forces of evil”. But what did St. Paul have in mind? He was explaining the superiority of the new covenant of which Jesus Christ is the mediator through his shed blood to the old covenant God made with the natural Jews. He (St. Paul) then made reference to “the blood of sprinkling” a picture drawn from the pattern in the old order of things in which the priests sprinkled the blood of animals on the altar to sanctify it. - Exodus 24:8; 29:16; Leviticus 1:11.

How does the blood shed by Jesus Christ speak “better things than that of Abel”? Abel died imperfect; his blood was not meant to and cannot save anyone. It was Jesus Christ God used to save mankind. The Bible says “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” -Galatians 3:13.

It could be seen that these quotations do not in any way suggest that anyone should be calling on the blood of Christ for protection. The redeemed of the Lord who have now known that the Almighty God Jehovah and His Son Jesus Christ are their true benefactors should continually exercise strong faith in them and call upon them for help in time of need. - 1 Peter 3:10-13.

## **Atonement**

Right from Old Testament times, God Almighty had made it clear that life is sacred and therefore man should not shed blood. At the end of the deluge, after Noah and his family had left the ark, God declared to Noah: “Whoso sheddeth blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.”- Genesis 9: 6,9,16.

By this covenant, God Almighty outlawed the unwarranted taking of life and laid the rule that the means of paying for any life or blood shed is by taking the life of the guilty person. The declaration that “whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed” foreshadows the law the Lord God gave the Jews through the Prophet Moses in which he declared that “(a perfect) life must go for ( a perfect) life”. -Deuteronomy 19:21.

Regrettably the world is not paying heed to this warning as they are busy killing and shedding innocent blood. The perpetrators will be judged and punished in God's time, except they repent. - Hosea 4:1-3; Isaiah 24:5,6.

God Almighty also warned man against the eating of blood stating that it is with blood that atonement is made as it is written: “And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.”-Leviticus 17: 10-14; See also Leviticus 3:17; 7:23-27; Deuteronomy 12:16,23-25.

The people needed to make sacrifices to make atonement for their sins always because though the law of God was perfect (Romans 7:12), the people were imperfect beings subject to errors as a result of which they violated the law of God, the penalty of which was death. The only remedy for escaping punishment was through the sacrifice of animals the life of which provided a substitute for the persons who had sinned. (Le 17:1-16) Apostle Paul declared: “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission”. -Hebrews 9:22.

For the purpose of sanctification also, God Almighty set aside a day, known as the Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 23:27,28; 25:9) It fell on the 10th day of the 7th month, five days to the Feast of Tabernacles. The Day of Atonement was the only time the High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies. On that day the Priest, clad in holy linen garments, made atonement for himself, his family, and for all the assembly of Israel. In

Leviticus 16:1-34 there are instructions to the High Priest for the purpose of sanctifying the people. The activities include killing the bullock of the sin-offering, sprinkling the blood on the mercy seat, killing the goat of the sin-offering, and selecting the scapegoat over whose head were confessed the transgressions of Israel before that creature was sent away into the wilderness of Judaea, carrying the people's sins into "a solitary land". These were living pictures that pointed to the redemptive work Jesus Christ would do to save mankind from sin and death. In the picture, the High Priest foreshadowed Jesus Christ, who as eternal High Priest, entered not "into the holy places made with hands" (Hebrews 9:24) but into heaven itself, offering his own blood, not merely sacrificing animals for man's sins.

The basic teaching of atonement are that through man's fault, the natural relationship between God and man has been broken; and that this communion can be restored by the removal of sin through the sacrifice and death of the Perfect One, Jesus Christ. The vicarious death of Christ was a demonstration of the perfect and complete love which God has for mankind. and showed how far God went to win His estranged children back into communion with Him. See John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Romans 5:6-11,15-19; Hebrews 2:9,17;9:14; 1 John 2:1,2.

## **God and Christ**

It is the name of God Almighty we should call through Jesus Christ when in danger or in need of any kind of help and not the blood of Jesus. In Isaiah 45:22 God declared: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." It is similarly stated in Joel 2:32 "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered". The name of the Lord is JEHOVAH and when the faithful call on Him He will come to their aid and deliver them. "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." (Isaiah 12:2) That was why Solomon a prophet of God and king in Israel stated: "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." (Proverbs 18:10) We cannot fail to make reference to the admonition of David, a king and prophet of God who declared: "Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." - Psalm 50:14,15; See also Jeremiah 33:3.

Based on this understanding, the Jews, though they made sacrifices for atonement of sins from time to time, never prayed to God by calling on the blood of the animals they sacrificed. When in trouble they called on the name JEHOVAH for deliverance. The Holy Bible says: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God". - Psalm 20:7; 2 Chronicles 20:15-30; Isaiah 37; etc.

It was after Christ's death and resurrection that God Almighty exalted him highly. He himself declared that all power in heaven and on earth had been given to him, obviously by the Father Jehovah. (Matthew 28:18) God Almighty then commanded that angels and men should worship Jesus Christ - Hebrews 1:6.

Expatriating on this St. Paul stated: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And

that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2: 9-11; see also Revelation 5:12,13) This text makes it abundantly clear that it is the name of Jesus Christ, not his blood that worshippers of God should hold in reverence or call on from time to time.

It is appropriate at this juncture to ask how the idea of calling on the blood of Jesus Christ arose. It is a creation of the devil to mislead the people so that they will lose the benefit of the protection and blessing God has promised to those who trust in Him. The devil knows that when people pray amiss by not praying according to the will of God He will not answer them. - James 4:3; John 9:31; 1 John 3:22.

Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and men. (1 Timothy 2:5,6) He is the way to God (John 14:6) hence he instructed his disciples that they should pray to the Father in his name. He declared: “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son”. (John 14:13) He repeated the charge in chapter 16 verse 23 thus: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.” (See also John 15:16) It should be understood however that calling on God in the name of Jesus means calling on Him through Jesus Christ the only mediator between God and men. (1 Timothy 2:5,6; Acts 4:10-12) Evidently, those who instead of praying to God through His son are calling on the blood of Jesus have been misled.

As has been explained in this sermon, it is wrong to be calling on the blood of Jesus for help. Rather Christians are enjoined to exercise faith in and call on the name of God Almighty and His son Jesus Christ always. This was the essence of the declaration of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to wit: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent”.- John 17:3.

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## RECEIVING THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A LITTLE CHILD

### God's Kingdom Advocate Volume 3 No. 3

That God Almighty in exercise of His infinite love for mankind has prepared an everlasting, righteous and universal government of perfect peace and happiness for His faithful worshippers is a revealed truth of the Holy Bible. However those to be approved to live in that Kingdom must be renewed in spirit so as to have the wholesome natural qualities of children.

This fact was aptly illustrated by Jesus Christ himself when during his earthly ministry children were brought to him for blessing. The action of the parents was no doubt informed by the fact that it was a custom of the Jews, which grew from the law of God, that each child should be taken to the priest for presentation to God after the mother's days of purification. (Leviticus 12:1-8) The disciples of Christ who thought this was an unnecessary distraction to the work of Christ, rebuked those bringing the children. But our Lord and Saviour overruled his disciples. Instead of the cold shoulder or even a shove Jesus Christ welcomed the children with open arms.

The account of the incident as recorded in Mark 10:13-16 states that Jesus said to his disciples, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." He added: "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." Thereafter, Jesus Christ took the children "up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them"

Thus, by precept and example, our Lord Jesus Christ drove home the very important point that those who will be approved to enter God's Kingdom must have the character of children. From the account just cited, one could see that our Lord Jesus Christ taught that children are living pictures of the virtues Christians need to cultivate to be called his disciples.

It should be pointed out however, that, Christ's statement is not a ground or basis for infant baptism as baptism is a rite meant only for adults who alone can take the decision to accept the Christian faith. (Acts 8:26-39) The text does not mean that children automatically become inheritors of the Kingdom because of their age. It also does not suggest that we should engage in foolish adventures or be playful like children but that we should cultivate the plainness and lowliness so well expressed through the natural faculties of children.

Children are generally humble, obedient, forgiving, tolerant, trusting and inquisitive. They are neither proud nor malicious. Their humility makes them teachable and obedient. It is true they sometimes fight and quarrel over small possessions, but they easily forget about it and resume their play. Their anger, sadness, shame, disgust, guilt do not remain in them for long. Parents who because of their quarrel instruct their children not to play with each other have found to their chagrin that they were merely trying to hold the wind.

It is these qualities of humility, obedience, forgiveness, etc. that Jesus Christ wants his disciples to have if they deserve to be called his followers. David, a prophet and king in Israel had this understanding and thus declared: "LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things

too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.”- Psalm 131:1,2.

## **Humility**

It is only those who humble themselves to serve God with sincerity of heart and who diligently obey His commandments that He will bless with everlasting life in perfect peace and happiness. One who is not humble is proud. That was why the Scriptures say that “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble”. (James 4:6; Proverbs 3:34) The prophet David states that “ though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off”(Psalm 138:6) Children readily carry out errands or chores adults will ordinarily shy away from. It is the humble ones who accept their faults, regret their wrongdoings and strive to forsake evil that God in exercise of His loving kindness forgives and sustains in His Kingdom. God Almighty declared in Isaiah 57:15 “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

By practical demonstration, Jesus Christ emphasized the importance of humility. After he had finished his supper, he laid aside his garment, and in the manner of a servant to whom belongs the office of washing the feet of guests, he proceeded to wash the feet of the apostles. Peter, out of respect for the master, did not consent to having his feet washed. He said “Thou shalt never wash my feet.” But Jesus answered him, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” Simon Peter then said to him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” After Jesus Christ had finished that assignment he told his disciples, “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.” (John 13:3-15) Drawing from the example of Christ, we should not make much of condescending to do the most humble services for the benefit of others. We should serve one another. St. Peter exhorted: “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.- 1 Peter 5:5,6.

It was by his humility that Jesus Christ was able to accomplish his mission on earth to the glory of God and was consequently highly exalted above all creation. (Philippians 2:5-11) If we follow Christ's example of humility, God will by His grace promote us to honour. Truly grand and illustrious are the blessings that accrue from humility. The prophet Solomon declared: “By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life”. (Proverbs 22:4) The Bible further states: “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted”.- Matthew 23:12.

To the humble ones God reveals His truth and these are the ones He chooses to do His work. During his days on earth Jesus Christ stated: “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.”

(Matthew 11:25,26) Indeed "The meek will He (God Almighty) guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way."- Psalm 25:9. See also Isaiah 28:9.

## **Sincerity**

Another quality children have is sincerity. They express things the way they see them. God requires us to serve Him with sincerity always. In the days of Joshua, he passionately exhorted the people to "fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth" while St. Paul prayed that, "grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" - Joshua 24:14; Ephesians 6:24.

Only a child-like simplicity can measure up to St. Paul's exhortation to wit: "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward." (2 Corinthians 1:12) Thus, it is required of people of God to be plain, straightforward and frank all the time. The Bible says "the way of the righteous is made plain". - Proverbs 15:19.

The opposite of sincerity is hypocrisy. According to Bible scholars, a hypocrite is "one who, like a stage-player, feigns to be what he is not." The epithet is generally applied to those who assume the appearance of virtue or piety, without possessing the reality." Jesus Christ declared: "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:20) What Christ is saying is that anyone who is hypocritical in the service of God like the Pharisees will not get life in God's Kingdom. - Luke 12:1; Matthew 23:27,28.

## **Obedience**

Another quality we must have if we are to be like little children in God's service is obedience. To obey means to follow the commands or guidance of, to conform to or comply with. Children are generally obedient to their parents and elders. The child who is disobedient is seen as a foolish child, the exception to the norm, a deviant. We must be completely obedient to the laws of God in order to get life in His Kingdom.

When the children of Israel came out of Egypt the first command God gave them was to obey His voice so that it might be well with them. "For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you." - Jeremiah 7:22,23. See also 1 Samuel 15:22,23

Some people may regard the Christian position on obedience as foolish, but in the end it is more rewarding. (1 Corinthians 1:18,19; 3:18) It is by patiently obeying the commandments of God and the instructions of the elders of the Church- like a child - that one will, by God's grace, get life in the end. Job the prophet says: "Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures."- Job 36:9-11; Isaiah 1:16-20.

## Forgiveness

Many who call themselves Christians today find it hard to forgive. Some of them even boast “I can forgive but I will never forget.” This is unlike children who not only forgive easily but also forget completely. Christians ought to forgive those who wrong them as long as such ones own up their faults and show penitence. In our Lord's prayer Jesus Christ taught us to pray thus: “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12) But many so-called Christians today do not forgive their neighbours, husbands, wives or children who may have wronged them, even after such had come to apologise. And yet they say the Lord's prayer every day! This is unchristian. Such ones forget that, if God were to punish each and every one of us for our sins, no one will remain. We should always bear in mind the words of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel who stated: “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” (Psalm 130:3,4) Also, Jesus Christ warned: “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” - Luke 17:3,4.

When the issue of how many times one should forgive his brother was put to Jesus Christ in Matthew 18:21-35, he told them “seventy times seven” and then followed up with a parable about a certain king, who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. One of them owed him 10,000 talents (the equivalent of \$10 million) “But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.” But due to his pleadings the master forgave him by writing off the debt.

But when the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, who owed him an hundred pence (about \$2000), he cast him into prison despite his pleadings. The servant was reported to his master who directed that he be delivered to the tormentors “till he should pay all that was due unto him.” Jesus Christ then added: “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” Every time one says the Lord's prayer, he should ask himself if he is keeping that part of the prayer which says: “Forgive us the wrong we have done as we have forgiven those who have wronged us”. - Matthew 6:12, New English Bible

If we readily forgive trespasses against us, then we would not keep a diary of wrongs by storing them in our memory to be dredged up whenever there is a small misunderstanding. That way such ones store up malice and hostility to each other and make it difficult for them to love as brethren. St. Paul declared: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger and clamour and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.” - Ephesians 4:26,29,31,32; Colossians 3:12-14

St. Peter further exhorted us saying: “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” - 1 Peter 2:1-3

## Faith

It is amazing how trusting children are to promises made to them. This teaches us faith or trust in God Almighty. Jesus Christ said: "...Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall ... say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." -Matthew 21:21,22

Apostle Peter further exhorts us thus: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." - 1 Peter 1:13-16; Leviticus 11:44.

From the afore stated, it could be seen how it came to be that it is the child, not the adult that is the model for those who seek to enter into God's Kingdom. However, we should be childlike, not childish. This was made clear by St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthian Christians when he exhorted: "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." (1 Corinthians 14:20) Indeed, a lot is expected from those who had been Christians for a reasonable number of years. Such ones should behave maturely and put away what St. Paul called "childish things". (1 Corinthians 13:11) The learned apostle, chastising the Hebrew Christians, wrote: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." - Hebrews 5:12-14.

From all that has been stated in this sermon, it could be seen why Jesus Christ said his followers must be like little children if they want to be the children of the Kingdom. We should therefore strive to cultivate these qualities so as to serve God "acceptably, with reverence and godly fear".- Hebrews 12:28.

## God's Kingdom Advocate volume 3 No. 5

### Are relics truly necessary for worship?

Relics refer to parts of the body or personal belongings of persons regarded as holy and therefore believed by some professed Christians to be of spiritual benefit to them. In keeping with the requirements of God as enshrined in the Holy Bible, there is need to examine this doctrine to see if relics are truly necessary for worship.

According to the Catholic Encyclopaedia downloaded from the Internet and the Catholic Dictionary (sixteenth edition) by William E. Addis and Thomas Arnold, among other publications, the origin of the relics doctrine is traceable to the Council of Trent, the 19th ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church which defined the doctrine in 1563. From the literature on the subject, it is unmistakably clear that virtually all the items regarded as relics are based on "traditions", a euphemism for fables. This is certainly true of what is regarded as the "holy robe of Christ" which was displayed in 1959 in the oldest Cathedral in Germany and which recorded 1.8 million visitors or pilgrims. In Spain there have been exhibited in different cathedrals two different heads of John the Baptist, and in one of the cathedrals there is a magnificent ostrich feather preserved in a gorgeous case, which, it is said, fell from a wing of the angel Gabriel when he came to make the announcement to Mary! According to Rev Bertrand I. Conway at page 231 of his book THE QUESTION BOX, "The Catholic Church ... says, following the Scriptures, that they (the relics) are often the occasion of God's miracles."

Dilating on this issue Loraine Boetner in his book Roman Catholicism states at page 369 that, "Many of the alleged relics have been proved false and have been dropped ...

Some of the bones have been exposed as those of animals. In one instance the alleged bones of a famous Neapolitan saint, which it was claimed had worked countless miracles, were found to be those of a goat." !

People of goodwill will no doubt be appalled that traditions of men are being accepted as doctrines. As a result many people today indulge in what the Bible calls "vain worship" - the kind of worship that is barren or empty as it will not lead anyone to salvation. It is pertinent to recall the encounter Jesus Christ had with the Pharisees in which he reprimanded them for violating the law of God because of their tradition. Quoting the prophet Isaiah he said "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." - Matthew 15:3-9.

Moreover, Christians are strictly warned against building their faith on legends or fables. St. Paul admonished: "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith..." "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness." "And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables". (1 Timothy 1:4; 4:7; 2 Timothy 4:4) The word of God as contained in the Holy Bible, we repeat, is the

only authentic guide to worshippers of God in all matters of faith and doctrine-. Isaiah 8:20; Colossians 2:8.

## Misleading Arguments

The doctrine of relics has, right from the middle ages, been the means of raising money for the Church. The people used to be frightened with the teaching that “each time a man looked at one of the relics he was excused from a certain number of years of purgatory”. These pardons from purgatory called “indulgences,” were officially granted by the command of the pope who was believed to have the power to “borrow”

quantities of goodness from a heavenly treasury. “This treasury was filled with the infinite merits gained by Christ through his suffering and death. It also contained the merits left over from the saints and others who had done so much good that they got into heaven with goodness to spare”. (THE UNIVERSAL HISTORY OF THE WORLD, by Johanna Johnston and James L. Steffensen, Volume VIII, page 620-621) Purgatory, according to the advocates of the doctrine, is a place where those unfit for immediate entry into heaven are purged through suffering, until they attain the state that qualifies them for heaven. The approach adopted by the Church to raise funds amounts to extortion and profiteering which the Bible condemns.- Proverbs 28:20,22; 20:21; 1 Timothy 6:6-12.

The thinking that the store of goodness left over by a departed saint can help the living is not true. What that argument fails to take account of is that though works are important, it is not by reason of one's work only that he will get salvation. In other words, those to be saved will not attain the gift of life merely because of their good works not to talk of having “goodness to spare”. Salvation is a matter of grace. St. Paul stated: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Ephesians 2:8,9.

Again, the dead when resurrected will be rewarded according to the works they did while alive. God will not transfer the righteousness of one person to the account of another neither will He on the basis of the blessings meant for A bless B or reduce the punishment meant for him. Please read Isaiah 3:10: 11; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:5,7,8; Matthew 16:27; Ezekiel 14:14,16,18,20.

Moreover, belief that the souls of the dead are suffering in purgatory and that such suffering could be positively affected by means of the prayers said by priests on monetary consideration is certainly not true. When man dies he does not go to heaven or purgatory or to a hell burning with eternal fire but to the grave. The dead, both good and bad, will be in the grave until the time of resurrection. Indeed, “All (the dead) go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.” - Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 3:19-21; Job 17:1,13-16; John 5:28,29.

Other arguments being cited to justify the relics doctrine include Exodus 13:19 which states that the Israelites carried the bones of Joseph with them from Egypt and 2 Kings 13:20,21 where it is written that a dead man was restored to life when his corpse fell on the sepulchre of Elisha. But these texts cannot justify the veneration of relics. What the Israelites did was merely to convey the body of Joseph to its final burial place

in keeping with his wish. (Genesis 50: 24-26; Exodus 13:19) It is not uncommon for one to ask to be buried in the place of his choice. For instance, Jacob asked to be buried in the cave of Machpelah which Abraham his father had bought for a burial place. (Genesis 23:3-20; 25:9,10; 49:29,30; 50:13) The Jews would have been the first to preserve the body of Joseph for use as relic. But they only took the body for burial in Canaan. Joseph, giving instruction about where he is to be buried was a demonstration of faith in the promise of God to redeem the Jews from the bondage of Egypt some day. Hence St. Paul stated: "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." - Hebrews 11:22.

It should be stressed also that the Jews did not venerate the body of Joseph. They did not start distributing parts of his body to increase the level of devotion among the faithful. They never expected the dead Joseph to help them in prayer or to solve one problem or the other. They only took the body down to Canaan for burial. This was because they had the understanding of the purpose of God. The law of God says: "Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel..." (Numbers 19:13) Verse 14 of the same chapter says that the house into which the dead person or his parts are carried are thereby rendered unclean. It could be seen therefore that those who go about with pieces of dead men bodies in the name of relics are unclean before God. If a house is defiled by a dead body how much more a place of worship? It is imperative therefore that the dead should not be carried into the place of worship as the place as well as everything done therein at once become unclean before God. The text adds in verse 16 that "whosoever toucheth ...a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days..." See also Haggai 2:11-14.

In the case of the man who revived on falling on the sepulchre of Elisha, it should be understood that the dead man was not deliberately thrown on the grave of the prophet. The bearers of the dead body saw enemies coming and fled for their lives, abandoning the corpse they were to bury which, on falling on the grave of Elisha, revived. This was a special miracle God did in those days to show that Elisha was His servant. There was no evidence that such a miracle occurred again. One may ask, if the bones of a dead saint could raise people from the dead, then why are other dead people not being raised by being placed on the grave or caskets of any of the thousands of "saints" in the world?

## **Idolatry**

The churches who believe in relics insist that though relics are to be kept in places of worship and due honor and veneration given them "no divinity or virtue is believed to be in them on account of which they are to be worshipped". But there is no denying the fact that by venerating the bodies of saints, their images and personal effects and so on the church has created, in the words of Paul Blanshard, "a full blown system of fetishism and sorcery...": she is practicing idolatry. -American Freedom and Catholic Power, page 248.



The law of God in regard to the use of images is as follows: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, ...” (Exodus 20:4) In Deuteronomy 4:15-20, God Almighty warns through the prophet Moses that His worshippers should not corrupt themselves by making “

a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air...” (See also Deuteronomy 5:6-9) For the fact that the second commandment forbids the worshipping of images in any shape or form, it is unmistakably clear that the use of anything as “aid to faith”, be it image or anything is idolatry. See also Ezekiel 8:7-12

It is patently misleading therefore to say that the Almighty God sanctioned the use of images in worship when he directed the making of the Brazen Serpent in Numbers 21:8 and the two golden Cherubims on the Ark of the Covenant as stated in Exodus 25:18.

What should be made clear is that the healing power of the brazen serpent was not in the object itself. The healing was done by God for those who obeyed His command to look at the brazen serpent on the pole. (Jeremiah 7:22,23) The brazen serpent was a picture of greater things to come as it typified Jesus Christ whom all would look to for salvation. (John 3: 14,15) It needs be recalled that King Hezekiah later destroyed the brazen serpent when he saw that some of the Jews worshipped it by burning incense before it as some are doing to relics today. (2 Kings 18:1-4) It was on this score that Joseph Zacchello, writing in *The Secrets of Romanism* posited that “The brazen serpent is rather a proof against the worship of images”.

The images of cherubims on the tabernacle were certainly not worshipped by the people of Israel in those days. The images were not even seen by the people since they were placed in the holy of holies into which the priest entered only once a year, a picture of greater things in the Christian era. - Hebrews 8:2; 9:11,24; 10:1,10-12.

It was in this context that Apostle Paul in his letter to the Christians in Rome regretted that some people have “turned the truth of God into a lie and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” -Romans 1: 25.

Some however contend that the relics are mementoes, or memorials of deceased persons, to remind one of their works, for one to draw inspiration from them. There is nothing wrong if personal belongings of loved ones are kept as mementoes. But to venerate them becomes an entirely different matter. It is a sin.

The question may also be raised as to whether the handkerchiefs and aprons St. Paul used to cast out demons and heal the sick, (Acts 19:11,12) are not examples of relics? The fact is that God allowed such miracles to be done by St. Paul and other apostles when the Church was just at its infancy in order to establish the Church, but now such miracles have ceased. Particular note should be taken also of the fact that St. Paul was alive when these miracles happened - unlike the “saints” of today whose purported miracles are done after death! - Mark 16:16-20; Hebrews 2:4.

## Look to God

People see relics as aids to devotion, to inspire them to focus their faith on God. But the Bible says we should look to God and Jesus Christ who is the mediator between God and men for our sustenance and salvation. God Almighty says: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. (Isaiah 45:22) And in Hebrews 12:1,2 St. Paul wrote: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." ( see also John 17:3) Evidently, Christians ought to exercise implicit faith in God Almighty through Jesus Christ and not in images or relics. And Christ told Thomas Didymus: "Blessed are those that have not seen, and yet have believed,"(John 20:27,29; compare 1 Peter 1:9) When people trust God and run away from sin He will help them out of their troubles. Hence Apostle Paul said Christians "walk by faith, not by sight".- 2 Corinthians 5:7.

There is no need for any object to serve as helps to faith as some religious leaders are teaching. As a matter of fact, all the exertions and self-afflictions in the use of relics in worship are spiritually worthless and unprofitable. The dead saints or martyrs so-called cannot help anyone being dead and silent. In Job 5:1 it is written

"Call now, if there be any that will answer thee; and to which of the saints wilt thou turn?" Certainly none. It is only Jesus Christ God has appointed as the only way to salvation.- John 14:6.

All true Christians must keep away from such beliefs and practices as the one on relics and hold to the truth that is in Christ for their own blessing and salvation in the end by God's grace. - 1 Timothy 4:13,16.

## **Laying Aside the Sin that doth so easily beseth us**

### **God's Kingdom Advocate Volume 3 No. 5**

The Christian, regardless of opposition by way of persecutions, tribulations, or obstacles, must persevere in the way of life which he has chosen. He must strive to abstain from all appearances of evil and pursue the path of duty as commanded by God. This requires spiritual understanding, patience and fortitude and above all the grace of God.

This was the essence of St. Paul's exhortation in his epistle to the Hebrew Christians when he stated: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us..." - Hebrews 12:1,2.

Earlier in chapter 11, the apostle had given a catalogue of worshippers of God who distinguished themselves in His service by virtue of their faith. These are examples for those serving God in later generations to continue in the race of life without being encumbered by sin, the obstacle to spiritual progress.

To lay aside means to put away, to get rid of, or to remove. The phrase "the sin that doth so easily beset us" is with particular reference to that temptation or sin which we always fall victim of; those vices or sinful habits which we seem to overlook either because of material benefits, negligence or carefree attitude. These vices include drunkenness, sexual immorality, lie telling, stealing or such like. Saint Paul is exhorting us to get rid of them for our own good by the grace of God.

Sin, according to the Bible, is the transgressing of the law of God, which debars one from entering the Kingdom of God. It was Isaiah the prophet who stated: "And an high way shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it .." (Isaiah 35: 8) Saint Paul asked: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" -1Corinthians. 6: 9.

For the fact that men are born in sin, the devil takes advantage of this frailty or weakness to hold them in spiritual bondage. It is therefore required of true Christians who are yearning for salvation in God's Kingdom fully established to be conscious of the sin or sins that so easily overwhelms them, and to make every effort to overcome such sins by the grace of God

### **False Pastors**

Some pastors today give wrong interpretations to texts of the Bible for filthy lucre's sake. One of such texts is 1 John 2: 1, 2 where Apostle John stated: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Some hold to the statement "if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father..." as meaning that as long as the Advocate, Christ Jesus, is there to plead for them, they will always get forgiveness, even without repentance. Such ones are thus emboldened to go on committing other sins after having claimed to have repented of a previous one. This is

wrong. Without thorough repentance, no one will benefit from the redemptive work of Christ. It was in this sense David, a prophet and king in Israel declared: "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." - Psalm 130:3,4.

Saint John's admonition is not a license to continue in sin, for he started by saying "these things I write unto you that ye sin not". If he meant to encourage sinners he would not have said so. Apostle John further stated "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments". 1 John 2:3.

Any Christian therefore who for material benefits or out of sheer carelessness or negligence of his duty to God remains in sin will have himself to blame. It was king Solomon who stated: "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death". (Proverbs 14:12; 16: 25) The point that must be brought home to those who take pleasure in sin is that they are in danger of God's judgment. Christians must do away with or kill that "old man", the desire or tendency to sin, and do what is right always for their salvation. For any Christian to claim not to know the sin that easily besets him or her smacks of insincerity. Isaiah the prophet had cause to say: "For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them." -Isaiah 59: 12.

## **Besetting Sins**

In his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, Saint Paul sternly warned of the dangers of sin which will prevent one from being saved in the kingdom of God fully established. He admonished: "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." -Ephesians 5: 1-5.

Sin separates one from God. (Isaiah 59:1,2) Anyone committing sin and remaining in it is in darkness, hence Apostle John stated: "This then is the message which we have heard of him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth." "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him." (1 John 1: 5, 6; 2: 4, 5) The reason is that though Christ died to redeem us from sin and death, any one who commits sin wilfully will not have forgiveness: "For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." (Hebrews 10: 26, 27) This admonition of Saint Paul to the Hebrew Christians is indicative of the fact that since we have been called by the Almighty God to the way of salvation through the belief of the truth, we should be steadfast in the faith till the end in order to get salvation.

The "besetting sins" that people fall victim of are many and they vary from one person to the other. One of the more common sins committed today is fornication. But many worshippers are not mindful of its consequences. "Every sin that a man doeth is without the body" said saint Paul, "but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body". It was because of fornication which the Jews committed in the wilderness that the Almighty God destroyed 23,000 of them in the days of Moses. (1 Corinthians

10: 5, 8.) Despite these examples, there are those who see nothing wrong in hopping from one spot to the other in search of loose men and women. Those who continue to indulge in the sin of fornication should know that unless they repent thoroughly of their sins they stand to lose eternal life. Saint Paul admonished: "But fornication, and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not once be named among you as becometh saints." (Ephesians 5: 3; 1 Thessalonians 4: 3-7). Let us therefore be committed in the effort to rid ourselves of sins.

Paul the Apostle of God further enumerated some of these "besetting sins" in his admonition to the Christians in Colossae thus: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry...But now ye also put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds. And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." - Colossians 3: 5-10.

There are those who give themselves to drunkenness. They often boast of their ability to consume large quantities of alcohol without being intoxicated. This applies to men and women, young and old. Some people in the guise of taking native drugs made from the roots or barks of certain trees - which need to be soaked in gin to be effective - actually consume large quantities of alcohol each day, and even get drunk in the process. The Bible enjoins moderation in all things. (Philippians 4:5) Any medicine that needs alcohol to be effective must be taken only as prescribed.

It must be pointed out nonetheless that it is not a sin to drink. St. Paul's admonition to Timothy to "take a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" is of course well known. But the exhortation is not a license for anyone to become a drunkard. The Bible enjoins us not to drink in excess. (Ephesians 5:18; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Proverbs 23: 19-35) It is even better if one can avoid alcohol altogether, and become a teetotaler.

There are many Christians who are guilty of filthiness or uncleanness. This is also sinful. In Saint Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he said: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Corinthians 7: 1) Filthiness of the spirit includes hatred. Some hate their fellow men without reason; and when you ask them their response is usually "well that is how I am born". This is not an attribute to make boast of but a vice that should be done away with. Anyone who harbours such traits should change by the grace of God for his own good. Saint John admonished: "Whosoever hated his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3: 15) Other examples of spiritual filthiness include witchcraft, necromancy and various occultic practices. Those who indulge in these very wicked practices will be punished by God except they repent. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 8:19,20; etc.) Anyone being oppressed by witches and wizards should exercise strong faith in God as He alone is able to deliver His children from the devil and his agents. - Psalm 33:18,19; 34:17,19; John 10:27-29; 1 Peter 3:10-13.

Some people are physically filthy. Christians are seriously warned against uncleanness in Ephesians 5:5. People commonly say that "cleanliness is next to

godliness". We should as children of light learn to be clean both in our minds and in our bodies always by the grace of God.

## **New Creatures**

St. Paul reminded the Christians in Rome that by their conversion, as new creatures or worshippers of God, the old man (that is sinful habits in them) had been crucified with Christ, that the body of sin may be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. (Romans 6: 6, 10-16) Verses 12-14 of the chapter under reference is rendered by the New King James Version thus: "Do not let sin control the way you live, do not give in to its lustful desires. Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead give yourselves completely to God since you have been given a new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you are no longer subject to the law, which enslaves you to sin. Instead you are free by God's grace." See also Romans 12:1,2; 1 Peter 4:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Galatians 5: 16, 17.

It is necessary therefore, that as children of God who have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ the righteous, everything about us should conform with the life style of our Redeemer. Hence in verses 2 and 3 of Hebrews chapter 12 St. Paul charged us in this wise: " Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

Anyone committing sin and remaining in it is in darkness hence Apostle John stated: "This then is the message which we have heard of him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth." -1 John 1: 5, 6; 1 John 2: 4, 5.

## **Resisting the devil**

Whatever may be our vices, we should resolve to henceforth put them away. Some people make resolutions vowing to forsake one bad conduct or habit or the other but they lack the will power to change their ways. They disobey the voice of their consciences, and so remain in sin to the detriment of their salvation. Christians should not just yield to sin or to temptations brought by the devil with the excuse that it is beyond them. The devil is a coward; if only we resist him in faith by the grace of God, he will certainly run away from us. Scripture says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you". (James 4:7) Apostle James further stated: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.... Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." -James 1: 13-15,12.

Saint Paul in his epistle to the Christians in Rome warned against the works of error. Said he: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the

day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lust thereof." - Romans 13: 12-14.

May our heavenly Father JEHOVAH Who in exercise of His love for us sent His only begotten son to die for our redemption help us to always avoid sin and to continue like that until the end by His grace through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, Amen.

## The Blessing in Doing what we hear

### Volume 3 No. 6

There is great blessing in being practical Christians. No one can deny the fact that doing what one hears or learns from the Bible uplifts the character of the individual, earns him the admiration and respect of godly people and above all, leads to salvation by the grace of God. These facts are embodied in the statement of our Lord Jesus Christ when, as he was preaching, “a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.” Replying, Jesus Christ said, “Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it”. - Luke 11:27,28.

What Jesus Christ was saying in effect was that although the woman who gave birth to him was blessed, those who keep the words of God would receive greater blessings from Him. On another occasion when Christ was told that his mother and his brethren were standing without desiring to speak with him, he, among other things, said: “My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.” Luke 8:19-21; Matthew 12:46-50.

It should be noted that St. Paul commended the believers at Thessalonica because they were practical Christians in that they received “the word of God... not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” as a result of which the word was working “effectually” among them. - 1 Thessalonians 2:13-15.

When people are given to keeping the laws of God, their standard of morality will be far higher than that of other nations and relative peace, progress and happiness will come to them as a matter of course. God Almighty told the natural Jews: “Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” (Deuteronomy 4:6) The prophet Solomon declared: “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.” (Proverbs 14:34) Every country that wants to enjoy a respectable position in the comity of nations must be disposed to orderly and decent behaviour based on the knowledge of God. It was Thomas Jefferson, a former American president, who declared: “I have always said and always will say that the studious perusal of the Sacred Volume (the Holy Bible) will make us better citizens, better fathers, and better husbands”. (Parenthesis ours)

It is a great irony however that so many people, both in high and low places across the world, make a show of religion and devotion, yet their day-to-day conduct comes far short of what is required of the true worshippers of God. For instance, Nigerians had in a World Values Survey been rated the most religious people on earth. (Daily Sun October 21, 2003, page 7) Yet that has not prevented the country from occupying the unenviable position of being the sixth most corrupt country on earth. (Thisday February 13, 2006, page 4) An article carried in The Guardian of March 10, 2004 at page 51 quoted a BBC documentary as having given Nigeria 91% in Church attendance, compared to 21% in Britain, 54% in the United States of America and 7% in Russia.



It was for this attitude of showing off with flourish their piety or devoutness and yet failing to practise or keep the tenets of the faith that our Lord Jesus Christ indicted the Pharisees, who were the religious leaders in those days. He said: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." (Matthew 23:2,3) The counterparts of these religious leaders, who say one thing and do another, abound today. Jesus Christ warned: "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men". (Matthew 15:7-9) Again he said: "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." - Matthew 5:20.

Indeed, it is only by practising the truth which we hear from time to time that we can attract the favour of God. Even in day-to-day life, people see the cultivation and practise of truthfulness or honesty as the mark of good character. An insightful editorial in The Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper, stated: "Good character cannot be decreed, nor is it attained by mere wish; it comes from painstaking nurture over time, it is best taught by example..." (The Guardian April 15, 2005, page 12) Apostle James declared: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." James 1:22-25.

## **Call To Hear**

The Bible shows that it is a Christian virtue for one to be ready to hear the word of God. Some people close their ears to any kind of knowledge other than the one they know. This is not good: for, it is only by comparing what one has heard with what one knows that one can judge whether he is on the right side or not. It was because they were ready to hear that the people of Berea were able to appreciate the truth preached by St. Paul "in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" and so many of them joined the faith. (Acts 17:10-12) On this score Apostle James exhorted: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear..." (James 1:19) Those who are eager to hear the word of God will be glad to go to places of worship where the truth about God and His Kingdom is preached. The Prophet David wrote: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD". (Psalm 122:1) St. Paul even lays it down as a rule that we, as true Christians, should not forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrew 10:25) The worshipper must hallow the place of worship and comport himself in a sober manner. He must be attentive to what is being said and not allow himself to be distracted in any way. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God" exhorted the prophet Solomon "and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil." - Ecclesiastes 5:1

## **Woman of Zarephath**

Practical Christianity is evidence of faith on the part of the believer and makes one to have the mercy of God and ultimately justification by His grace. In the words of St. Paul it is “not the hearers of the law” that are just before God, “but the doers of the law shall be justified”. Romans 2:13

The woman of Zarephath is a shining example of those who heard the word of God and by keeping to it were helped tremendously by Him. In 1 Kings 17: 8-16 there is the story of the widow of Zarephath, who obeyed the word of the prophet Elijah to give him “a little water in a vessel ...a morsel of bread ...a little cake ...until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.”

The widow in a great show of faith went and “did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days” for “the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.”

Stressing that her noble faith in God is worthy of everlasting remembrance and universal imitation, our Lord Jesus Christ used her case to rebuke the Jews for their stubbornness. He said: “But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.” Luke 4:24-26

From the story of the widow of Zarephath, we also learn that it is important to obey the voice of the servants of God as stated in 2 Chronicles 20:20 to wit: “...Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.” See also Hebrews 13:7,17; 1 Peter 2:13.

All those who show like measure of faith in God, like the widow of Zarephath in obeying the word of God to the letter even in the most trying circumstances will be helped and saved by Him in the end. See also 1 Samuel 15:22,23; Job 36:10-12; 1 Samuel 1:16-20.

## **The last days**

The Bible says that the last days will witness a level of godlessness unprecedented in human history. The devil, knowing that his time is short will be doing everything in his power to lure people away from God into lawlessness and carnality. Even many of those who profess to serve God will be mired in the pool of hypocrisy. In the words of St. Paul such people “have a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof”. The learned apostle advised true worshippers to avoid such people. - 2 Timothy 3:5.

This prophecy is fulfilling to the letter. Some attend services merely to keep up with social expectations. Even some of those who claim to be “anointed men of God” are actually pretenders and impostors. There was a publication in a Nigerian newspaper with a banner headline “Robbers disguise as gospel preachers”. According to the report carried in the Nigerian Tribune of February 18, 2003 “Traders on a business trip to Lagos at the weekend lost over N8.5 million to armed robbers in the

guise of gospel preachers in a bus.” The robbers, consisted of four men, clutching Bibles, and one woman “who tied her head gear like the contemporary born again Christians”. As the bus took off, the four bandits were said to be singing, praying and quoting chapters and verses of the Bible, “which held the passengers spell bound.” At midnight, the robbers abruptly stopped singing, praying and clapping. They shot the police escort dead, ordered the driver at gun point to stop and forced everybody to lie face down after which they dispossessed the passengers of their money and valuables. Though the robbers may think they had succeeded in their mission, we must stress that they will surely face the judgement of God, unless they repent. (Psalm 7:11-16; Proverbs 11:19,21; Isaiah 3:10,11; etc). The American magazine Newsweek observed in a shocking cover story entitled “Is God dead?” that people in Europe go to Church services “for reasons of culture, not faith”. The story quoted a Yugoslav who confessed that he attends services only because it is a family tradition. -Newsweek, July 12, 1999.

Writing on what he called “Rampant Supernaturalism”, Professor Sola Adeyeye, a former member of the Federal House of Representatives, lamented: “under the guise of religious fervour, we have imbibed the arrant falsehood and silly superstition that God will heal Nigeria via endless night vigils and religious jamborees. We must wake up to the truth that faith without works is metaphysical hogwash and silly hocus-pocus!” - The Guardian December 17, 2003, page 65. Please see Jeremiah 7:16,17; 16:7

If people had been doing what God says, the level of social vices would certainly not be as high as it is today. It is these vices which create disorder and distress in the society. (Compare Romans 6:16; Jeremiah 2:19) Even the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which led to the death of an estimated 3 million people in 2005 and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases would not be taking so many lives as they do today.

In this age when knowledge has increased tremendously, (Daniel 12:4) people have greater opportunity than ever before to know the word of God through books, or by audio or video equipment or the internet so as to know how to conduct themselves. The Bible says “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” - Revelation 1:3.

## **Blessing**

Those who keep the word of God will be blessed not only in this world but in the world to come. The Prophet David wrote that those who keep the law of God will have “great reward”.(Psalm 19:7-11) He also stated: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” Psalm 1:1-6

Such ones shall never be moved but will enjoy the blessing of God at all times no matter the tribulations the devil will bring. “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings

of mine,” said Jesus Christ, “and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.” (Matthew 7:24-27) Jesus Christ asked the unbelieving Jews: “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). Those who keep the word of God become models of positive values and are great assets to society.

The most important blessing in keeping the word of God is that it will enable one to get life in God's Kingdom fully established. God Almighty had earlier declared through Moses that any man who keeps the law, “he shall live in them” (Leviticus 18: 1-5) And St. Paul stated: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” Romans 1:16.

To get life one must continue in doing what he has heard until the end. (Matthew 24:12,13; 1 Corinthians 15:58) It is to this end Jesus Christ told his disciples: “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.” (John 8:31,32) And in John 13:17 he said : “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

What is more in Revelation 22: 14 Jesus Christ stated: “Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city (God's Kingdom fully established).

May our heavenly Father, Whose mercies endure for ever help His children everywhere to identify the truth and practise it until the end so as to be saved in His perfect and everlasting Kingdom by His grace and power through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

## **Glorification of the Church**

### **God's Kingdom Advocate Volume 3 No. 8**

Glorification of the Church is one of the ten fundamental doctrines of the Holy Bible. It refers to the honours, privileges and exaltation which God Almighty will confer on His people, in this age of the second presence of Christ, in demonstration of His love for them and in accordance with His divine purpose.

The fact that God Almighty has promised to glorify His Church presupposes that His people had been in a state of degradation and decay. This was sequel to the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, at the instance of satan the devil, as a result of which the human race lapsed from perfection to decay and corruption, and ultimately to death. When God Almighty reverses the distressful conditions which His people had suffered all through the ages, they will be raised from the poverty, fears and miseries of this evil world to a life of perfect peace and happiness.

In the context of this sermon, to glorify means to invest with "splendour of a very high degree". The word church is derived from the Greek word Ecclesia (or ekklesia) which means an assembly or body of professed believers or Christians.

### **The Church**

Christians are divided into two distinct classes, the Saints, Apostles' or "Little Flock" class, and the Other Sheep class. The 12 Apostles were the foundation members of the Apostles' class of Christians, (also known as the Church of the firstborn) the full number of which is 144,000. (Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1-5; Hebrews 10:22, 23) The Other Sheep consists of other worshippers of God who are not apostles.

It is common knowledge that individually and collectively, the people of God suffer many deprivations and persecutions at the instance of the devil. (James 5:10,11; Matthew 11:12; Hebrews 11:36-38) But the situation will not remain the same at this time of the second presence of Chrst. (Psalm 102:16; Matthew 25:31) Consequently, the work of God in the last days will be of a much higher order than what obtained in years gone by. Hence in Haggai 2:8,9 it is stated: "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts."

The "latter house" properly applies to the Kingdom of God or His true Church organisations that would be set up in the last days by Jesus Christ at his second presence through the remnants of the saints. (Isaiah 2:2; Matthew 24:15, 16; 13:31,32) Wherever it is established, the kingdom will continue to rise even as satan's organisation continues to fall. "Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase." (Job 8:7) Also, the Bible states: "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end... The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this". - Isaiah 9:7.

Evidently, those who serve God will not continue to wallow in abject poverty and want. Rather, they will be blessed by Him, spiritually, materially and otherwise in this age of the glorification of the Church. Apostle Paul, comparing the standard of the

work in time of old to that which will be revealed later to the apostles, stated: "But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious." - 2 Corinthians 3:7-11. See also Exodus 34:20-35; 28:1, 2.

Since God had promised to richly reward his faithful worshippers in this age, it is needful therefore for them to serve Him diligently and sincerely until the end by His grace. Apostle Paul affirmed positively that those who patiently continue in well doing, will be rewarded with "glory and honour and immortality, eternal life. But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile." - Romans 2:7-9. See also Isaiah 49:3-5.

## **Jesus Christ**

Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:23) It is through him that God Almighty will glorify His Church. During his first advent he was made a little lower than the angels. (Hebrews 2:7) In fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah, he was "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief". - Isaiah 53:3; Psalm 69:8, 9.

In Matthew 17: 1-9 there is the record of the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. The Bible says that the Lord Jesus took with him Peter, James and John into a high mountain, "And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him." (Matthew 17:2, 3) The transfiguration was a vision (Matthew 17:9) to show the apostles the future glory and majesty of Jesus Christ. It also foretold the great honours which other faithful worshippers of God (represented in the vision by Moses and Elijah) will enjoy in God's Kingdom fully established.

Moreover, knowing the immense glories that awaited him, our Lord Jesus Christ, after the successful completion of his mission on earth, prayed the Father thus: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." (John 17:4, 5) True to His promise, our Lord Jesus Christ was highly exalted by God Almighty and given "a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father". - Philippians 2:9-11

It was with this glorious body Jesus Christ appeared to St. Paul (then known as Saul), who was for three days blinded by the brightness of his appearance, and could not eat or drink. - Acts 9:1-18.

On his ascension to heaven, Christ was asked to sit on the right hand of God until his enemies would be made his footstool. (Psalm 110:1) This waiting period expired in 1914. God Almighty then issued the command: "rule thou in the midst of thine enemies". (Psalm 110:2) Consequently, Satan was driven down from heaven and he, in an outburst of anger, plunged the world into the World War of 1914-1918, in an attempt to destroy all flesh. (Matthew 24:7, 8; Revelation 12:7-12) Concerning the coronation of Jesus Christ in heaven the Bible states: "And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." - Daniel 7:13, 14. See also Psalm 21:3-5; 45:7-9; John 18:36-38.

## **Time of Refreshing**

Our Lord Jesus Christ during his mission on earth, chose 12 apostles to assist him in carrying out his mission. At a point in time Apostle Peter had cause to ask our Lord Jesus Christ thus: "Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." - Mark 10:28-30.

This promise of Jesus Christ applies to the apostles and to all faithful Christians by the grace of God. Those who continue in the work of God in spite of tribulations until the end will get life and other attendant blessings by God's grace. Jesus Christ, exhorting the apostles who are in the covenant of sacrifice with God (Psalm 50:5) stated: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." - Revelation 2:10.

Based on the assurance by our Lord Jesus Christ, St. Peter, addressing the crowd that gathered following the miraculous healing of the lame man at the Beautiful gate in Jerusalem, delivered an important address to the people in which he spoke of the blessedness that will be the lot of the people of God in this age of Christ's second presence. He stated: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." - Acts 3:19-21

The "times of refreshing" and the "times of restitution of all things" refer to one and the same thing, the age of the second presence of Christ who had during his first advent declared: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." (Matthew 16:27) The first class of those to be so rewarded are the saints. They will be changed into spirit beings and taken to heaven as promised by our Lord Jesus Christ in John 14:1-3, 19, 22. See also 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52.

Then will fulfil the prophecy made earlier by David the prophet under the inspiration of God to wit: "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea,

the set time, is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory. When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.” - Psalm 102:13-17. See also Isaiah 54:11, 12.

St. Paul expressed hope in the promise of God to reward the saints at the second presence of Christ. In his second letter to Timothy he declared thus: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” - 2 Timothy 4:7, 8. See also Philippians 3:20, 21; Romans 8:17, 18; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

Apart from the apostles, all the other children of God who died serving Him will also be glorified. It was in the sense of the great privileges and honours the faithful will get in God's Kingdom fully established that Jesus Christ said the righteous shall at that time, “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”. (Matthew 13:43) Daniel the prophet under inspiration had stated: “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.” - Daniel 12:3.

The glorification each will receive will be according to his class and for each person according to his work and the grace of God on him. St. Paul stated: “There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory.” - 1 Corinthians 15:40, 41. See also 1 Corinthians 3:12-15.

It is in the kingdom of God fully established that the glory which God promised His people will be fully realised. At that time the people of God will be raised to glory and honour by God's grace. They will be exposed to excellences that will exceed whatever contrivance, order or beauty we may have in this world. The Bible says: “The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious.” (Isaiah 60:13) God has promised that at that time He “will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir”. (Isaiah 13:12) Indeed the Bible says: “...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” - 1 Corinthians 2:9. See also Isaiah 64:4.

## **Exhortation**

In view of the abundant promises God has made to His people, they are duty-bound to do His work faithfully and diligently until the end, knowing that their labours would not be in vain. In his letter to the Hebrew Christians Apostle Paul declared: “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” - Hebrews 6:10-12. See also 2 Corinthians 1:7.



We should be steadfast in the service of God irrespective of the hard conditions or tribulations we may go through in this world in the hands of Satan and his agents. Apostle Paul, referring to people of his class, the saints stated: "For which cause we faint not but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day". He added: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:16-18) On the basis of this hope Apostle Paul further stated: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." - Romans 8:18.

May God Almighty continue to strengthen us with His holy spirit so that we may remain in the way of God until the end so as to enjoy His rich and unfailing promises by His grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Facts about covering of hair in worship

Vol. 3 No. 7

In appearing before God for devotion or worship, every woman is required by nature and by the law of God to cover her hair. This puts her in a solemn and becoming posture for study, meditation, prayer and singing of praises to God. However, it has now become the norm for women in most Churches in the world to go for devotion or attend services with their hair uncovered. This practice which has been gaining ground with the advance of secularism in the last 100 years is a clear violation of the law of God as stated in the Holy Bible.

Writing in such websites as [www.btinternet.com](http://www.btinternet.com), [www.christianhospitality.org](http://www.christianhospitality.org) and [www.pbc.org](http://www.pbc.org), a number of church leaders and commentators on the issue contend that “the hair is the God-given covering, the material covering is just a human fashion or custom” and that “women are not supposed to wear veils because God has given them long uncut hair instead”. Among the arguments they use to buttress their stand are that:

1. By the law of Moses, women being tried for committing adultery are allowed to uncover their hair in the temple;
2. Mary, sister of Lazarus worshipped Christ without covering her head;
3. The Priests of old wore caps while a king of Israel was crowned in the temple

Let us now look at these arguments against the background of the Holy Scriptures.

In the case of women accused of adultery as stated in Numbers 5:11-31, the law provided that she should undergo a special rite to ascertain if she was actually guilty of the charge made against her. The law states among other things that “the priest shall set the woman before the LORD, and uncover the woman's head”. (verse 18) Some hold to this as proof that women could uncover their hair in the temple. But it should be understood that women spoken of in the passage under reference were under trial and uncovering their hair signified the humiliating and shameful nature of the accusation against them. Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible in explaining verse 18 “uncover the woman's head”, states as follows: “To take off a woman's veil, and expose her to the sight of men, would be considered a very great degradation in the East.” It adds: “To this St. Paul appears to allude in 1 Corinthians 11:5,6,10”.

Since in the East it is considered highly disrespectful for women to appear before men without a covering in line with the law of God - it is therefore natural to expect them to show much greater reverence for God Almighty by covering their hair during devotion. What those who canvass this argument should also reflect on is that: if the Jewish women normally worshipped in the temple with uncovered heads, why then was it necessary for women caught in adultery to be specifically asked to uncover their hair? Certainly, it was not the practice in those days for women to go into the temple with uncovered hair. Also, it should be pointed out that the woman accused of adultery did not go to the temple at that particular time for worship but for judgment.

The Bible states that shamefacedness is a virtue in women. St. Paul in his letter to Timothy instructs thus: "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works." - 1 Timothy 2:9,10

Another instance adduced by those who believe and teach that a woman need not cover her hair in worship is that of Mary, the sister of Lazarus. On a certain occasion when the Lord Jesus Christ visited them, the Bible records her as "weeping at the feet of Christ and wiping his feet with her hair". Here again we see that this was not a temple service but an unplanned, spur-of-the-moment action, in an informal setting - the family home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. The spontaneous outpouring of goodwill, and appreciation by Mary to God Almighty for His goodness on her, including the raising of Lazarus, her brother from the dead, cannot be used to justify leaving the woman's hair bare during worship. -John 11:2; 12:2,3; compare Luke 7:37-50.

Some have argued that since the Bible says one should "pray without ceasing", (1 Thessalonians 5:17), a woman should cover her hair all the time. This is not correct. As indicated earlier, the law on covering of hair by women has to do with worship situations. What St. Paul meant in his letter to the Thessalonians was that we should be regular in prayer; we should not be weary of asking for help from God. Prayer is a formal, solemn act of thanksgiving and of making requests from God by way of worship. This cannot be a 24-hour activity.

It is true that in the time of old, the priests wore headgears. The high priest wore a distinctive head gear called mitre (See Exodus 28:4,37,39; 39:28,30; Leviticus 8:9), while that worn by other priests was generally called bonnet. (Exodus 28:40; 29:9) The mitre is defined by the *Smith's Bible Dictionary* as "the turban or headdress of the high priest, made of fine linen cloth, eight yards long, folded around the head on the front of which was a gold plate with the inscription 'Holiness to the Lord". We agree that under Mosaic law it was mandatory for priests to cover their heads but such law was not retained in the Christian era. See Colossians 2:14-17.

It is also true that King Joash was crowned in the temple as recorded in 2 Kings 11:11,12,14. But this was an abnormal situation. Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (2 Kings 11:1) had usurped the throne after the premature death of her husband Jehoram and her son Ahaziah. She sought to secure herself on the throne by the murder of all the seed royal. Only Joash her grandson, then an infant, was saved by his aunt Jehosheba. The child was concealed in the temple for six years and brought up under the care of the priest, Jehoiada. During this period Athaliah reigned over Judah. At the age of seven Jehoash was brought from his place of refuge and crowned under the supervision of Jehoiada the high priest. The people's zeal for God and their loyalty to the house of David ensured that they quickly stood up to Athaliah's subsequent challenge and put her to death. - 2 Kings 11:1-21; 2 Chronicles 23:1-21.

What happened was that God allowed the Priest Jehoiada to install Jehoash as king in order to continue the royal lineage of king David in keeping with His oath to him. (Psalm 132:11,12; 2 Samuel 7:12; 2 Chronicles 6:16) The devil, knowing the purpose of God that all kings of Israel would come through the line of king David, had planned to frustrate that purpose by using Athaliah to kill all the heirs to the throne. But no one can

interfere or change the will of God. The crowning of Jehoash in the temple is an exceptional case which cannot be cited as a precedent for all time. God also makes allowance for unusual circumstances and these could warrant exemptions from the general rule. The circumstances of those days warranted the action of the Priest Jehoaida as the temple was the only secure place the priest could get to hurriedly crown the king. In any case, this was not a normal coronation ceremony as Jehoash was only seven years old. There is no other example in the Holy Bible where a king of Israel was crowned in the temple. In summary, we must reiterate that the case of king Joash being crowned in the temple was an example in time of old, which does not apply in the Christian era.

Some scholars have argued that though Joash was crowned in the temple, the venue could not have been the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies where the priest enters once a year. According to the American Tract Society Dictionary, "The temple itself, strictly so called, which comprised the Porch, the Sanctuary, and the Holy of Holies, formed only a small part of the sacred precincts, being surrounded by spacious courts, chambers, and other apartments, which were much more extensive than the temple itself. It should be observed that the word temple does not always denote the central edifice itself, but in many passages some of the outer courts are intended." - Emphasis ours.

### **Change of Priesthood**

The Bible shows that Jesus Christ came to "magnify the law and make it honourable". (Isaiah 42:21) It was the will of God that in due course the work of the Ministry should be raised to new heights through Jesus Christ. In the words of Apostle Paul "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Romans 10: 4) The Priesthood changed with the coming of Christ, the Melchizedek, as a result of which the laws, which were only a shadow of things to come, were done away with. St. Paul said: "For the Priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law." (Hebrews 7:12) For the fact that Jesus Christ did not come from the priestly line of Levi indicates that the law as to the priesthood had changed. (Hebrews 7:11-15) And in Galatians 3:24,25 St. Paul added: "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a school master." After Christ, the perfect teacher, had come, nobody should take the people of God back to the schoolmaster.

We implore our readers to take particular note of the fact that Apostle John records a vision in the book of Revelations where the 24 elders who sat about the throne of God "cast their crowns before the throne" in reverence to God Almighty. (Revelation 4:10,11) This is a clear demonstration of the fact that men, no matter how highly placed ought not to cover their heads during worship and is in line with the words of St. Paul that men should not cover their heads while worshipping God.

Jesus Christ and his apostles wore no head covering or any distinctive garments as the priests of old did while ministering in the temple. That was why Judas had to use a kiss to identify Jesus Christ. (Matthew 26:48). The example and precept of Christ and his apostles supersede the laws of the old testaments regarding the dressing of priests and ministers of God. (John 13:15) St. Paul in his letter to the Christians at Colossae stated: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was

contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”- Colossians 2:14-17.

## St. Paul

To better understand the Bible position on the covering of hair by women, let us dissect St. Paul's letter to the Christians at Corinth in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 in which he dwelt extensively on the issue. In verse 1 he enjoins the Corinthian Christians to follow his example just as he was also following the commands of Christ. In verse 2 he reminded them of the need to keep the ordinances he delivered to them. He went on to state the basis of the ruling he was to give, saying in the next verse, “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.” For this reason therefore: “Every man praying or prophesying, (preaching the word of God) having his head covered, dishonoureth his head: (Jesus Christ) But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head (the man) for that is even all one as if she were shaven”. (verses 3-5) Then he added in verse 6, “For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered”. The statement is clear enough.

In spite of the clarity of St. Paul's statement, many professed Christians still do not understand what St. Paul meant in verses 5 (already quoted) and 15 of 1 Corinthians 11. Verse 15 says: “But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.” A number of professed Christians wrongly explain this text to mean that because the woman already has hair on her head she does not need any scarf or any other covering anymore!

There should be no room for confusion in understanding of 1 Corinthians 11 verses 5 and 15, if we are sincere to ourselves. What St. Paul is saying is that if the woman prays without using a scarf or other material to cover her hair, she by so doing dishonours her head, that is the man. The material over her head is a sign of her subjection to the man and her readiness to subject herself to the divine order. The only condition in which she could pray without covering her hair is to shave it all. The covering in verse 5 refers to a material covering or vesture, etc. There is no way the expression “having her head uncovered” could mean “having no hair on her head”. The “long hair” in verse 15 means the woman's natural hair. This gives her glory and she could use it to cover her face if struck by shyness: “for her hair is given her for a covering”.

St. Paul's words are rendered more clearly by the *Living Bible*. We may as well quote verses 2-76, which reads as follows: “But there is one matter I want to remind you about: that a wife is responsible to her husband, her husband is responsible to Christ, and Christ is responsible to God. That is why, if a man refuses to remove his hat while praying or preaching, he dishonors Christ. And that is why a woman who publicly prays or prophesies without a covering on her head dishonors her husband [for her covering is a sign of her subjection to him]. Yes, if she refuses to wear a head covering then she should cut off all her hair. And if it is shameful for a woman to have her head shaved,

then she should wear a covering. But a man should not wear anything on his head [when worshipping, for his hat is a sign of subjection to men]". St. Paul adds in verses 13-15: "What do you yourselves really think about this? Is it right for a woman to pray in public without covering her head? Doesn't even instinct itself teach us that women's heads should be covered? For women are proud of their long hair, while a man with long hair tends to be ashamed."

The Churches who allow women to uncover their hair in worship are motivated by the quest for large membership and money, for which reason they are prepared to compromise Christian standards than practise righteousness. Such will definitely give account of their stewardship to God. (Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10) Even the wives of some of the Church leaders cover their heads during worship whereas most members of their congregation don't. This is hypocrisy.

Like the unfaithful priests of old, some of the Church leaders of today are committing a grievous blunder by not clearly setting out the right standards, as commanded by God for people to follow. In Ezekiel 22:26 God declared: "Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, ... and I am profaned among them." See also Ezekiel 44:23; Leviticus 10:10.

## **Personal Righteousness**

The truth is that several Churches have gone with the prevailing fashion of the secular world such that the covering of hair "has slowly but surely slipped out of sight" in many congregations.

Those women who prefer to do their own will by not covering their heads argue that God does not look at the outward appearance or dressing but the heart. This is a grossly misleading argument which has nurtured several licentious practices. The outward appearance or conduct is and should be a reflection of what is in the heart. And Christ said so in Matthew 15:18-20 thus: "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man..." By refusing to obey the command of God, those women who fail to cover their hair in worship and the priests who cover their heads are showing that their hearts are far from God. (Matthew 15:7-9; Isaiah 29:13,14) Indeed, those who follow the opinions and traditions of men and serve God loosely are indulging in vain worship.

It is in view of this that we go all out to draw people's attention to the truth as stated in the Holy Bible, not for the love of controversy as some say, or with the view of embarrassing anybody, but in the interest of the sheep of God who want to practise His righteousness so as to be saved.

Regrettably, many professed Christians today are behaving like the natural Jews who, instead of adhering to the standards God has laid down for His worshippers, are following the dictates of their hearts thereby falling short of the righteousness of God. St. Paul stated: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they

might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." - Romans 10:1-3

Warning those who refuse to abide by this instruction on covering of hair, St. Paul declared "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." He also stated: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." -1Corinthians 14:37,38. See also 1 Corinthians 11:16; 7:40; Matthew 7:21.

## **SELF-CONTROL**

### **God's Kingdom Advocate** Volume 3 No. 9

The ability of the individual to have mastery over his bodily passions as not to be ruled by his desires or lusts is known as self-control. In the Christian context, it is the abstinence from excess, and from satisfying every creature comfort or bodily appetite in the fear of God.

Today, there are glaring evidences of lack of self-control among many people. They indulge in alcoholism, drug abuse, over-eating, compulsive sex, gambling, smoking, wrathfulness, etc. This has led to broken marriages, indebtedness, high rate of accidents and many cases of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs, including the rampaging HIV/AIDS pandemic), etc.

Self-control, sometimes known in the Bible as temperance, is deeply ingrained in the Christian character, hence the Bible lists it as one of the fruits of the spirit, (Galatians 5:22, 23) and as one of the virtues that we should add to our faith. - 2 Peter 1:5-10.

In his letter to the Christians at Corinth, St. Paul compared the striving for life in God's Kingdom to a race in which the athletes must observe a strict and most laborious discipline in order to win the prize. He added: "...And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible..." (1 Corinthians 9:24-27) In his letter to Timothy his spiritual son, St. Paul spoke in the same vein, stating, "And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully." (2 Timothy 2:5) It is common knowledge that the athlete must observe all the conditions necessary for the contest in regard to diet, regular exercise, self-restraint, chastity, decorum, etc. He must abstain from excessive drinking and loose living which could weaken his ability to perform at his peak. The Christian is required to exercise even a higher degree of discipline or self-control to win the race of salvation by the grace of God.

## **Sin**

Though God made man a free moral agent, yet He gave him the power of reason so that man could do things rationally or wisely by way of self-control. It was the failure to exercise this power that led to the fall of man at the garden of Eden and eventually to the vile conditions under which the world is now living. The Bible account has it that "when the woman (Eve) saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband (Adam) with her; and he did eat". (Genesis 3:6) Consequently, man lapsed from perfection into sin with the result that all mankind were conceived and born in sin. David, a prophet of God declared, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."- Psalm 51:5.

St. Paul gave an insight into the hold which the sinful nature of man has on him when, in his epistle to the Roman believers, he stated: "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with



me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do..." - Romans 7:14-23.

There is thus the conflict between the Christian's inclination to do right and the strong urge to sin. A person may want to do what is right but the negative drives in him, hinder intended behaviour. But a person who finds that he has the tendency to do things contrary to his judgement, prevailing inclination or established conduct should not just give in to such conduct on the ground that "we are all sinners". Rather, he should with prayer to God determine not to give in so as to be freed from those vices lest he becomes a willing tool of the devil. Indeed, any vice that is not resisted but is nurtured or cultivated will, over time, become a habitual characteristic and the person

will become enslaved by or addicted to it. St. Paul stated: "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" - Romans 6:16

In this computer age of "spatial proximity and social distance" - when people are increasingly distant from one another though they live physically close to each other, a number of situations have arisen which tempt people to cultivate negative or unwholesome desires. These include boredom, which creates a hankering for novelty, excitement, change; loneliness which makes one feel unwanted, unloved, ignored, neglected and unappreciated; depression which creates emptiness, sadness, helplessness, and feeling of uselessness. Other factors which also affect the ability to control oneself include rage, hatred, spitefulness, wealth, education, beauty and power. Compare Jeremiah 9:23, 24; Psalm 147:10,11.

## **Some Other Vices**

To better appreciate the issue of self control, it would be useful to x-ray some other vices which pose great dangers to man's physical and most importantly, spiritual well-being. These vices include gluttony, which the Oxford Dictionary defines as "the habitual greed or excess in eating and drinking; inordinate and uncontrolled desire for food". When some people see food, even at public functions, they lose all sense of decorum or even shame in the way they rush at it. They are unable to control their appetite for eating. A newspaper report about Britain's "fattest family" described them as a "greedy family whose hobby was eating". The family of five were said to be "scoffing junk food and sugar around the clock" which left them weighing a "collective 100 stones". (635 kg) The report, carried in the London Daily Express of Wednesday October 20, 2004, at pages 6 and 7 said they "often woke up in the middle of the night and ate a full meal before going back to bed". Between meals the family would eat 48 cakes and 24 doughnuts, washed down with 36 cans of Coke. Feeding alone cost them £300 a week, "not including trips to restaurants". They only trimmed down when a nutritionist warned they were eating 50 times more sugar than the average family, "that they were eating themselves to death, and that just one more stone in weight could kill them".

It should be understood therefore why the prophet Solomon advised: "Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it." (Proverbs 25:16) It is not the quantity of food eaten that makes man happy,

contented and healthy but knowledge of and faith in God and His blessings on the individual worshipper. Moses told the children of Israel in those days that “man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live”. - Deuteronomy 8:3; see also Matthew 4:3,4.

Drunkenness is also significant in the issue of self-control. Because of drunkenness many men and women have suffered economic hardship, sustained injuries or even had their lives cut short through accidents. There was the report of an Australian, Wayne Griffin who, having drunk himself into unconsciousness was picked up by three pranksters who dumped him in an industrial bin where a compactor vehicle picked him up later. As the machine went to work grinding what it had collected, the man woke up from his stupor and started shouting and banging the sides of the vehicle but the driver could not see him or hear him. He would have been killed but for the fact that the driver had cause to come out to put something right at the back of the vehicle. It was then he saw the drunkard and took him to hospital. By then he had already suffered injuries to his arms and ribs. - The Times (of London) September 29, 2005, page 34.

The Bible warns: “Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags...” Knowing that many are enticed by the colour and aroma of alcohol, the Bible further admonishes: “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder...” - Proverbs 23:20, 29-32

Another important area where self-control is needed is sexual drive. It is important for men and women to be able to manage their sexual impulses. Man is made higher than the animals and so is not ruled by instinct. (Job 35:11; Psalm 49:12, 20) Truly, the inability to control this most basic of human desires, has given many a man heart-aches. But for laxity in sexual morality, there would not have been so many cases of rape, sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV/AIDS), divorces, single parenthood, etc. Faced with the AIDS pandemic which is taking millions of lives a year, an increasing number of authorities have now come to accept abstinence as the best way of preventing the disease which some have dubbed the “insurmountable scourge”. This is as it should be. The thrust of the fight against AIDS should be abstinence and not the use of condoms which only promotes sexual promiscuity for which God will punish this sinful world. (Ephesians 5:3-5; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10) But some are wondering how abstinence could be possible in this age of “bizarre dressing and fashion”. While we condemn erotic dressing and anything that excites to sexual lusts, it should be pointed out that both men and women have to practice self-control in order not to fall prey to the wiles of the devil.- Matthew 5:27-30.

Then there is the matter of the use of the tongue. It is vital to exercise restraint over what one says. Apostles James said: “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body” while our Lord Jesus Christ warned: “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned”. (James 3:2; Matthew 12:37) Indeed, “death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof”. (Proverbs 18:21) David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, having this understanding prayed: “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.” (Psalm 141:3) Many interpersonal conflicts

and even wars have been caused by wrong use of words. Hence Apostle James added: "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." - James 1:26. See also Proverbs 13:3; Ephesians 6:11.

What of Wrath? This is "intense anger or indignation; a fit or manifestation of such feeling". The Bible says that he who "hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" and that "the discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression". (Proverbs 25:28; 16:32; 19:11) A Christian should have control over himself even when he is angry. It is generally said that: "prove that you can control yourself and you are an educated man; without this, all other education is good for nothing." It could therefore be understood why St. Paul advised: "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil." (Ephesians 4:26,27) It was due to wrath that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, much to the displeasure of their father Jacob, slew all the males of Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, defiled Dinah their sister. (Genesis 34:18; 34) The event served as a reference point for Jacob when he was blessing his children and His parting words to the two-some were not complimentary. - Genesis 49:5-7.

David twice showed great example of self-control when he refused to kill Saul, who had been seeking his life, when he found him and his lieutenants sleeping. (1 Samuel 26:8,9; see also 24:1-22) In all things one should "be slow to wrath" knowing that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."- James 1:19,20.

Another vice afflicting many people today is the get-rich-quick-syndrome. It is not a sin to be rich, for "The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it". (Proverbs 10:22) Each and every one of us should therefore be contented with what God has blessed us with as it is written: "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content." (1Timothy 6:6-8. See also Matthew 6:25-34) But it is wrong to love money and to crave for wealth at all costs. The Bible says, "He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him". (Proverbs 28:22) St. Paul warned that "the "rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition". (1Timothy 6:9,10-12,17) Those materially endowed should resist vain pleasures and instead use their wealth for the service of God and humanity.

Several other vices which people indulge in due to lack of self-control are listed by St. Paul in Galatians 5:19-21 thus: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." See also 1 Corinthians 6:9,10.

## Admonition

The Scriptures say we must examine ourselves at all times. (2 Corinthians 13:5,6) We must seriously search our hearts whether we actually have self-control and if not, we should examine the reasons for our lack of self-control by carefully questioning and critically assessing ourselves. Some of our traits may initially be seen as positive, their enthralling power may have a relatively weak initial pull for us, but once we are absorbed, it takes hold. It is by recognizing their negative, long term consequences and disapproving of the destructive aspects of the traits, we can reduce, if not eliminate these “blocks”, which St. Paul called “the sin which doth so easily beset us” in order to achieve our more important life goals.- Hebrews 12:1-3.

Those who give free rein to their bodily impulses and do not want to mend their ways do not like exhortations on self control. An instance of this happened when St. Paul was addressing Governor Felix, a man who was said to have ruled “with a mixture of cruelty, lust, and servility” who “thought himself at liberty to commit every sort of crime with impunity”. The record in Acts of Apostles chapter 24 verse 25 has it that as St. Paul's “discourse turned to questions of morals, self-control, and the coming judgement, Felix became alarmed and exclaimed, That will do for the present; when I find it convenient I will send for you again”. (*New English Bible*) The discomfiture of Governor Felix was because the truth was at odds with his immoral life style which he did not want to amend. This should not be the case with true Christians.

To achieve mastery over one's impulses, one must have the knowledge of God. (Job 23:12; Proverbs 6:23) This enables one to know what the will of God is concerning His worshippers. (Ephesians 5:17) Then one should exercise strong faith in what he has read. (1 Corinthians 15:1,2; Hebrews 2:1) Strong faith in God is required for one to put in the effort and time needed to tame what may seem to be the “uncontrollables” and “unchangeables” in one's life and prove that one is rational, realistic and healthy in his thinking, emotions and actions. David prayed “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” (Psalm 51:2) In Isaiah 1:16-17 God Almighty declared: “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well...” It is with the help of God one can turn his back on sin, hence the Bible says that “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps”. (Jeremiah 10:23) One must attune himself to the laws of God by insisting on what is right and praying to God for strength to keep to it always. St. James said: “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”- James 4:7

To achieve self-control it is also helpful to talk to a supportive person. Counselling by a knowledgeable, God fearing person could go a long way in easing the burden of one's emotional torments, thus facilitating the process of achieving self-control. The Bible says that in the “multitude of counsellors there is safety.” - Proverbs 24:6;15:22.

Also, it is important to avoid environments or persons that trigger or encourage compulsive behaviours. It would be careless and even foolish for one to say he cannot break a habit or to blame God in any way if he continues to relate with persons or places that will lure him back to sin. Apostle James declared: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and

enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” (James 1:13-15) Ahab did not have the heart to kill Naboth nor had Amnon the boldness to rape his sister but for the negative influence of Jezebel and Jonadab respectively. - 1 Kings 21:1-19; 2 Samuel 13:1-33;

Truly has the Bible admonished, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners”. (1 Corinthians 15:33) Moreover the Prophet Solomon stated: “Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding” (Proverbs 9:6) and that “if sinners entice thee, consent thou not”. (Proverbs 1:10) The Bible also states: “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed”. - Proverbs 13:20.

Seeking the interest of others by getting immersed in positive activities such as church work, community projects, counselling and recreational activities, helps one to replace the negative behaviour with positive ones, takes him away from the situations that trigger unwholesome behaviour and serves as antidote when temptations threaten. (See Philippians 2:1-5). One needs to constantly ask himself this question, “Am I making full use of my time right now?” Ephesians 5:16.

The realization that lack of self-control leads to vanity, vexation of spirit and death should spur one to keep working on oneself to overcome his areas of weakness. But those who scorn and refuse to change will regret in the end.- Proverbs 9:12; Ephesians 5:6.

Many people, including professed Christians, have found themselves living virtually all their adult lives under great stress because of the struggle to secure themselves against future calamity, such as poverty, disease and death. However despite all their efforts, they instead end up being captive to greater anxiety and ill-health. The Bible says: “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”. - Philippians 4: 5-7.

## **Blessings**

Blessings abound from the ability to control oneself. These include peace of mind, clear conscience, good health, respect of godly people, happy married life, etc. Such a one will be prosperous and wise and live a longer, more satisfying life and be saved in God's Kingdom by His grace. Elihu, one of Job's friends declared: “Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge”. - Job 36:9-12.

We should learn to exercise self-control and look to God always. He has promised He will always be with us and not fail us. St. Paul exhorted: “Stay away from the love of money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, I will never, never fail you nor forsake you. That is why we can say without any doubt or fear, 'The

Lord is my Helper and I am not afraid of anything that mere man can do to me' "-  
Hebrews 13:5, 6 (*Living Bible*)

## The Penny Reward

### God's Kingdom Advocate, Vol. 3, No. 10

One of the parables given by Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry was that of a man who called workers into his vineyard and at the end of the day, gave each of them a penny. In the parable, known generally as the parable of "The Workers in the Vineyard", Jesus Christ stressed the certainty of Jehovah's promise of everlasting life for His children who maintain the faith until the end and asserted the prerogative of God Almighty to give life to the faithful according to His will.

The account as recorded in St. Matthew's Gospel chapter 20 verses 1-16, states that the man, identified severally as an householder, the Lord of the vineyard, and the goodman of the house, went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard, (a piece of land where grapevines are grown), and agreed with them for the wage of a penny a day. When the householder went out about the third hour, (around 9.00 a.m.), and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, he immediately invited them to go and work in the vineyard, promising that they would be given "whatsoever is right", that is, their due reward at the end of the day. The householder engaged more labourers about the sixth hour (12.00 noon) and at the ninth hour (3.00 p.m.). When he went out at the eleventh hour (5.00 p.m.) - which was just one hour before the end of the day - he still found some people standing idle and therefore said to them, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" and when they replied that it was because no man had hired them, "He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive". (verses 6, 7)

When it was time for them to be paid however, those who came earlier, murmured as they all got a penny each. Naturally, they expected that they would be paid more than those who came later, especially as payment started with those who came last. They murmured: "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day." But he answered saying: "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?" (verse 12) The householder argued that he had the right to do what he chose with his money and that they should even be grateful for his generosity. Jesus Christ then concluded by saying: "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen." Verse 16.

### Meaning

The word "parable", is derived from a Greek word, parabole, which means, "to compare things together, to form a parallel or similitude of them with other things".

Long before our Lord Jesus Christ was born into this sinful world, many prophecies were made about him. One of them was that he would teach the people in parables. David, a king and prophet in Israel, was inspired by God to prophesy concerning Jesus Christ thus: "My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding. I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp". (Psalm 49:3, 4) He stated further, "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old". - Psalm 78:2.

In fulfilment of these prophecies, when Jesus Christ came to this world, he delivered a good portion of his homilies by way of parables. The gospels say that “with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them”. However, when he was alone with his disciples, “he expounded all things to them”. (Mark 4:33, 34. See also Matthew 13:34, 35) Jesus Christ explained his reasons for using parables in response to a question by his disciples on the issue, as it is written: “And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.” - Matthew 13:10-13; see also Mark 4:11, 12; Luke 8:9, 10.

The interpretation of the parable of the workers in the vineyard is as follows:

The Householder, (also referred to in the parable as the “Goodman of the house” and “The Lord”, as earlier stated): In this parable, the “man that is an householder” is the Almighty God, JEHOVAH, the Creator of the heavens and the earth who will save His people through Jesus Christ. The Bible states that “The earth is the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” - Psalm 24:1; See also Psalm 33:6-9; 90:2; 93:2; 104:2-4, Jeremiah 10: 12; Genesis 1:1-31; etc.

The “Vineyard” stands for the kingdom of God that would be set up in these last days, where His sheep would be called through His servants to work for their own salvation. (Isaiah 5: 7) This kingdom is a place of safety where all the needs of man would be met by God Himself in the same manner the “householder” met the needs of the labourers by paying them their due wages.

The different times in which the labourers were called - in the morning, the third, the sixth, the ninth and the eleventh hours - show the different times people of God are called into His Kingdom, the expansion of the Kingdom being a gradual process. Others would come when they are middle aged, and some in old age - yet, they are all given the opportunity to prove themselves or work out their own salvation. (Philippians 2:12) Some would even have the special grace to pass through from this present world to eternal life in the world to come. Moreover, the different times reflect separate historical periods. Whether one did the work in ancient times or in the time of Christ or in this age of the end of the world, the important thing is what one makes of the call, in that one must labour diligently until the end in order to get salvation by the grace of God.

Grace: Another issue highlighted in the parable is that salvation is a matter of grace. Nobody can of his own accord come into the Kingdom except he is called. It is the Father's good pleasure to invite all people of goodwill, the meek who want to work, into His service. Jesus Christ himself said: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” He said further,



“... Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father”. -John 6: 44, 65.

The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that the Father has committed the work of gathering people to His dear Son, Jesus Christ the righteous, hence Christ said: “ I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John14:6) This work of gathering the people took a greater dimension after Christ's resurrection when the saints were anointed and the gospel started spreading beyond the confines of the Jewish nation, thus fulfilling the statement of Jesus Christ who said: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” - John 12: 32.

A striking example of how God calls His people is given in the book of Acts chapter 16 verse 14, which states that when Paul and Barnabas arrived Macedonia, and preached to those who were at the beach, one of those who heard them was “a certain woman named Lydia, which worshipped God, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul”.

Even: The next point is the meaning of “even” in the parable. This is an old way of saying “evening”, which is the end of a day, representing this age of the end of the world when God will judge the world in righteousness and render to every man according to his works. Apostle Paul addressing the Roman Christians stated that God “will render to every man according to his deeds”. (Romans 2:6, 7; see also Romans 14:12; Matthew 16:27; Revelation 22:12) As the householder entered into a contract with the workers and fulfilled his promise to them so God Almighty will keep His promise to His children in due course by His grace. Saint Paul, exhorting true Christians on this said: “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” - Hebrews 6:10-12.

Penny: The “penny” was the reward the 'goodman of the house` gave to each person. It was the day's wage for workmen in the time of Christ. The penny stands for everlasting life, salvation or eternal life. Apostle John wrote: “And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.”(1 John 2:25; 5:11) This promise is sure. We should not doubt it. Hence Saint Paul spoke of the “hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.” (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18) Salvation, which is complete deliverance from sin and its consequences including death, is the prerogative of the LORD which He gives to His faithful worshippers as a matter of grace. (Ephesians 2:8, 9) The Psalmist stated: “Salvation belongeth unto the LORD...” (Psalm 3:8) Again, he went on to say that, “He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto GOD the Lord belong the issues from death.” - Psalm 68:20.

God will give eternal life to all His faithful worshippers regardless of age, gender, position or status, no matter how long they served, whether it is for the duration of their lives or shortly before God destroys the world. That is why St. Jude spoke of “the common salvation” (Jude 8) while St. Paul asserted that as far as this important promise of God was concerned, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female”, adding “for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”. - Galatians 3:28.

To labour until the evening or the end of one's life requires faith, patience, understanding and, above all, the grace of God. (2 Peter 1:5-11) Jesus Christ stated: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." (Matthew 24:12, 13) Moreover, St. Paul exhorted Christians thus: "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise...Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Hebrews 10:35,36,38,39.

St. Peter expounded on the fate of those who backslide in the following words: "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." - 2 Peter 2:20-22.

The Steward: The "steward" in the parable stands for the immediate disciples of Christ, his cabinet members, known as the apostles or saints, whose number is a hundred and forty and four thousand. They are the ones vested with the authority to call, gather or fish out the children of God, known in the parable as "labourers" into the Lord's kingdom fold. In Jeremiah 16:16 they are called "hunters" and "fishers". It would be recalled that Jesus Christ told his immediate disciples he would make them "fishers of men". - Matthew 4:18-22.

The remaining ones among the apostles or saints, known as the remnant will be chosen in this age to continue the gathering work. Jesus Christ made this clear in Matthew 24:31, where he stated: "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Aside from the apostles, their helpers or children in the Lord who share in their grace, would also be used by Him to call His children into His Kingdom.

### Conclusion

It is evident from the parable that it is not the volume of work one does or the length of time spent in the service of God that matters but the quality of the work in the sight of God. It is for this reason that Apostle Paul warned Christians to be careful in what they do in the service of God to ensure that they obtain a full reward, by His grace. He declared: "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." - 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. See also 2 John verse 8.

The statement of St. Paul that some people's work "shall be burned", though they will still get salvation means that such people will get salvation without other accompanying rewards because of their poor heart condition which was reflected in the quality of their work in the service of God. This again emphasizes the importance of serving God with a clean heart always, hence David the prophet declared: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart". He also prayed thus: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." - Psalm 73:1; 51:10; see also Psalm 125:4; Jeremiah 17:7,8; Romans 2:6, 7; etc.

There is no doubt that by the parable of The Workers in the Vineyard, Jesus Christ impressed on all Christians this very important truth: that the matter of reward is under Jehovah's sovereign control. Certainly, the Judge of all the earth, will do justly always, by giving "what is right" to whomsoever will do His will until the end. - Genesis 18:25.

May God help us to keep the faith pure and inviolate until the end so as to get the promised "Penny Reward" by His grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Advocate Number 3 No. 16, January – March 2008

### JEHOVAH, A STRONGHOLD IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE

By His supreme power and complete control over the entire forces in the universe the Almighty God is the only place of refuge and trust for His people.

It is for this reason the admonition is given in Nahum 1:7 thus: “The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.”

A stronghold is a place that is secure and safe, because it is well fortified. God is able to provide protection to His people because, being the ‘Almighty God’, He “is greater than all”. (John 10:29; Genesis 17:1; Jeremiah 32:17, 27) As a loving Father, God Almighty is compassionate, pitiful, merciful, and sympathetic. - Psalm 103:8-14. See also Isaiah 63:7-9.

The Almighty God does not take pleasure in the death of anyone. He is longsuffering towards them, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”. - Ezekiel 18: 23,32; 2 Peter 3:9.

#### The fall of man

Right from the time man fell from the favour of God in the Garden of Eden and the sentence of death was passed upon him, he has not known peace. (Genesis 3:16-19; Job 5:6,7; Job 14:1) These “troubles” have become more intense in this time known as the last days, an era which started in 1914 when the devil was driven down to this earth and which event was signalled by the First World War of 1914-1918. - Revelation 12:12; 2 Timothy 3:13.

The economic, political and social conditions in the world will continue to get worse and worse until the time of the great tribulation when the devil and his hosts will be destroyed by God through Jesus Christ, Jehovah's ‘battle axe and weapon of war’. Only those who have remained faithful to God will be saved. - Jeremiah 51:20-23; Daniel 12:1; see also Isaiah 26:20,21; Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13

#### Look to God

Many people today do not know that JEHOVAH is the sacred name of God Almighty, and that they should call on Him when they are in trouble. Rather they look to their wealth, military strength, spiritual powers, false gods, false prophets, and so on, contrary to the Bible. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 2:19, 20; Psalm 62:10; 33:16-19; Psalm 20:7; Proverbs 21:31) The Bible says: “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.” - Psalm 146:3, 4; Compare Jeremiah 17:5, 6; Psalm 46:1-3; Jeremiah 17:7,8.

#### Examples

The Almighty God Himself made a clarion call to His people to exercise faith in Him at all times so as to be protected and saved from the assaults of the devil. Instances abound in the Holy Bible of the end of those who trusted in other gods rather than in God Almighty and the divine protection enjoyed by those who trusted in Him by His grace. Let us call to mind the case of King Ahaziah who sought help from Baalzebub, the god of Ekron rather than in the Almighty God as a result of which he died in his sickness. (2 Kings 1:1-17) During the reign of King Jehoshaphat, there was a time the people of Judah were surrounded by their enemies, but they were saved because they trusted in God. They did not even fight, they only came to gather the spoil. ( 2 Chronicles 20:15-30) There are also other instances when God delivered His people from danger in miraculous ways.

Some of them are given below.

David: In one of their many military engagements with Israel, the Philistines put forward a giant called Goliath, a gigantic man, whose height was six cubits and a span, which is about 10 feet, 5 inches. The Jews were unable to confront this giant even though he was mouthing blasphemies against God until David came and defeated him by virtue of his strong faith in God. 1 Samuel 17:1-57.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were Jews in captivity in Babylon where they were chosen to live in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon and were renamed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Time came when the King made an image of gold 90 ft high and nine ft wide and ordered everyone to worship the image and that whoever would not worship the image was to be thrown into a burning fiery furnace. The three faithful Jews bluntly refused even before the king to worship his gods or his image of gold. As a result, the king gave instruction that they should be thrown into the fiery furnace. But to the astonishment of the king, the fire had no power over their bodies. Rather, God Almighty Whom they trusted in refusing to obey the king's order did deliver them. "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."- Daniel 3:1-7, 16-18.

After asking them to come out of the fire, Nebuchadnezzar and his princes, governors, captains, and the counsellors, beheld with wonder the three Jews, "upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them". The King then made a declaration directing all peoples in his domain to fear God or else they "shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort." - Daniel 3:28, 29.

Peter: In the time of the early Church, Herod stretched out his hand to persecute the believers. He killed James, the apostle with the sword and since this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also in order to kill him. But the Church without ceasing prayed for his deliverance. An angel of God came and opened the prison doors and led him out. - Acts 12:1-19.

Paul and Silas: When Paul and Silas were cast into prison for healing a girl who had an evil spirit, they sang praises to God in the night and the prison doors were miraculously opened, and all the shackles on them were loosened by the grace of God. Alarmed, the Jailor, supposing that the prisoners had fled, wanted to kill himself, but was prevented by St. Paul. He was so moved by the experience that he and his family joined the faith and were baptized. The next morning the magistrates ordered the apostles to be freed. - Acts 16:13-34

## Strong Tower

In the book of Proverbs chapter 18 verse 10, Solomon, a prophet of God, was inspired to state: "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." In time of old, a tower afforded a place of refuge to those who escape into it. In case of an invasion and even when the city was subdued, the tower, by and large, remained impregnable, generally. So God is a strong and safe protector of His people.

How do people of God run to Him? They do so by exercising faith in Him, by way of belief in His promises and by doing His will. Such ones will be protected and saved by Him. -Psalm 18:1-3. See also Psalm 9:9, 10.

The Psalmist further declared: "They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever." (Psalms 125:1, 2) For the fact that He understands the imaginations of the hearts of men, He is able to show Himself strong on the faithful by His grace. - 2 Chronicles 16:9.

## Prayer

Prayer is the formal act of making requests to God. It is also an act of worship. It involves casting all our cares upon God knowing that He cares for us. (1 Peter 5:7) One needs faith, accurate knowledge of God, understanding, patience and fear of God for one's prayer to be effective. All peoples of the world who desire the salvation of God must come to Him in prayers. - Psalm 65:2; Psalm 121:1-8.

Having known that the Almighty God Jehovah is our stronghold in the day of trouble, we should not be unduly anxious or worried about how to sort out our problems knowing that He will handle them for us. Said St. Paul: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus". - Philippians 4:6, 7.

In a similar vein, Isaiah the prophet was inspired to state: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength."- Isaiah 26:3, 4.

Moreover the Bible states: "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call."- Joel 2:32.

May the Almighty God sustain His people in His Way so as to be protected from this evil world and saved in His Kingdom when fully established by His grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## THE SECRET OF TRUE PROSPERITY

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There is no one who does not want to be prosperous or successful in every aspect of life. Apart from being strong in body and mind, each person wants to be successful in his domestic relations, in his trade, profession or any other activity. It is reassuring that God Almighty has these ends in view for His people, if only they would be diligent in obeying His voice.

The word “secret” means “known to very few people and consequently quiet and secluded”. “Prosperity” is the condition of enjoying wealth, success, or good fortune. Prosperity in the context of this sermon does not mean increase in material wealth only but also growth in spiritual qualities that enables one to be in good standing with God and men. The adjective true which qualifies prosperity shows that while some types of prosperity are genuine, others are counterfeit or artificial. Everyone should be concerned with how to get lasting prosperity and not the one that is transient or temporary. Apostle John stated: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” - 3 John 2.

### **Power to make rich**

Some people think that those who serve God will continue to wallow in abject poverty, as if want is a mark of righteousness. That thinking is not correct. Even though the degree of blessing would not be the same for everybody, there is no one who serves God diligently and faithfully who will not be blessed spiritually and materially in this present world and more abundantly in the world to come.

God Almighty declared through Jeremiah the prophet: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” (Jeremiah 29:11) Earlier, David the prophet had confessed: “Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.” (1 Chronicles 29:12) The power of God to raise those in low estate to make them enjoy His riches is also highlighted in the song of Hannah, the second wife of Elkanah, when her prayer for a male child was answered by God. She stated: “The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them.” - 1 Samuel 2:7, 8.

Indeed, those who patiently continue to look to God will be raised by Him by and by. Scripture says: “For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.” - Psalm 75:6, 7.

Even though God has provided enough resources for the inhabitants of the earth to be able to meet their needs, yet not everybody is able to afford three square meals a day because of the interference of the devil and the greed of a few persons. There is a tendency therefore for some among the few who are rich to assume that they became wealthy as a result of their intelligence, discipline, hard work and so on. Though these



factors cannot be discounted in wealth creation and accumulation, yet they do not on their own enable one to get rich, for, unless God gives one the strength and wisdom to make good use of opportunities He had provided, no one would be able to realize his ambition.

This understanding should make those who are rich to be humble and to have regard for their fellow men. Moses the servant of God exhorted thus: "Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day." - Deuteronomy 8:11-14, 17, 18

It should be stated however that material prosperity is not possible without skills, hardwork, frugality, moderate living, patience and above all the grace of God. Those who are preoccupied with what has become known as "prosperity gospel" today tend to downplay these qualities, as if riches would fall on the laps of those who folds their hands and do nothing. Scripture says: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men." (Proverbs 22:29) Certainly, riches do not come overnight, but are gathered gradually over time by His grace. (Proverbs 13:11) Futhermore, it is not everybody who will be rich as "the poor shall never cease out of the land" (Deuteronomy 15:11) The Lord would bless the faithful who are not rich materially, in other ways, as it pleases Him. The fact remains however that God will always provide the basic needs of each of His worshippers in fulfillment of the prayer "give us this day our daily bread". The Bible says: "The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all." - Proverbs 22:2.

### **Counterfeit Prosperity**

God does not give out His blessings indiscriminately; He blesses only those who serve Him faithfully. It follows therefore that the riches of those who are irreligious and wicked do not come from Him but from the devil, the "god of this world". (2 Corinthians 4:4) That the devil blesses people who do his bidding could be deduced from what happened during the temptation of Jesus Christ. The Bible says that after the devil had taken Jesus Christ into a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, he said to him: "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." - Matthew 4:8-10.

David the prophet was disturbed by the anomaly whereby good people suffer while the wicked wallow in riches, and consequently declared: "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." (Psalm 73:1-3) He added: "They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth." - verses 8, 9.

This situation continued to engage his mind “until he went into the sanctuary of God”, that is, he sought the knowledge of God, and then he understood their end. He then declared: “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.” - verses 18, 19.

The problem highlighted by David the prophet also drew the attention of one of the friends of Job - Zophar, the Nasmathite - who asked: “Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?” -Job 21:7-15.

Zophar went on to proffer a resolution to the problem he posed by stressing the transience of ill-gotten wealth and of persons who become rich through injustice and oppression, as it is written: “Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?” - Job 20:4-7.

In view of this understanding therefore, no one should aspire to become rich through fraudulent means as God would eventually scatter such riches and the person will suffer an untimely end. Said David the prophet, “I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.” (Psalm 37:35, 36) Moreover, God spoke through His prophet Jeremiah thus: “As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.” -Jeremiah 17:11.

The deceitfulness of riches also affected the Church of the Laodiceans such that they strove solely for material possessions rather than spiritual riches. Jesus Christ warned them in this wise: “Because thou sayest, 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: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.” -Revelation 3:17,18; see also Luke 12: 15-21.

From the knowledge of the Bible, and the benefit of experience over time, we know that those who get their wealth by wicked means suffer from anxieties, evil conscience, and regrets. They are not able to sleep peacefully. Though they may have all that the heart can desire, though they spend enormous time and energy to secure themselves and their past, yet the evil manner they acquired their wealth will continue to haunt them. (Compare Ecclesiastes 5:12) But the blessing from God does not trouble the receiver; he would peacefully and happily enjoy them. Solomon, who was not a whit behind anybody in his generation in terms of wisdom and wealth, knew this and confessed: “The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.” - Proverbs 10:22.

## True Prosperity

True prosperity comes from God Almighty - "for the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof". (Psalm 24:1) It was for this reason, David, a prophet and King in Israel, who also tasted of the goodness of God in large measure, stated: "Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness endureth for ever." (Psalm 112:1-3; see also Psalm 1:1-3) The secret of true prosperity therefore lies in diligently keeping the commandments of God, so as to be blessed in this world and in the world to come, hence, God Almighty told His servant Joshua "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. -Joshua 1:8. See also Psalm 1:1-6.

Another point that needs to be emphasized is the importance of good heart condition or sincerity as a requirement for true prosperity. Accordingly, Apostle Paul charged Christians: "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." (Colossians 3:23, 24) Hezekiah the king served God honestly and was blessed for so doing, as it is written: "And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the LORD his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered." - 2 Chronicles 31:20-21.

A good heart condition produces the fruits of humility and faithfulness in God's service. All such ones will be raised to positions of prominence in the way of God. Solomon the king stated: "By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life." (Proverbs 22:4. See also Proverbs 18:12) Those who are humble are not only teachable, they are also contrite in spirit, and this enables them to accept their faults and refrain from sin. Elihu, one of the companions of Job made this point clear when he declared: "Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures." -Job 36:9-11

Again, the true worshipper who wants to prosper must be steadfast in God's service. The Lord will always keep His promises to those who continue to be on His side of favour. The Bible shows that Uzziah the king of Judah "sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God" and that "as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper". (2 Chronicles 26:5) But when he violated the law of His Maker, having become intoxicated with power, he was stricken with leprosy and died in that condition. - verses 16-23.

Another way to achieve true prosperity is to support the work of God. This could be through the use of one's gifts mental, spiritual, physical and material in support of the work of God. Those who want the work of God to prosper will be prospered also themselves. (Psalm 122:6,7) An important aspect of support for the work of God is

through the faithful and regular payment of tithes and offerings. Some people are very tightfisted when it comes to supporting the work of God; but they spend a fortune on themselves. Some of the natural Jews in the days of Haggai the prophet were guilty of this and God Almighty rebuked them, as it is written: "Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house." -Haggai 1:5-9.

Those who fail to pay tithes are actually robbing God. Such people are in the words of God through Malachi the prophet, "cursed with a curse" and will not prosper. To prevent His worshippers from falling into this lamentable situation, God Almighty charged His worshippers: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts." - Malachi 3:10-12.

Furthermore, Apostle Paul exhorted the Christians at Corinth on the issue of liberality in the service of God in this wise: "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." - 2 Corinthians 9:6-8; see also Matthew 6:19-21; Philippians 4:17-19.

Besides, we are admonished through Solomon the prophet thus: "Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." - Proverbs 3:9,10

May the Almighty God help His people everywhere to do His will at all times so as to be given His true riches in this world and in the world to come everlasting life by His grace through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

## **The Parable of the Unjust Steward**

### **God's Kingdom Advocate, Vol. 3, No. 14**

The Parable of the Unjust Steward is a mystery to many. While some are bewildered as to why the parable should, as it were, promote unfaithfulness and outright fraud as a means of hedging oneself against penury, others wonder why Jesus Christ would exhort Christians to make friends with mammon (wealth, riches, or earthly goods) which he himself has described as unrighteous. There are also others who are unable to

understand why a dodgy steward should be commended for the “finesse” with which he cheated on his master.

The parable as recorded in Luke chapter 16 says that a certain rich man accused his steward of having wasted his goods. When he called him to give account, he found him wanting and so decided to do away with his services. The steward then said to himself: “What shall I do? For my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed”. (verses 1-3) Knowing that his master would not retain his services because of the extent of his misdeeds, he then decided to meet each of the lord's debtors and arrange with them to reduce their bills by between 20 to 50 per cent. The Steward stated: “I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil, And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore”. - verses 4 -7.

Ironically, instead of joining issues with his servant for what he had done, the lord in the parable “commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely”. Jesus Christ then asserted that “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light”. He then added: “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.” - verses 8,9

## **Interpretation**

It had long ago been prophesied in the Scriptures that Jesus Christ will speak to the people in parables and by it utter dark sayings of old. (Psalm 78:2; 49:4) The Parable of the Unjust Steward serves to admonish worshippers of God to serve Him actively and faithfully so as to be blessed in the end.

In unraveling the paradoxical elements in this parable, it is vital to point out that it is not unconnected with the parables in the preceding chapter, such as that of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son. In these parables, Jesus Christ, highlighted the mercies of God in bringing His children who had gone astray back to Himself. Jesus Christ, building on this same theme in the Parable of the Unjust Steward, highlighted a salient quality which those who have received the grace to come back to God should have in order to serve Him acceptably. That quality is that of planning for their future in God's Kingdom by making full use of the opportunity they now have to do things that are pleasing to Him so that they would on the basis of their stewardship receive honourable places in God's Kingdom fully established.

A steward is one who is given charge of the affairs of a family or household. A lot of trust is therefore reposed in him. Only servants who have proved themselves over time to be prudent, honest and trustworthy are given the position of stewards. To one who is faithful, the position is a stepping stone to a higher social status. But it is also an office

which creates room for dishonesty, waste and embezzlement. The steward in the parable fell victim of these vices. He had charge of the rich man's goods, but instead of being faithful (see 1 Corinthians 4:2), he was corrupt and wasted the goods of his master. The day of reckoning came when his master called on him to give account. Knowing the fate that awaited him, he decided to meet his master's debtors to doctor the accounts, obviously, so that they would help him by the time he loses his position. His "foresight" then informed the praise of his master in verse nine of Luke chapter 16 which the King James version renders thus: "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations". The New Living Translation puts the text this way: "I tell you, use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. In this way, your generosity stores up a reward for you in heaven". ("Heaven" in this context does not mean that every good person will go to heaven but that the person will be rewarded in God's order of things in His Kingdom fully established.)

Jesus Christ's declaration that we should make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness thus means that we should make ourselves friends of God Almighty and Jesus Christ by means of the wealth God has blessed us with, so that at the time when the world will be destroyed and money will be useless, He will save us by virtue of the faithful deeds we had done, by His grace. (Genesis 22:1-17; 2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23; John 15:13-15) The fact that money will in course of time become useless will readily be appreciated if we recall that once there is a change of currency, all the old notes and coins cease to be legal tender.

As the steward made plans to have friends, comfort, and a home by using the means at his disposal to secure his future, so Christians should use their material endowments to support the work of God and help their fellow man so as to secure comfort, peace and salvation in God's Kingdom fully established.

## **Faithfulness A Christian Virtue**

It is the commendation given the unjust steward by his lord (i.e. his master) and the exhortation by Jesus Christ to Christians to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness that several Bible students find problematic. It should be pointed out right away that the Bible does not in any way recommend dishonesty or fraud, whether by servants to their masters or by any one. Rather, the Holy Bible persistently charges us, as Christians, to be faithful in any capacity we find ourselves.

In his letter to Titus, Apostle Paul, writing in regard to those who are under servitude, voluntarily or involuntarily, declared as follows: "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things...Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things". (Titus 2:9, 10) To purloin means to steal (especially something of small value). It is sheer dishonesty for those under authority to covet what belongs to their masters or employers. Rather, they should show "all good fidelity" or honesty in handling what has been put into their care. That way, they present the Christian faith in good light to their masters. Jesus Christ declared: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven". - Matthew 5:16.

Apostle Paul further exhorts: “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eye service, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free”. - Ephesians 6:5-8.

Those who are in positions of trust and responsibility as religious, political or business leaders should not abuse the opportunity by enriching themselves. In Leviticus chapter 19 verses 11 and 13, God Almighty commanded the children of Israel thus: “...Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him...” (See also Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:6) Instead of engaging in fraudulent practices and refusing to work, each person should labour to earn an honest living and thereby be of help to others, including the old, the young, the sick and the poor. -2 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Corinthians 4:12; Acts 20:35.

Rather than infidelity, what the Bible encourages is faithfulness. In Proverbs 28:20, the Bible says: “A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.” In the drive to be rich at all costs many have lied, robbed, blackmailed and oppressed their fellow men; some have even killed. But such approach to wealth leads ultimately to ruin. The Bible states: “He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him”. - Proverbs 28:22; see also Jeremiah 17:11.

Moreover, in his letter to Timothy, St. Paul wrote of the danger which comes from the love of money. He declared: “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” -1 Timothy 6:9, 10.

These facts have been highlighted to show that the Bible totally condemns what the servant did as his attitude could only have brought great loss to his master.

### **Go to the Mountains**

Worshippers of God are enjoined by Him to work hard to enable them help themselves and the needy. In their quest for material things however, they should do things in the fear of God and be patient. Solomon says: “Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase”. (Proverbs 13:11) In chapter 10 verse 22 it is written: “The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it”. Having been blessed by God by His grace, Christians should not hoard their wealth or turn a blind eye to His work .

Thus, in Haggai 1:8, we are admonished to: “Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD”. Many of the natural Jews in the time of Haggai the prophet were greedy and selfish, and so allowed the house of God to lie waste. As a result, God withheld His blessings from them. (verses 9-11) The people of God are enjoined to work hard so as to be blessed

by Him with riches (or mammon of unrighteousness) in order to use them to support His work. They should not therefore refuse to use such wealth for the promotion of His work on earth. In Matthew 6:19-21, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ exhorted: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also".

Whoever says he is serving God but does not show love to his fellow man by way of doing good to him whenever the opportunity comes, is yet to mature in understanding. "But whoso hath this world's good," asserts Apostle John, "and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth". - 1 John 3:17,18; compare John 13:34,35.

It is by using their wealth to support the work of God that the rich will get life in God's Kingdom. They should not think their wealth is a source of defence or protection and therefore turn it into an object of worship. David the prophet stated: "Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them." (Psalm 62:10; see also Proverbs 23:5) Also, Jesus Christ gave a stern warning to his disciples concerning trusting in material things when he stated: "...Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." (Luke 12:15) He then gave a parable about a Rich Fool, who, having stored immense wealth felt at peace with himself. Concluding Jesus Christ said: "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God". - Luke 12:20, 21.

The man who is liberal in the work of God will not go a-begging. David the prophet stated: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread". - Psalm 37:25; see also Proverbs 13:7.

All the wealth in the universe belongs to God. (Psalm 24:1) He gives them to us to glorify His name by supporting His work, taking care of ourselves and helping the needy. It is by using the blessings of God for His service that we demonstrate that we owe our lives and all we have to Him and that we are appreciative of His goodness on us. (1 Chronicles 29:11-15) It is by such tokens of faith in God that He will give to us "the true riches" in God's Kingdom fully established. Hence Jesus Christ made an important inference from the parable of the Unjust Steward when he asserted: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, (the blessings and provisions from God Almighty, 1 Corinthians 4:7; Deuteronomy 8:18, 19) who shall give you that which is your own?"- Luke 16:10-12. (Parenthesis ours)



The point must be made that this world has an end. Time is coming when the devil and everything that answers to unrighteousness will be wiped off the surface of the earth by God Almighty through Jesus Christ. That day of reckoning will definitely come anytime within these last days. But as Jesus Christ said, "... of that day and hour knoweth no man..." (Matthew 24:36) In the book of Zephaniah, the prophet under inspiration stated: "The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly..." The record further states: "Neither their silver nor their gold

shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land". -Zephaniah 1:14-18.

As the Bible says, at that time, money or riches will be of no avail in securing anyone salvation as it is written: "Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death". (Proverbs 11:4) Those who use their material endowments to support the work of God, thereby laying up for themselves treasures in heaven, are wise. (Matthew 6:19-21) St. Paul also wrote in this vein when he stated: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." - 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Because St. Paul was anxious that the Christians should do works that will stand them in good stead in future, he told the Philippians thus: "Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." (Philippians 4:17) He also warned that worshippers should serve God with honesty, diligence and steadfastness in order to get a full reward when he wrote: "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. ..Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire". -1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Let us therefore resolve to imbibe the over riding virtue of using our blessings for the service of God and humanity so that when they (our material possessions) fail, God may receive us into "everlasting habitations", which is God's Kingdom fully established.

May God Almighty in His infinite mercy give His sheep the understanding and faith to invest their time, energy and material resources in His work so as to lay up in "store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come," by His grace and power through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## RANSOM SACRIFICE

The word "ransom," refers to the price or payment made to set free a prisoner or slave. The price is considered the equivalent of the person who is thereby freed from liabilities and charges.

"Ransom Sacrifice", is one of the ten fundamental doctrines of the Holy Bible. The sermon denotes the immeasurable love which God has for man by which He sent His only begotten Son to die in place of sinful mankind. Apostle John states in 1 John 4:9,10 thus: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins". And in John 3:16, Jesus Christ himself states: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

### **Life Lost**

The question of ransom arose because of the life man lost in the Garden of Eden. After creating Adam and putting him in the beautiful Garden, God Almighty gave him a law to the effect that he could eat of every fruit in the garden except the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:16, 17) But the devil came in the form of a serpent and lured Eve into eating the fruit after which she "gave also unto her husband...and he did eat". (Genesis 3:1-6) The consequence of that disobedience was

The sentence of death God passed on Adam, which among other things, reads thus: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return". - Genesis 3:16-19

As a result of the fall of Adam, the entire human race came short of the glory of God, having been born in sin. (Romans 3:9,19,23) David the prophet declared: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me". (Psalm 51:5) Because man has been in the bondage of death due to sin, Apostle Paul stated: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned". Romans 5:12

For man to be free from the bondage of inherited sin, there must be a remedy for the life lost in the Garden of Eden. This remedy must be equivalent to the value of the perfect life which Adam had in consonance with the divine rule that a (perfect) life must go for a (perfect) life. (Deuteronomy 19:21) It was not possible for any one among the sons of men to pay back the life lost by Adam, since they were all born in sin. Who then will pay the price for man's transgression? Who will ransom man from the bondage of sin and death? Jesus Christ was willing to carry out that duty and to him the task was assigned. - John 10:15, 17, 18; Romans 7:24, 25.

### **Shadows**

It is worthy of note that even in passing the sentence on the serpent, God Almighty had in verse 15 of Genesis chapter 3 stated that, though the serpent (satan the devil) will initially bruise the heel of the seed, the seed of the woman (Jesus Christ, Galatians 3:16) will eventually bruise the head of the serpent (Romans 16:20).

In several other places in the Old Testament, God Almighty, by express declarations and by picture language, gave the promise that He will redeem man from the burden of sin and death. The blood sprinkled on the door posts of the Jews on the night of Passover, so that the destroying angel will pass over their houses, (Exodus 12:1-30) foreshadowed the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Apostle Paul states: "...For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us". - 1 Corinthians 5:7.

Another pointer to the need for man's redemption was the law God Almighty gave His servant Moses while the Jews were in the wilderness, on the payment to the Lord of half a shekel, by every male in Israel from 20 years old and above "as a ransom for his soul". The law further states that: "The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less" - the benefit of redemption is offered equally to all; it is not a function of money. It should also be noted that the atonement money was for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, now represented by Jesus Christ, "A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man". - Exodus 30:15; [compare Numbers 3:40-51]; Hebrews 8:2.

Also, in time of old, the Jews had a Day of Atonement, which marked the end of ten days of penitence, to cleanse the individual from defilement on that day, the priest, clad in holy linen garments, made an atonement for him-self, his family and for all the assembly of Israel, killing the bullock of the sin offering, sprinkling the blood on the mercy seat, killing the goat of the sin-offering and selecting the scapegoat on whose head was confessed the transgression of Israel for the year just passed. Thereafter, the sin-laden goat was led to wander away into the wilderness. This provision was done as "an everlasting statute ... to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year". - Leviticus 16:1-34.

It is vital to note, that the point was consistently being made that all the people were doomed and were therefore in need of atonement to stay alive.

## **Christ The Ransomer**

St. Paul in a detailed treatise on the ransom sacrifice of Christ explained that sacrifices in time of old were only temporary palliatives pointing to and awaiting the coming of Jesus Christ. He wrote: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect...But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins". Hebrews 10:1-4.

Thus, Jesus Christ had to be translated from the heavenly realm into the womb of Mary so as to be born on earth as a perfect man to pay back the life lost at the Garden of Eden. - Hebrews 2:7, 14.

John the Baptist identified Jesus Christ as the lamb of God that "taketh away the sin of the world". (John 1:29; see also Revelation 13:8) Moreover the Bible says: "For he

hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him". (2 Corinthians 5:21) That was why Jesus Christ while on earth stated that he came to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28) At the Memorial Supper, he also stated clearly that the bread he gave the apostles meant or represented his body, while the wine stood for his blood "which is shed for many for the remission of sins". - Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:24.

The ransom work covers the entire scope of the sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and therefore lies at the very heart of the gospel message. It is true that during his mission on earth, Jesus Christ, by his preaching and by example, taught man how to serve God. But even if they did all he commanded them to do, the faithful cannot have the liberty and salvation God promised them without the ransom paid by Jesus Christ by the forfeiting of his life.

During his first advent on earth, some of the wicked Jews reported Jesus Christ to the Chief Priests and Pharisees who were apprehensive of losing their influence and privileges due to the mass-following Jesus Christ was getting. At a meeting of the Pharisees Caiaphas, the High Priest declared: "Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not". Apostle John then explained: "This spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad". (John 11:49-52) Truly did St. Paul state: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time". -1 Timothy 2: 5, 6; see also Galatians 3:13; Hebrew 9:11-28; 1 John 3:4

By the death of Jesus Christ, the debt of sin against man was fully paid, not merely cancelled. His blood or life, which he surrendered as the "ransom", effectively secured the deliverance of the children of God from the bondage of sin. Having died as a perfect man so as to "taste death for every man" Jesus Christ was then in a position to redeem man from death. In one of his most lucid expositions on the subject, St. Paul said: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage". -Hebrews 2:9, 14,15.

As opposed to the sacrifices made under the Mosaic law, the expiatory blood shed by Jesus Christ, which was made once, was perfect and effective for ever - it needed not to be renewed every year. St. Paul declared: "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God..." - Hebrews 10:10-12.

By his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8) and thus paved the way for the fulfillment of the promise God Almighty made through Hosea the prophet to wit: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance

shall be hid from mine eyes". (Hosea 13:14) In God's Kingdom fully established, death, which is man's greatest enemy will be no more. - 1 Corinthians 15: 26.

## **Living Unto Christ**

Having paid the supreme price to give the world liberty, the least that is expected of us all is to show appreciation for the great sacrifice Jesus Christ made in dying that we may live. In John 15:13, 14 Christ Jesus declared: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you". Those being ransomed must therefore be humble enough to obey the voice of Jesus Christ by living "soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world". (Titus 2:11-14; See also John 10: 14-18) "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him", Jesus Christ stated. (John 3:36) And Apostle John added: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin". - 1 John 1:7.

In his letter to the Christians at Corinth Apostle Paul stated: "And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new". (2 Corinthians 5:15, 17) In his epistle, St. Peter made it clear that the proofs of true discipleship are belief of the truth and love for one another, when he stated: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot...Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently". - 1 Peter 1:18-22. See also John 13:34, 35

It must be pointed out that those who have come to the knowledge of the truth but do not keep the commandments of God through Jesus Christ, will not get the benefit of the ransom sacrifice. Such ones as it were "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame"- Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-29.

It is by appreciating the goodness of God in sending Jesus Christ into the world and by showing such appreciation through faithful service that those who have come to God will be in close communion with Him.

May God Almighty Who, in exercise of His love for mankind sent His only begotten Son to pay the ultimate price in order to reconcile man to Himself, help His sheep to live as true Christians by way of faithful service by His grace through Jesus Christ our Ransomer. Amen.

## **JEHOVAH, A STRONGHOLD IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE**

God's Kingdom Advocate Number 3 No. 16,

By His supreme power and complete control over the entire forces in the universe the Almighty God is the only place of refuge and trust for His people.

It is for this reason the admonition is given in Nahum 1:7 thus: “The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.”

A stronghold is a place that is secure and safe, because it is well fortified. God is able to provide protection to His people because, being the ‘Almighty God’, He “is greater than all”. (John 10:29; Genesis 17:1; Jeremiah 32:17, 27) As a loving Father, God Almighty is compassionate, pitiful, merciful, and sympathetic. - Psalm 103:8-14. See also Isaiah 63:7-9.

The Almighty God does not take pleasure in the death of anyone. He is longsuffering towards them, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”. - Ezekiel 18: 23,32; 2 Peter 3:9.

### **The fall of man**

Right from the time man fell from the favour of God in the Garden of Eden and the sentence of death was passed upon him, he has not known peace. (Genesis 3:16-19; Job 5:6,7; Job 14:1) These “troubles” have become more intense in this time known as the last days, an era which started in 1914 when the devil was driven down to this earth and which event was signalled by the First World War of 1914-1918. - Revelation 12:12; 2 Timothy 3:13.

The economic, political and social conditions in the world will continue to get worse and worse until the time of the great tribulation when the devil and his hosts will be destroyed by God through Jesus Christ, Jehovah's ‘battle axe and weapon of war’. Only those who have remained faithful to God will be saved. - Jeremiah 51:20-23; Daniel 12:1; see also Isaiah 26:20,21; Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13

### **Look to God**

Many people today do not know that JEHOVAH is the sacred name of God Almighty, and that they should call on Him when they are in trouble. Rather they look to their wealth, military strength, spiritual powers, false gods, false prophets, and so on, contrary to the Bible. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 2:19, 20; Psalm 62:10; 33:16-19; Psalm 20:7; Proverbs 21:31) The Bible says: “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.” - Psalm 146:3, 4; Compare Jeremiah 17:5, 6; Psalm 46:1-3; Jeremiah 17:7,8.

### **Examples**

The Almighty God Himself made a clarion call to His people to exercise faith in Him at all times so as to be protected and saved from the assaults of the devil. Instances abound in the Holy Bible of the end of those who trusted in other gods rather than in God Almighty and the divine protection enjoyed by those who trusted in Him by His grace. Let us call to mind the case of King Ahaziah who sought help from Baalzebub, the god of Ekron rather than in the Almighty God as a result of which he died in his sickness. (2 Kings 1:1-17) During the reign of King Jehoshaphat, there was a time the

people of Judah were surrounded by their enemies, but they were saved because they trusted in God. They did not even fight, they only came to gather the spoil. ( 2 Chronicles 20:15-30) There are also other instances when God delivered His people from danger in miraculous ways.

Some of them are given below.

**David:** In one of their many military engagements with Israel, the Philistines put forward a giant called Goliath, a gigantic man, whose height was six cubits and a span, which is about 10 feet, 5 inches. The Jews were unable to confront this giant even though he was mouthing blasphemies against God until David came and defeated him by virtue of his strong faith in God. 1 Samuel 17:1-57.

**Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego:** Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were Jews in captivity in Babylon where they were chosen to live in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon and were renamed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Time came when the King made an image of gold 90 ft high and nine ft wide and ordered everyone to worship the image and that whoever would not worship the image was to be thrown into a burning fiery furnace. The three faithful Jews bluntly refused even before the king to worship his gods or his image of gold. As a result, the king gave instruction that they should be thrown into the fiery furnace. But to the astonishment of the king, the fire had no power over their bodies. Rather, God Almighty Whom they trusted in refusing to obey the king's order did deliver them. "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."- Daniel 3:1-7, 16-18.

After asking them to come out of the fire, Nebuchadnezzar and his princes, governors, captains, and the counsellors, beheld with wonder the three Jews, "upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them". The King then made a declaration directing all peoples in his domain to fear God or else they "shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort." - Daniel 3:28, 29.

**Peter:** In the time of the early Church, Herod stretched out his hand to persecute the believers. He killed James, the apostle with the sword and since this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also in order to kill him. But the Church without ceasing prayed for his deliverance. An angel of God came and opened the prison doors and led him out. - Acts 12:1-19.

**Paul and Silas:** When Paul and Silas were cast into prison for healing a girl who had an evil spirit, they sang praises to God in the night and the prison doors were miraculously opened, and all the shackles on them were loosened by the grace of God. Alarmed, the Jailor, supposing that the prisoners had fled, wanted to kill himself, but was prevented by St. Paul. He was so moved by the experience that he and his family joined the faith and were baptized. The next morning the magistrates ordered the apostles to be freed. - Acts 16:13-34

## **Strong Tower**

In the book of Proverbs chapter 18 verse 10, Solomon, a prophet of God, was inspired to state: "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." In time of old, a tower afforded a place of refuge to those who escape into it. In case of an invasion and even when the city was subdued, the tower, by and large, remained impregnable, generally. So God is a strong and safe protector of His people.

How do people of God run to Him? They do so by exercising faith in Him, by way of belief in His promises and by doing His will. Such ones will be protected and saved by Him. -Psalm 18:1-3. See also Psalm 9:9, 10.

The Psalmist further declared: "They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever." (Psalms 125:1, 2) For the fact that He understands the imaginations of the hearts of men, He is able to show Himself strong on the faithful by His grace. - 2 Chronicles 16:9.

## **Prayer**

Prayer is the formal act of making requests to God. It is also an act of worship. It involves casting all our cares upon God knowing that He cares for us. (1 Peter 5:7) One needs faith, accurate knowledge of God, understanding, patience and fear of God for one's prayer to be effective. All peoples of the world who desire the salvation of God must come to Him in prayers. - Psalm 65:2; Psalm 121:1-8.

Having known that the Almighty God Jehovah is our stronghold in the day of trouble, we should not be unduly anxious or worried about how to sort out our problems knowing that He will handle them for us. Said St. Paul: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus". - Philippians 4:6, 7.

In a similar vein, Isaiah the prophet was inspired to state: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength."- Isaiah 26:3, 4.

Moreover the Bible states: "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call."- Joel 2:32.

May the Almighty God sustain His people in His Way so as to be protected from this evil world and saved in His Kingdom when fully established by His grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **THE ALL-SUFFICIENT PRAYER**

**God's Kingdom Advocate Volume 3 No. 17**



On a certain occasion during his earthly ministry, the disciples of Jesus Christ asked him to teach them how to pray, “as John also taught his disciples”. Being the perfect teacher that he is, our Lord and Master Jesus Christ immediately taught them a unique and concise prayer that has since then become the model prayer for all Christians. Because of its comprehensive nature, Bible scholars refer to the “Lord’s Prayer” as the “All-Sufficient Prayer”.

The account in the book of Luke chapter 11 verses one to four states: “And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.” (Luke 11:1-4; see also Matthew 6:9-13) Let us now go on to explain the meaning of the main points in the prayer in the light of the Scriptures.

**Our Father:** The word “father” means “life-giver”. God Almighty is Creator of all living things in the universe, whether in heaven or in earth. (John 20:17; Revelation 4:11) Because He is the Sustainer of life, He is called “the God of the spirits of all flesh”, in Numbers 16:22 and 27:16. In the words of Apostle Paul, in his famous lecture on Mars Hill in Athens, it is in “in him we live, and move, and have our being... For we are also his offspring”. - Acts 17:28; see also Job 34:14,15; Psalm 104:29,30.

Our acceptance of God Almighty as our Father, sets the tone for the subsequent declarations and petitions contained in the prayer. The Bible shows that God Almighty loves us and will always provide us with the best. This human beings cannot do because of their limitations. (Matthew 7:11; Isaiah 64:8) A deep and sincere appreciation of our total dependence on God is vital to His answering our petitions. Jesus Christ stated: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” -Matthew 7:11.

**Hallowed Be Thy Name** - The exclusive name which God Almighty took to Himself is Jehovah. (Exodus 6:3) The name should be hallowed, meaning that it should be held in awe or deep reverence, and not be taken in vain. (See Exodus 20:7; Psalm 111:9) Contrary to the law of God, there many people today who go to law courts and swear falsely. God would punish all such ones except they repent. In any case, Christians are not to swear anymore. (Matthew 5:33-37) The Almighty God declared through His servant “for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” (1Samuel 2:30)

Another aspect of the matter is that we should not do anything that will make people to speak ill of or bring reproach to the name of God and His work. High standards of morality or righteousness are expected from those who have given themselves to the

service of God. A life of purity honours the faith and the name of God; an impure life does the reverse. The unbelievers would definitely despise the Christian faith if they do not its effect on the believers.

Jesus Christ stated: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) Moreover Apostle Paul stated: "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written." -Romans 2:20-24.

**The Kingdom:** The next line in the prayer is for the Kingdom of God to come so that the will of God will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. This prayer shows that the petitioner has the understanding that the kingdom of God is the only solution to the problems of this world. It also shows that the petitioner is striving to enter into it.

Bible prophecies show that the Kingdom of God will come in this age. (Isaiah 2:2) This prophecy has fulfilled with the setting up of God's Kingdom Organisation in various parts of the world, of which the God's Kingdom Society (GKS), *the Church of the Living God*, is part and parcel. (Matthew 24:31, 15,16) The Kingdom will continue to grow as people of goodwill are gathered into it by the power of God until He will bring iniquity to an end and righteousness and peace will cover the earth. The Bible says further: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Daniel 2:44) Since the Kingdom has been set up, we no longer say "Thy Kingdom come" but "They Kingdom has come".

**Daily Bread:** The prayer for God to "give us this day our daily bread" should be understood to mean both spiritual and literal bread. The spiritual bread, which is the word of God, is more important. It teaches man what to do so as to get life, which ordinary bread cannot do. (Isaiah 55:1-3; Matthew 16:6-12; etc.) God declared through His servant Moses that he humbled the Jews, and caused them to suffer hunger, and fed them with manna, so that they might "know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live". (Deuteronomy 8:3; see also Matthew 4:4; Job 23:12) It was to the end that we should be diligent in acquiring the knowledge of God so as to be approved for life that Jesus Christ exhorted us thus: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." -John 6:27, 63.

However, literal food is also important as it is needful for daily sustenance. No human being can stay or function for long without food. It was for this reason. God Almighty fed the Jews with manna in the wilderness. (Exodus 16:16-35) Also, Jesus Christ fed 5000 people with bread and there were 12 baskets full that were left over. (John 6:1-14)

It should be noted that the prayer is for us to have our daily bread, that is food enough for today. We should not be greedy by asking or setting our mind on having so much more than we need for our upkeep. This exhortation tallies with the prayer of Agur who prayed God to feed him with food convenient for him." - Proverbs 30:8.

The prayer for God to give us our daily bread also means that we should be contented with what God has provided for us. "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content." -1 Timothy 6:6-8.

**Forgiveness:** Continuing the Lord's prayer says "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (Matthew 6:12) Since it is the duty of every one to obey God, anyone who violates His laws has incurred a debt, which can only be made good by repentance and right conduct. But being a merciful Father, God Almighty, by virtue of His love for man forgives those who show remorse for their sins and repent. But for this quality of forgiveness, no man can remain alive to serve God. David the prophet stated: "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." (Psalms 130:3, 4) Furthermore the Psalmist stated: "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." (Psalms 103:8-14)

The second leg of the prayer is that since God is ready and willing to forgive us, then we should also forgive those who wrong us. Jesus Christ gave a parable about the servant whose debt was cancelled despite owing him millions of dollars (some translators say about \$10 million) but would not forgive his debtor but jailed him for owing him only about \$20. (Matthew 18:21-35 particularly 32-35) On being told what his servant had done, his lord was angry and said unto him "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him." (Matthew 18:32-34) Jesus Christ then said in verse 35: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

Still stressing the importance of forgiving each other Jesus Christ said: "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith." - (Luke 17:3-5)

**Temptation:** The prayer continues with the request that God should not lead us into temptation. From Bible understanding the phrasing is wrongly translated, because God does not leave people into temptation. God tries tests His people, but He does not tempt man. Apostle James stated: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." - James 1:13-15.

It is the devil who tempts people and so is known as "the tempter". (Matthew 4:1, 3) The statement, "God did tempt Abraham" in Genesis 22:1 is properly put in Hebrews 11:17 where St. Paul said: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried..." In the words of James the apostle: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. - James 1:12.

While not leading us into temptation, God delivers us from temptation. Apostle Paul in his letter to the Christians at Corinth attests to this: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who 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 Corinthians 10:13) Writing in this vein, St. Peter said: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." – 2 Peter 2:9; see also Luke 22:31

**Deliverance from evil:** The next prayer is for God to deliver us from evil. The world is full of evil, troubles or perils. It was for the purpose of saving mankind from the troubles or perils of this world that Jesus Christ came, suffered, died and was raised by the Father.. Apostle Paul said Jesus Christ: "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" -Galatians 1:4.

David the prophet was a man who suffered many afflictions at the instance of the devil. Yet God delivered him from the evils he encountered. He was therefore well placed to make this declaration: "The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all." - Psalms 34:17-19 See also John 10:27-29; 1 Peter 3:10-13

The account of the Lord's Prayer in the book of Luke stops "at deliver us from evil" But the one of Matthew ends with a doxology: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." According to authorities this part was added by later writers. It is not part of the inspired text. Adam Clarke's commentary has this to say: "The whole of this doxology is rejected by Wetstein, Griesbach, and the most eminent critics. The authorities on which it is rejected may be seen in Griesbach and, Wetstein, particularly in the second edition of Griesbach's Testament, who is fully of opinion that it never made a part of the sacred text. It is variously written in several MSS., and omitted by most of the fathers, both Greek and Latin." Another reputable commentator Jamieson Fauset wrote: "If any reliance is to be placed on external evidence, this doxology, we think, can hardly be considered part of the original text. It is wanting in all the most ancient manuscripts; On a review of the evidence, the strong probability, we think, is that it was not part of the original text."

From the foregoing it could be seen that the prayer, while not going into specifics, covers all a man or woman would ask from God. It is also not selfish as each petitioner is praying not only for himself but for all people of God. Besides, the prayer, in keeping with the words of Jesus Christ, is devoid of repetition.

It is necessary at this stage to recall the charge of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ that a prayer should be a quiet and sober affair. Those who make loud and long prayers are doing so for vainglory or ostentation. – Matthew 6:5-8

A fact that cannot be over-emphasized is that God will certainly answer those who say the Lord's prayer with faith and understanding by His grace. The Bible says: "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us". - 1 John 5:14

**The Essence of the Theocratic Greeting: "Hail Jehovah and Jesus Christ !"**

**God's Kingdom Advocate Volume 3 No. 18**

Some people have been asking to know the essence of the greeting. “Hail Jehovah and Jesus Christ” which members of the God's Kingdom Society, (GKS) the Church of the living God, use as a form of salutation and after opening and closing prayers in gatherings of the Church. This sermon is written to make the issue clear to all.

According to good dictionaries, the word 'essence' means “the most important quality of a thing, which makes it what it is”. The word “theocratic” means “pertaining to or of the nature of theocracy” (which is a government directed by God Himself). God's Kingdom Society being one of the Branches of God's universal government which He in fulfillment of His promise to set up in these last days, is controlled by God through His word, under the direction of His Holy Spirit. It is therefore, a theocracy, though not yet in a perfect form.- Isaiah 2:2-5; Daniel 7:22, 27.

The word “greeting” means “a salutation” while to “hail” means “to call out someone by name in recognition of his importance” or to acclaim, as “to praise or approve a person, action, or accomplishment with enthusiasm”. Jehovah is the Hebrew name of the Almighty God. It means self-existing One, One who lives of Himself. He lives from everlasting to everlasting. (Psalm 90:2) Jesus Christ is the name of the only begotten son of God. He is the only direct creation of God Almighty. Through him all other things, visible and invisible were created. - Colossians 1:15-17; Ephesians 3:9; John 1:10.

It is these two personalities that men ought to worship. Unfortunately however, people tend to be misled by the devil into doing reverence to their fellow human beings or sets up some grand scheme before them so that they will set their hopes on such makeshifts rather than in God Almighty. The danger in such false reasoning could be seen from the tragedies that had followed those who had been so misled. A striking instance happened during the Second World War, following the exaltation of Hitler, the then leader of the Nazi party, in Germany. In 1934 Hitler took the title of Führer (“Leader”), in addition to being the chancellor, and commander in chief of the army, consequent upon which “Heil Hitler!” became legally obligatory as a common greeting, as did the Hitler salute of the right arm fully thrust forward with the palm facing downward. Heil is the German word for “hail”.

Reports allege that during World War II, German soldiers captured some children and locked them up in a cell. When they said “yes” to the question as to whether they believed in God, the soldiers then asked them to pray to God to give them bread to eat, as they were hungry. And the children did just that by saying, “Oh, God, give us this day, our daily bread”. But no bread was forthcoming. Unknown to the children, the soldiers had packed some loaves of bread into the ceiling and prepared a device which at the touch of a button, will open up the ceiling for bread to start dropping from the ceiling. Thus, when the children changed the words of the prayer and started saying: “Hitler, give us this day our daily bread”, they saw to their pleasant surprise that bread started raining down from the ceiling. On seeing this, the children started chanting “Heil Hitler”, “Heil Hitler”. Thenceforth, people in Germany and the conquered territories started saying “Ha” or “Heil Hitler”, meaning that the German leader is the one in whom supreme power resides and whom the people should look to for their provision, protection and well-being generally. And so, in schools, work places, parade grounds,

among the military and so on throughout Germany and in her colonies, the Hitler salute was followed by the words “Heil Hitler” .

When this report reached St. Urhobo, he was very angry and declared publicly that no man should ascribe to himself the power to save other human beings as that is the exclusive preserve of God Almighty. He then gave a lecture entitled “Hitlerism must be destroyed”. St. Urhobo then directed in the year 1943 that “Hail Jehovah and Jesus Christ” should be the mode of salutation among members and that it should be said at the end of every prayer held privately or congregationally. Since 1943, this has become the tradition of God's Kingdom Society.

Our reasons for using the theocratic greeting “Hail Jehovah and Jesus Christ are as follows:

1. That Jehovah is the Source of Salvation: The theocratic greeting gives the understanding that salvation comes only from Jehovah through Jesus Christ and is for the benefit of those who do His will and praise His holy name. “Salvation belongeth unto the LORD” said the Psalmist in Psalm 3:8. Furthermore God declared through His prophet Isaiah: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” - Isaiah 45:22

All people who have faith in God know that neither Hitler nor any human being can bring salvation to the people. Salvation will only come to those who fully embrace Jesus Christ, the Bishop and Shepherd of our souls. “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; see also Hebrews 12:2.

The people of God believe that Jehovah is the only source of life and peace or salvation through Christ Jesus. Scriptures say "Salvation to our God (Jehovah) which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb (Christ Jesus). (Revelation 7:10) People of God cannot claim to be faithful to Him if they hail any being other than their Maker. (Jeremiah 10:6,7,10,11) Thus, the salutation is also a prayer for God to continue to protect, sustain and save us in His Kingdom by His grace.

2. It is a sign of complete allegiance to the two Higher Powers: We hail Jehovah and Jesus Christ because they constitute the two “Higher Powers”. All who want to get life must be subject to Them. St. Paul said: “Let every soul be subject to the higher powers” (Romans 13:1) All other authorities in God's Organisation derive their powers from God Almighty through Jesus Christ. When people hail Jehovah and Jesus Christ, they thereby declare their complete submission to them and declare their readiness to do Their will at all times for their blessings and salvation in the end. The Bible says: “Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge.” - Job 36:9-12. See also 1 Samuel 15:22,23; Jeremiah 7:22,23; Romans 2:8,9.

3. It shows that God is the source of blessings: By the theocratic greeting, we not only acknowledge and express appreciation for the blessings received from God and Christ but express faith that we shall receive more by His grace as long as we continue to do His will. - Isaiah 26:3,4; Psalm 29:11.

4. For purpose of identification: Those who have decided to take their stand on the Lord's side by identifying with the truth are peculiar people, who are zealous to do the will of God. The theocratic greeting is a way of publicly demonstrating their faith in God Almighty and Jesus Christ and identifying themselves as members of the God's Kingdom Society (GKS) the Church of the Living God. No true believer will be ashamed of showing himself or herself as being firm in his or her belief in God Almighty and Jesus Christ. "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation;" said Jesus Christ, "of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy

Angels." - Mark 8:38.

5. Spiritual Commitment: Those who use the theocratic greeting, should be fully conscious of its implications in that they are thereby committing themselves to the doing of the will of the God all the time. St. Paul stated: "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (2 Timothy 2:19) Again, Apostle Paul in his letter to the Christians in Rome declared: "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written." - Romans 2:21-24.

### **Mode of saying the Theocratic greeting**

In saying "Hail Jehovah and Jesus Christ" to close prayers the men should bow their heads while women bow the knee. This is however not necessary when the greeting is being used for salutation. Still, the men should remove their hats at all times when they hail, whether greeting fellow members or in prayer. But we should not genuflect or bend the knee when using it as greeting to our fellow members.

The Theocratic Greeting should not be said:

- When one had just woken up from bed and had not washed the mouth and face or taken one's bath;
- When one is eating and the mouth is full of food;
- In unclean environments, such as the toilet , garbage heaps; etc.
- When the members are too far from each other.



Also, the greeting should not be accompanied by “sir” or “ma”. This is no disrespect because the salutation is a prayer to God and Christ Jesus wishing the recipient well in the Lord.

It is hoped with these clarifications, the mists have been cleared in regard to the theocratic greeting of the GKS and the mode of saying it, and that those using it will do so with better understanding and faith by God's grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **The Marriage Bond and Divorce**

### **God's Kingdom Advocate, Volume 3, No. 19**

The marriage institution, because of its divine origin, has continued to thrive despite the relentless attempts by the devil to devalue its importance, distort its essence and even

make it a relic of a bygone age. A fact that cannot be denied however, is that it is only by having stable marriages that a society will itself be orderly and peaceful.

Marriage is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “a legally recognized relationship, established by a civil or religious ceremony, between two people who intend to live together”. (It should be pointed out that “two people” in the context of this sermon, means a man and a woman.)

Marriage is so important that it is considered by some as one of the three major phases in life - the others being birth and death. The union of a man and a woman as husband and wife is the foundation for a home and family, and it is the basic unit of society. Without the marital tie, the family circle, family instruction and parental love and care would have been altogether unknown.

### **Origin of Marriage**

After man had been created and placed in the Garden of Eden, he was alone as there was no other human being on earth. If he had any communion with any other creature, it was with beings either high above him in the order of creation, as angels, or far beneath him, as the birds, beasts of the field and plants. But man was created to be a social being. The Almighty God Who is All-wise assessed the situation perfectly and declared: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” (Genesis 2:18) He then induced a deep sleep on Adam during which time He made, from one of his ribs, a woman, and brought her to the man. On seeing the woman, Adam said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” (Genesis 2:23) Thereafter, was recorded what is now known as the marriage charter: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.” - Genesis 2:24.

The declaration that the couple “shall be one flesh” denotes the unity of purpose or oneness of heart that exists or should exist between them. A bond which unites two unique and divergent personalities is a phenomenon so remarkable that Agur, the man of God, described it as “wonderful”, (Proverbs 30:18,19), while Solomon, the prophet of God, spoke of the superior merits of the marriage union over the single state. - Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

Our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated his support for the institution of marriage by his first miracle, that of turning water into wine. This occurred in Cana of Galilee when he and his disciples attended a marriage feast. (John 2:1-11). Apostle Paul, under divine inspiration, encouraged young people to marry, saying that “it is better to marry than to burn”. (1 Corinthians 7:9, 36) Many today will readily agree with Solomon the prophet who stated: “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.” - Proverbs 18:22.

### **Purpose of Marriage**

Marriage was established by God for the couple to complement each other. It was also designed to ensure the procreation of the human race. (Genesis 1:28) St. Paul said marriage is needful “to avoid” fornication, which is common today. (1 Corinthians 7: 2; Hebrews 13:4; Acts 15:20) And because a believer may be drawn into apostasy if his or

her partner is not a Christian indeed, marriage between the people of God and non-believers was forbidden in the Old Testament and frowned on in the New. People of God, St. Paul says, should marry “only in the Lord”. -Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3, 4; 1 Corinthians 7:39.

## **Marriage Under Threat**

Unfortunately, in some parts of the world, marriages are in decline. In Japan, the trend is so serious that it threatens to leave the country with “a labor shortage, erode the country's tax base and strain the pension system” as fewer taxpayers have to support an expanding elderly population. This was reported by Kozo Mizoguchi, Associated Press Writer in the on-line edition of the Boston News, an American newspaper (accessed January 17, 2008). He states further: “Yet Japanese companies typically expect long hours from workers, and many women with careers feel they cannot meet the demands of both work and family and must choose one or the other”. Indeed, many women in the technologically developed countries, are foregoing or delaying marriage to pursue career opportunities.

Stating that “Government Subsidizes Cohabitation”, Michael J. McManus, stated in the website [www.virtueonline.org](http://www.virtueonline.org) (accessed March 17, 2008) that the reason the marriage rate has fallen by 50 percent (in the United States of America) since 1970 is that “many couples cohabit rather than marry”. He added: “The number of cohabiting couples has soared 12-fold from 430,000 in 1960 to 5.2 million in 2005. About half of those who live together, never do marry. The result is that the percentage of never-married Americans aged 30-44 has tripled. That pushes down the marriage rate....”

Also, new laws in the developed countries are distorting the concept of marriage and family as stipulated by God Almighty. These days lesbians and homosexuals are allowed by law in some countries to be “married” after which they pick up a licence certifying them as “domestic partners”. According to Wikipedia Encyclopedia, under the Civil Partnership Act 2004, same-sex couples in the United Kingdom were granted rights and responsibilities identical to civil marriages. There is also a formal process for dissolving such partnerships that is akin to divorce.

We must point out that the union of homosexuals and lesbians is contrary to the purpose of God and is a direct challenge to the authority of the Almighty God as the people did in Babel in those days. - Leviticus 18:22; Deuteronomy 23:17; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Timothy 1:10 ;Genesis 11:1-9.

It is gratifying however that since no one can change the purpose of God, there are many young people, even in the economically developed countries who still hold marriage in high esteem and keenly look forward to it. A poll of 5000 women aged 18 to 25, done in 2004 in Britain shows that nine in 10 young women still dream of a white wedding, with almost seven in 10 hoping to be married before they have children. The result shows that “far from embracing the promiscuous society in which they live, the 'children of the divorced generation' want to settle down with a husband and start a family...They believe in marriage and want to stay with one man for the rest of their lives.”- The Daily Telegraph Thursday October 14, 2004, page 14.

It must be pointed out however that whatever strain the institution of marriage is undergoing now is the fault of the individuals involved, because they fail to keep to the high tenets desired to make it work. Some of the basic problems facing present-day marriages are stated below.

**Struggle for Equality:** God never purposed that the man and the woman should be equal in the marriage contract. The man is the head of the house. The woman must recognize that fact and hallow it for therein lies peace and order in the home. God's law to the woman in the garden of Eden was "...thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee". St. Paul exhorts, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing." - Ephesians 5:22, 24. See also Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1.

Where the woman is rude, contentious, confrontational or quarrelsome, she will become a burden on the man; she will be tearing down her house rather than building it up. In the Bible brawling wives stand in contrast to the model wife. (Proverbs 14:1; 19:13, 14; 21:9,19; 27:15; 31:10-31) There was a case in one of the major cities in Delta State, Nigeria, of a 54 year old man who felt so dejected by his wife's persistent nagging, that he decided to "punish her" by committing suicide. - Saturday Punch, October 18, 2003, page 8.

**Emotional Immaturity:** Because of the political, economic and social dislocations of today's world, many young people come into marriage as emotionally imbalanced individuals. They thus find it difficult to get along with each other. The fact is that two emotionally mature individuals will complement each other and make a happy marriage by the grace of God. Marriage involves the ability to get along with people, to face both routine and crises without becoming unduly upset, to meet disappointment and difficulty, and primarily the ability to subordinate self-interest for the common good.

The maturity that comes from having strong faith in God and understanding His ways are requisite qualities the couple should have to be able to cope with changes in family fortunes. These qualities are particularly important for the wife to cultivate. - 1 Peter 3:1-5; Proverbs 19:14.

**Incompatibility:** Two persons cannot get along well unless they understand or know each other very well. "Marry in haste, repent at leisure" is as true today as always. Marriage Counsellors say that disharmony in the home brings into play almost all the emotions: fear, uncertainty, anger, jealousy, hatred, worry, anxiety and so on. Great differences in beliefs are difficult to manage as they inevitably lead to tension if not to open quarreling, writes Gertrude Nystrom in *Christian Romance and Marriage*. Amos, the prophet raised this vital question centuries ago when he asked: "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). No matter how much one has by way of education, wealth, social status, or physique, what matters in marriage is basically one's own character and personality. Beauty may be an asset, but time will cause it to fade. It was King Solomon who said, "Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD she shall be praised." - Proverbs 31:30

**Lack of communication:** Lack of communication in the home creates tension which leads to unhappiness for the couple. Because there is no fear in love, couples should be frank with each other and not sweep issues under the carpet. They should find time to discuss in an atmosphere of tact and mutual respect and affection. They should avoid the sin of pride which often prevents the husband and wife from expressing regret even when they know themselves to be in the wrong. (See Luke 17:3,4; James 5:16; Matthew 18:15) Some prefer to carry their matters to friends rather than discussing them with their partners at home. This is not good. Solomon the prophet admonished thus, “Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another: Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.” - Proverbs 25:9

Emotions, as restrained aggression, hostility or unexpressed rage are very common among couples who do not communicate, particularly, when one of the partners endeavours to keep the peace.

**Childlessness.** This creates considerable pressure on marriages. But it should not tear the couple apart. Childless couples should give themselves in prayer to God Almighty, the Giver of life, (Genesis 33:5) while seeking medical help.’ The Bible says, “He maketh the barren woman to keep house and to be a joyful mother of children.” -Psalm 113:9.

## **Divorce**

Divorce or dissolution of marriage is the ending of a marital union while the spouses are still alive. Unfortunately, since many nations, especially in the West are witnessing what has been termed “a continuing epidemic of dysfunctional relationships”, the rate of divorce has been on the high side. Among the places where divorce has become common are the United States of America, Canada, South Korea and members of the European Union, with the exception of Malta (where all civil marriages are for life, because civil divorce is banned). Divorce is so common now that the children born in many developed countries are called “children of the divorced generation”.

Studies show that divorce is harmful to the couple and to the children. A divorced man is twice as likely as a married man to die in any given year of heart disease, stroke, hypertension or cancer the big killers. J.J. Lynch in his book, *A Cry Unheard: Medical Consequences of Loneliness* states: “Death for the divorcee is four times higher than married people via auto accidents and suicide, seven times higher by cirrhosis of the liver and pneumonia, eightfold greater by murder and psychiatric illness is 10 times more likely”.

Quoting various studies, a pressure group called “Americans for Divorce Reform” was quoted in the website ([www.divorcereform.org](http://www.divorcereform.org)) to have stated: “Children of divorce are twice as likely to drop out of school as those from intact homes, three times as apt to have a baby out of wedlock, five-fold more likely to be in poverty and 12 times more apt to be incarcerated”. It is also stated in the website that children of divorced parents are twice as likely as those from homes with married parents to divorce when they grow up, if they marry at all.

It is quite gratifying that a number of young people in Britain “having reaped the bitter fruits resulting from broken families”, are reportedly “determined not to repeat the failed

marriages of their parents.” According to The 21st Century Young Woman's Survey of Great Britain, Nicole Martin, a writer for The Daily Telegraph stated: “Young people ..., far from embracing the promiscuous society in which they live ...want to settle down with a husband and start a family”. He added: “They come from divorced parents and they want a more stable life for their own kids”. - The Daily Telegraph, Thursday October 14, 2004, page 14.

### **No Putting Away**

When the unbelieving Jews asked Jesus Christ why Moses gave allowance to the Jews to put away their wives he explained that it was because of their stubbornness. At that time the husband had the option of putting away the wife by a bill of divorcement (Deuteronomy 24:1; Matthew 1:19). Christ's answer however restated the divine will as it was first given to mankind. He stated: “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery”. -Matthew 19:9.

Earlier, Malachi the prophet had been inspired to state: “For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away... Therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously”. - Malachi 2:16.

We enjoin all married couples and those intending to marry to study the divine rules for marriage and walk thereby so as to become model Christian families in which the children are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord to the glory of His name. St. Paul states: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will

### **Be Careful for nothing**

In his letter to the Christians at Philippi, St. Paul gave them a charge which is of vital importance to all true worshippers of God in their efforts to attain salvation in God's Kingdom fully established. He stated: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God". - Philippians 4:6.

By exhorting Christians to be careful for nothing, St. Paul meant that they should not be unduly anxious or worried by any matter so much as to be weighed down by it. Rather, they should take such matters to God in prayer, which is a solemn request or petition to God arising from a sense of one's inadequacy or want. Supplication means continuance in prayer with deep humility and earnestness. St. Paul says prayers should be accompanied by thanksgiving to God. This is in view of the blessings and favours He showers on us from day to day.

### **Troubles in the world**

Why did St. Paul exhort Christians not to be unnecessarily anxious or worried? This was because he knew that man is surrounded by troubles which, from time to time, make him to be restless or disturbed. Indeed man has been born into trouble, as a result of sin inherited from Adam. (Genesis 3:16-19; Job 5:6,7; 14:1,2; Psalm 51:5; etc.) The troubles of man have multiplied in this age because, the devil, having been driven down from heaven, is most vicious in his determination to cause as much havoc on earth as possible. The declaration of the angel when the devil was driven down goes thus: "Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." (Revelation 12:12; see also Revelation 11:17, 18) The "great wrath" of the devil was expressed during the First World War of 1914-1918 and this was a sign to people on earth that the devil had been driven down from heaven, marking the beginning of the last days. The Second World War, which took place from 1939 - 1945, was wider in geographical scope and in its toll on human lives, than any other war in history.

Jesus Christ stated that the difficulties that have defined the living conditions of the people in the aftermath of the First World War, "is the beginning of sorrows". (Matthew 24:7,8) Truly, no one can deny that we are now in the last days, when there shall be "distress of nations, with perplexity" with men's hearts "failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth". (Luke 21:25-27) The last days are "perilous times" when "the wicked shall do wickedly"; when people will not have feeling for their fellow men; and "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived". - Daniel 12:10; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 12, 13.

Evidently, the world has been matching into harder and harder times since World War 1. Currently, the world is facing severe economic and social conditions in which stock markets are now in a free fall, and the world is said to be "at the point of sheer panic". (*The Guardian on Sunday*, November 2, 2008, page 11) The present crisis, known as the global economic melt-down, has resulted in the bankruptcy of several multi-national companies and the retrenchment of thousands of workers. Some of those affected have even committed suicide as have been widely reported in the media. If the economic situation in the West is biting hard on them, the state of people in poor

countries can better be imagined than described. In Nigeria and other developing countries, the unemployment situation is so high that poverty has become pervasive. Consequently, so many youths are not able to get good education to equip them with the skills that would make them employable. Some of the youths have resorted to crime in order to make ends meet, those who are sick suffer in silence, patronize quack doctors, so-called miracle workers and fake traditional healers because they are unable to afford proper medical care. Due to financial constraints, many young men and women are unable to get married, build their own houses and live a reasonably decent life. A number of couples who are already married are afflicted with the problem of childlessness for which they spend huge amounts and go through indescribable ordeals in their search for the fruit of the womb.

Knowledge of the spiritual cause of the troubles in the world should inform our attitude to the various problems that confront us daily. While not discounting the efforts of governments all over the world in tackling these problems, the fact remains that God Almighty is the strength and hope of His people. He is the One people should look to in order to get relief from the hard conditions in the world. They should therefore do His will and always exercise faith in Him Who “is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”. (Psalm 46:1) David the prophet also states: “Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.” We should always bear in mind the charge from God Almighty through Isaiah the prophet to wit: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” - Psalm 60:11, 12; Isaiah 45:22. See also Psalm 108:12.

## **Examples**

By positive declarations and specific acts in time of old, God Almighty repeatedly impressed it on His people that there is no way to get help in time of trouble than to trust in Him. We shall highlight a few of such instances as they have been written down “for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”. (Romans 15:4) A ready case was when the Jews had left Egypt, Pharaoh was moved by the devil to pursue the Israelites with the mind of bringing them back into slavery. On seeing the host of the Egyptians, the Jews quivered and quaked because of fear as it is written: “And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.” (Exodus 14:10-12) Seeing that their faith was failing them, Moses was inspired by God to encourage the people: “And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” -Exodus 14:13, 14.



In fulfillment of the words of Moses the prophet, God Almighty wrought a great miracle in delivering the Jews in that He used the wind to divide the Red Sea so that the Jews crossed the dry river bed in one night. But Pharaoh and His host were swallowed up as the river closed up on them. What God did at that time should teach His people to remain calm in times of crisis and to trust firmly in Him, no matter how extreme the circumstance may look like. - Exodus 14:21-31; 15:1-21.

In spite of what God did for them, the Jews could not sustain their trust in Him when they were faced with more dangers or difficulties. At a stage, they even wanted to return to Egypt. It was because of their faithlessness that they spent 40 years on the journey instead of 40 days. Even at that, it was only Joshua and Caleb and those who were 20 years and below as well as children born in the wilderness that reached the promised land. - Exodus 16:1-4; Number 14:1-39.

To drive home the importance of trusting in Jehovah's providence, He used His servant Moses to remind them of how he cared for them during the years in the wilderness saying: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live." -Deuteronomy 8:2, 3

When Israel became a settled nation, God Almighty showed His power in delivering them from danger several times. At a time during the reign of Jehoshaphat the people of Moab, Ammon, among others, besieged Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat himself "feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah". He went into the temple to pray, saying among other things: "for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee." - 2 Chronicles 20:12.

In response to King Jehoshaphat's prayer, God used His servant Jehaziel to encourage him and the people of Judah with these words: "And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's ... Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem : fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you." (2 Chronicles 20:15-17) By the miracle of Jehovah, the armies who came against Judah fought against each other and destroyed themselves. The Jews only came to gather the spoil. -2 Chronicles 20:21-34.

God Almighty also wrought great deliverance for His people during the time of King Hezekiah, when Sennacherib, king of Assyria, besieged Jerusalem. Hezekiah went into the house of God and prayed, placing the blasphemous words of the king and his servants before God, in the temple. God replied him through Isaiah the prophet, stating that the King Sennacherib "shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return ... The Bible record states that the "angel of the LORD went forth,

and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses". When King Senacherib returned to his palace, two of his sons assassinated him. -Isaiah 37:33-37.

One of the most striking instances in the New Testament of God's intervention to deliver His people is the one of Paul and Silas. While Paul and Silas were carrying out their work of preaching the gospel, they met a young girl who was possessed by the spirit of divination through which she brought much gain to her masters. Paul cast the evil spirit out from her in the name of Jesus Christ. For doing this however, he incurred the wrath of her masters who dragged him and his colleague to the magistrates accusing them of troubling the city, sowing discord and disturbing the public peace. Consequently, they were beaten and jailed. But in the night, while they prayed and sang praises to God, "suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed". (Acts 16:26) As a result of this miracle, the jailor and his household became Christians and the following morning, Paul and Silas were released. It could be seen that the faith of Paul and Silas attracted Jehovah's intervention and their subsequent deliverance.

### **Christ's Admonition**

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ gave us a stern warning on why we should not worry over material needs so much as to allow it affect our faith, when he stated: "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" Then he drew our attention to a fact which many tend to gloss over: " 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? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" In view of this undeniable fact, he then stated: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God , and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." - Matthew 6:25-34.

The exhortation given by our Lord Jesus Christ on why men should not be restless about the wants of life or concerning the future had earlier been given by David the prophet when he stated: "Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine" "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." - Psalm 33:18-20; 37:25.

Knowing that people of the world are weighed down by several problems imposed on them by the devil, Jesus Christ pointed the way to life and peace for those who want to get the salvation of God. He stated: "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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." - Matthew 11:28-30.

## **Faith and Prayer**

At one time or another, every christian would have "a fiery trial". (1 Peter 4:12) Such trial is allowed by God to prove the faith of the person who claims to worship Him. It is also a training or disciplinary process to purge the convert of the works of the flesh so that he will become a new creature imbued with faith, understanding, patience, temperance, humility, obedience and so on. The Christian should not get confused or become faithless in the face of these assaults from the devil, or start looking to "mountains" and "hills" or to "Egypt", (satan's organization) for help; rather he should understand that such tribulations show that he is on the side of God. (See Proverbs 24:10; Jeremiah 3:23; Isaiah 30:1-3) We should always remember that there are good times and bad times, just as there are sunny days and rainy days. God allows them to balance each other for our own spiritual good.(Ecclesiastes 7:14) It is those who prayerfully remain on the side of God despite the storm that will get help from Him as He will make a way out for them. (1 Corinthians 10:13) "They shall not be ashamed in the evil time..." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all." - Psalm 34:19; 37:19.

Furthermore, St. Paul stated that "tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts..." (See Romans 5:3-5; compare 1 Peter 4:1, 2) A writer, Dr. Patience Turtoe-Sanders stated in a Nigerian newspaper that "...suffering, sadness, loss, grief, heart break, rejection, pain, teach inner strength". Dr. Turtoe-Sanders added: "Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired and success achieved." She quoted another author, Helen Keller, who, after spending several years as a deaf and blind person, stated: " ...Life is all about experience, At the end all we have to draw on is experience. Experience sharpens our perception, teaches us not to repeat the same mistakes, and enables us to turn our pain into encouragement to help others keep their hope alive. When the storm of life is blowing hard, understand that it is not trying to knock you down but to teach you a lesson" *The Guardian*, Tuesday January 15, 2008, page 79.

People of God should always trust and be prayerful to Him. David the prophet stated: "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (Psalm 55:22) And St. Peter admonished: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." -1 Peter 5:6, 7.

It is by faith, that is, absolute trust in God Almighty that His people will enjoy his peace, which means a condition in which one is free from fear and anxiety. Faith "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". Nobody should expect any help from God if he lacks faith. Apostle James enjoins us to make our requests

based on strong faith in Him, “nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord”. (James 1:6, 7) The Scriptures assert that “whatsoever is not of faith is sin”. (Romans 14:23) The Bible further states: “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” - Hebrews 11:6

One who trusts in God Almighty will always show his dependence on Him by being prayerful. When prayer is based on accurate knowledge and understanding of the purpose of God and is backed by faith, it works wonders. Jesus Christ made a parable to the end that “men ought always to pray, and not to faint”. (Luke 18:1) And St. Paul stated: “Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17,18) One could move “mountains” (seemingly impossible situations) through faith. - Matthew 21:21,22.

Once a problem has been taken to God in prayer, the Christian should no longer worry about it. He should leave things to Him Who has power to do even more than we ask of Him. (Ephesians 3:20) Such a one will be at rest, “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD.” (Psalm 112:7; see also John 16:33; 14:27) Indeed, the Scriptures charge us to be strong and of good courage knowing that God will eventually give us victory and make a way out for us in the midst of any crisis. - 1 Corinthians 10: 13; Joshua 1:6-8; 1 Corinthians 15:57.

It was with this understanding St. Paul stated that we should be careful for nothing, that having made our requests known to God in prayer, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. - Philippians 4:6, 7; see also 1 Peter 5:10.

May the Almighty Father give us the faith and understanding to remain strong in the face of adversity by trusting in His Almighty power always by His grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle?**

#### **God’s Kingdom Advocate** Volume 3 No. 21

Some people do not know that conversion to the Christian faith is only the first step in the ladder of salvation. To continue to climb the ladder, one must be relentless in putting away all vestiges of one's sinful past, in order to live the new life in Christ. It is important therefore that those who are sincerely desirous of life eternal should know what to do and the things to avoid in order to inherit God's Kingdom.

It is on this score that David the prophet posed the question as stated in Psalm 15 verse 1, to wit: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?". The Lord in the passage refers to God Almighty while the words tabernacle and hill, as used in this context stand for God's organization..

By reason of the questions asked by David the prophet one could infer that though God calls people of every category to come into His Kingdom, yet it is not every one that would remain to enjoy His blessings and get salvation in the end. St. Peter gave expression to this point after hearing how Cornelius, though a gentile, was called to be

an apostle when he said: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Acts 10:34, 35; see also John 9:31) It is in God's Organisation, the true Church, now set up in these last days, that His worshippers are taught the fear of God and instructed in the way of righteousness so as to become peculiar people who are prepared and, in the end, qualified to inherit the Kingdom. Such a people are able to testify to His name and carry out His commandments and be an example of right conduct to others. They vindicate the name of God on earth and give the lie to the devil's boast that no one will continue in God's service when faced with adversity.

## Qualities

The prophet David went on to give answers to the questions he raised by highlighting the qualities that will enable one to remain in the way of God until the end when he stated: "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved." - Psalm 15:1-5.

Let us x-ray these points one after the other. The person who will abide in the way of God is, to begin with, the one "that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness..."

Those who walk uprightly are known as the meek. This means that they are humble or lowly in heart and do not esteem themselves above what they really are. (Romans 12: 3) An example of such upright people was the man Nathaniel, whom Jesus Christ called "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!". -John 1:47.

The fact is that merely accepting that God exists or that Christ is the Son of God does not make one a true worshipper of God. Satan the Devil believes in God and trembles. (James 2:19) If one believes in God and Christ, such one must prove his belief or faith by his actions. Such a person must then walk uprightly and do works of righteousness. Apostle James stated, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (James 2:14) He answered this question in verse 24 that it is "by works a man is justified, and not by faith only". If a man knows and really believes the truth he will be for the Lord completely and not serve the Devil and his agents part of the time and at the same time claim to be a Christian. Mixed worship or interfaith is wrong as it amounts to serving two masters. No true Christian will lean to individual opinions or do what is right in his own eyes. - Deuteronomy 12:8; Proverbs 3:5-7; Matthew 6:24; 1 Corinthians 10:21.

The next quality highlighted by the prophet is that the person must be one that "...speaketh the truth in his heart". Christians should speak the truth always, whether they are talking about God and His Kingdom or to one another. God declared through His prophet Zechariah "These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD." (Zechariah 8:16, 17) Also Apostle Paul stated in his letter to the Christians at Ephesus thus: "Wherefore putting away lying,

“speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.” (Ephesians 4:25) Anyone who is determined to do the righteousness of God will not lie; he will be plain in his dealings. A good heart condition is vital in the service of God, because the heart is the source of motive. That is why Jesus Christ said it is what comes from the heart that defiles the man. - Matthew 15:15-20.

Continuing, King David stated that the true worshipper is the one “that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour”. The word backbite means “to make spiteful or slanderous comments about somebody who is not present”. This is very bad. King David, under inspiration of God warned: “Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer” (Psalm 101:5) And St. Paul said that we should “speak evil of no man...” (Titus 3:2) Moreover, the prophet David stated: “What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” -Psalm 34:12-14.

King David stated further that the true believer is the one “In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.” The New King James Version renders the text thus: “In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the LORD.” The truth is that the upright will not exalt those who hate righteousness. The wicked are vile in the sight of God and in the eyes of His people, that was why King David stated: “Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.” (Psalm 139:21, 22) Of course, David the prophet did not by this mean that he hated their persons but their character or conduct. If such perverted persons change, then he would be at peace with them. King Solomon rightly observed: “An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked.” (Proverbs 29:27) It is the wide gulf between righteousness and unrighteousness that informed the statement of James the apostle that friendship with the world (that is, the ungodly,) is enmity with God. - James 4:4; See also 1 John 2:15-17.

But true Christians honour those who fear God. They like to be with them, to discuss with them so that they may draw encouragement from each other and be strengthened thereby. That was why King Solomon declared that as “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend”. (Proverbs 27:17) Such ones gladly give moral, physical and material support to the ministers of the gospel as did Ebedmelech, an Ethiopian eunuch, who supported and helped Jeremiah in his tribulations and was, for that reason, delivered from death. Concerning the eunuch God Almighty stated: “...For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the LORD.” - Jeremiah 39:15-18. See also Galatians 6:10; Hebrews 13:7, 17.

Another important quality of a true worshipper of God is that he is one “that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not”. It should be pointed out, however, that with the coming of Jesus Christ, swearing was done away with. In the Christian era, our answer should simply be either “yes” or “no”. (Matthew 5:33-37) And since we should be taken by our word, then there is no need for us to swear. Those who say one thing and do the

opposite are mere pretenders. (Psalm 26:24, 25; 62:4; 55:21) Another point to note is that the vow of every Christian, as did David, is to serve God in His organization all the days of his life. This vow should be kept without wavering. King David stated: "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple." (Psalm 27:4) He further affirmed his determination to serve God in His Kingdom when he stated: "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." (Psalm 84:10) Knowing fully well that the devil is bitterly opposed to those who are given to the true worship of God, the Christian should remain faithful to His vow though he suffers reproach and persecutions along the way. Jesus Christ said: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38) St. Paul had this understanding and that was why he carried on despite fiery opposition as he declared: "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." (1 Timothy 4:10) By the grace of God, nothing should separate the Christian from the love of Christ. - Romans 8:35-38.

Writing further on the qualifications for true discipleship, King David stated that the believer should have sympathy on his fellow believer who is in financial distress and so should not put out "his money to usury". The law of God allowed the natural Jews to charge interest for loans given to foreigners. But they were forbidden to receive it from each other. (Deuteronomy 23:19, 20, Exodus 22:25) In the time of Nehemiah the governor he rebuked the rich Jews for exacting usury from their poor brethren and made them to return what they had unjustly taken from them. The law against usury was given by God to help the poor among the Jews so that they would not be taken advantage of and exploited. One should therefore be generous and helpful to the needy. See James 2:14-17; 5:1-6; 1 John 3:17, 18; Nehemiah 5:6-12.

It is well known that there are many people today who, in their craze for money, position and power, take "reward against the innocent", contrary to the law of God, just because they feel such ones are helpless. Many people today think of nothing else but to pervert justice, oppress their fellowmen, and even commit murder because of gain or hope of it. When people call evil good and good evil, when they put light for darkness and darkness for light, when they utter bare-faced lies and insist it is the truth, (Isaiah 5:20), one should know, such people have been taken captive of by the devil. God Almighty pronounced woe on people who "justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!". - Isaiah 5:23

The Christian does not indulge in oppression, but deals honorably and justly. God declared through His servant Moses: "Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked." (Exodus 23:7) In view of the fact that it is through bribery people tend to become prejudiced against the cause of justice, the Bible says: "And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous." (Exodus 23: 8; see also Deuteronomy 16:19) All the people of God should avoid "the gain of oppressions" and keep their hands away from the "holding of bribes" (Isaiah 33:15) Any land where bribery is the norm will be characterized by distress, disharmony and violence. (Compare Micah 7:3)

One would recall that Judas Iscariot took a reward to betray Jesus Christ. - Matthew 26:15; 27:3-5.

A question similar to that stated in Psalm 15 verse 1 is asked in Psalm 24 verse 3 which says: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?" Again the prophet answers the question: "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." - Psalm 24:4, 5.

In other words, the true disciple must refrain from doing things that are contrary to will of God: his motives should be pure and right and in harmony with God's law; such one would avoid the worship of idols, or anything that compromises his faith; and he would not lie in the name of God. It is those ones that would abide in God's organization. But those who out of carelessness, self-will or stubbornness persist in their evil ways, will be gathered out of God's organization or Kingdom in His due time. Matthew 13:41-43, 47-50; Revelation 21:8; Isaiah 35:8.

## **Love**

To meet the conditions needed for one to be upright and righteous before God, one must have the love of God and of one's neighbour. In Romans 13:9,10 St. Paul stated: "For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Love is the expression of unselfishness, in that the person puts the interest of God and his fellow man above his personal desires. One is thus able to avoid breaking the laws of God.

Just as Abraham did righteousness and was called the friend of God, so God Almighty and His son Jesus Christ will be the friends of all those who love to do Their will, having understood Their mind for them. (Proverbs 22:11; John 15:13, 14; James 2:21-23) Such ones will remain in God's Organisation until the end and will be given salvation by the grace of God as David the prophet prayed: "Oh send out thy light and thy truth; Let them lead me: Let them bring me unto thy holy hill, And to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, Unto God my exceeding joy; And upon the harp will I praise thee, O God, my God." - Psalm 43:3, 4.

May God Almighty help His sheep to cultivate the qualities that will enable them to attain His righteousness so that they will serve Him acceptably and be saved in His Kingdom fully established by His grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **RESTORATION**



The word, “restoration”, according to good dictionaries, means “the act of putting or being put back to a former state or position” or “to bring something back to an earlier condition”. In the spiritual context, it means the bringing back or return of the perfect conditions which man lost following the fall of man at the Garden of Eden. Restoration, which is the tenth string in the symbolic “Harp of God”, is the full expression of God's love for man whom He has created to show forth His praise.

The book of Genesis chapters 1 and 2 tell of the creation of the heavens and the earth and the things therein including man. Everything God created was perfect. All the beasts of the earth, the trees and herbs and fowls of the air were put under the subjection of man as food for him. Man was not to labour before he feeds as he was to choose from the large variety of foods in the beautiful Garden. The earth was to be filled with perfect creatures who will worship God in peace and happiness forever. The entire earth was to gradually become like the Garden of Eden, a place bereft of any iota of fear or want.

After creating Adam, God gave him a law that he should not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, warning that the consequence of breaking the law was death. (Genesis 2:16, 17) In spite of this clear warning, Adam listened to his wife, Eve, who had earlier been deceived by satan the devil, and ate the fruit for which reason the sentence of death was passed on them. In addition, the couple were driven from the Garden. Since then all the children of men had been living under hard conditions as they were born in sin. Like Adam and Eve, the children of men toil and labour until they get old and die. Some even die at infancy or in the bloom of youth. In the words of Apostle Paul, the whole creation has been groaning and travailing in pain until now. (Romans 8:22) In His infinite mercy however, God Almighty has determined that man will not continue in this condition, but, will through Jesus Christ, be restored to the idyllic conditions which he lost in the Garden of Eden.

### **“Times of Refreshing”**

Apostle Peter made reference to the divine promise of restoration following the healing of the lame man at the “Beautiful Gate” in Jerusalem. He told the Jews in those days: “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” -Acts 3:19-21.

The “times of refreshing” and the “times of restitution of all things” spoken of by Apostle Peter both refer to the period of restoration. It is evident from his declaration that the restoration of all things will be done by Jesus Christ at his second presence. Having been given full powers as king of Jehovah's kingdom to put all his enemies under his feet, (Psalm 110:1, 2) Jesus Christ drove Satan the devil from heaven to this earth in the year 1914, as a result of which the devil plunged the world into the First World War of 1914-1918. But Jesus Christ stopped the war for his elect's sake and thereafter resurrected the dead saints whom he granted immortality according to his promise in John 14:1-3, 19. He then proceeded to gather the rest of the children of God

by choosing the remaining ones of the saints to set up the Kingdom of God here on earth. (Matthew 24:15, 16, 31; Isaiah 2:2; Daniel 2:44; Zephaniah 2:1-3) Any true Church Organisation established on this earth, through the remnant of the saints in this age, is a Branch of the universal Kingdom. It will continue to grow under the guiding hand and protection of Jehovah's appointed king, Jesus Christ, until all forces of wickedness headed by Satan the devil will be destroyed at the battle of Armageddon. (Matthew 13:31,32; Isaiah 60:22; Revelation 16:13,14; etc.) The Bible says the battle of Armageddon or the "Battle of the Great Day of God Almighty" is unprecedented in human history, being a global conflict between Jesus Christ and the devil, and that such an event will not happen again. Daniel 12:1; Nahum 1:9; Matthew 24:21.

In the revelation which Jesus Christ gave to John the Apostle in the Island of Patmos, it is stated that a great multitude which no man can number from "all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" shall be saved from this global war. All those who are saved at that time will go from life to life everlasting and will be wholly devoted to doing the will of God. Mark 9:1; John 8:51; 11:26; Revelation 7:9,10,13-15.

After the battle of Armageddon, Christ will commence his one thousand years reign known as "the Millennial Reign of Christ". This is a period of reconstruction when the earth shall be restored to its former state of perfection as it was in the Garden of Eden. (Revelation 20:4, 6) It is this work of reconstruction that God used Ezekiel to refer to in the following text; "Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it." - Ezekiel 36:33-36.

When all the deserts, dry lands and other desolate places in the earth had been made habitable, the entire earth will be filled with righteous people, according to the number God Almighty has purposed as the Bible further states: "Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the LORD." - Ezekiel 36:37, 38.

During the one thousand years uninterrupted reign of Jesus Christ, there will be the general resurrection of the just and the unjust. The just will be granted eternal life while the unjust will be given a period of one hundred years to work as a second opportunity to show their readiness to obey the commands of God Almighty. The obedient ones will enter into life while those who are disobedient will be "accursed" that is, they will die the "second death" - death without any chance of life again. - Isaiah 65:20; John 5:28, 29; Revelation 20:13-15.

After the kingdom must have been fully established and the whole earth restored to its pristine glory, satan shall be brought back to life to see the beautified earth full of people doing the will of God. He will try to deceive the nations once again, but the anger of God symbolized by fire will destroy him forever. (Revelation 20:7-9) Thereafter, Jesus

Christ will hand over the kingdom to God and He (God Almighty) shall be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15: 24-28.) Mankind will then enter the Sabbath or rest. (Hebrews 4:1, 9) From then onwards, no one will have to work before getting his food or satisfying any material want. "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." - Isaiah 65:24.

## **Beauties of the Kingdom**

The beauties of the kingdom are beyond human imagination or contemplation. Hence the Bible says: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Corinthians. 2:9; see also Isaiah 64:4; 60:17) Concerning the glory that would come to the reconstructed earth the Bible says: "The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious." - Isaiah 60:13.

The men and the women in the kingdom of God will be well built, healthy, attractive and therefore captivating to behold. God says: "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir." (Isaiah 13:12) There will be no more sickness and therefore no taking of drugs "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick" (Isaiah 33:24. See also Jeremiah 33:6) Also, there will be no more ignorance as the knowledge of God shall fill the earth "as the waters cover the sea". Isaiah 25:7, 8; 11:9; Jeremiah 31:34; Habakkuk 2:14.

In God's Kingdom, there will be no conflicts or wars as instruments of war would be converted to peaceful uses. (Zechariah 9:10; Isaiah 2:4) In Micah 4:3, 4 it is written: "He will arbitrate among the nations and dictate to strong nations far away. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall no longer fight each other, for all war will end. There will be universal peace, and all the military academies and training camps will be closed down. Everyone will live quietly in his own home in peace and prosperity, for there will be nothing to fear. The Lord himself has promised this." (The Living Bible) That is not all. In the restored earth animals would live in peace with human beings and with one another. The book of Hosea states: "And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely." - Hosea 2:18.

In addition, the prophet Isaiah states: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain ..." - Isaiah 11:6-9.

Because it is the only perfect solution to all human sufferings and woes, being what peoples of the earth both great and small have been looking for, the Kingdom of God is

called the “desire of all nations.” (Haggai 2:7) God states, “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.” - Isaiah 65:17-19.

It could therefore be understood why the Kingdom of God is said to be as beautiful as “a bride adorned for her husband”, as it is written: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.” - Revelation 21:1-5.

It is because of the glorious plans which God has for His people in His kingdom that Jesus Christ asked us to pray for it to come so that the will of God will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. - Matthew 6:9, 10. See also 2 Peter 3:13.

May God Almighty who has promised that, in the dispensation of the fullness of time, He will gather together in Christ all his creatures in heaven and earth to serve him in perfect peace and happiness, continue to direct his children on earth to serve him faithfully till the end so as to enjoy the benefits of the restoration by His grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## What is the Holy Spirit

God's Kingdom Advocate No 3, No. 24

January - March 2010

The Holy Spirit is the invisible power of God by which He does His work and by which He empowers His servants to carry out His will. It is holy because it comes from God Whose power is always directed at righteous purposes.

David the Psalmist said: "Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness." (Psalm 143:10) The spirit of God stands in total contrast to that of the devil which is called "evil spirit" because it is used for evil purposes.

In the King James Version of the Holy Bible, the Holy Spirit is wrongly referred to as the "holy ghost". The word "ghost" means "the supposed spirit of somebody who has died, believed to appear as a shadowy form or to cause sounds, the movement of objects, or a frightening atmosphere in a place". Since the Bible and practical experience show clearly that the dead are lifeless and cannot think or reason or act, and that they can only become conscious again on the day of resurrection, (Psalm 6:5; Job 14:13-15; etc.), it follows that the expression "holy ghost" is a misnomer. That is why modern translations now use the term "Holy Spirit", which is the correct translation.

The Holy Spirit is not "the third person of the Trinity"; it is not a "a distinct person, equal with the Father and the Son", "exercising the acts, thoughts, emotions, and volition of a distinct intelligent person", as stated in the American Tract Society Dictionary among other references. When Jesus Christ says his disciples should baptize "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Holy Spirit), the understanding is that the baptism should be done in the name of God Almighty and His son Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is only from God Almighty through His son Jesus Christ that we can get salvation, by His grace. Jesus Christ said: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." - John 17:3

### Active force

The heavens and the earth were created by God Almighty through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-18; Ephesians 3:9) The Bible says: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." (Psalm 33:6, 9) In the book of Job it is stated that God "divideth the sea with His power, and by His understanding He smiteth through the proud. By His spirit He hath garnished the heavens..." (Job 26:12, 13) Thus, when the Bible says that in the beginning, "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters", (Genesis 1:2), it only means that the power of God was in operation in the process of creation.

## Leadership

It is by the Holy Spirit that leaders of God's people are enabled or empowered to direct His people, according to His will. Moses, the servant of God was endowed with the Holy Spirit by reason of which he was able to carry out the assignment of leading the children of Israel from Egypt to the borders of the land of Canaan. (Exodus 3:1-14; Isaiah 63:11-14) When the work of ruling the natural Jews became too much for Moses, God took part of the spirit that was in him and gave 70 of the elders of the Jews and they prophesied or spoke the word of God, as a sign that they had been empowered by Him. - Numbers 11:14-17.

Interestingly, two of the elders who were in the camp when other elders were put into office, Eldad and Medad, also prophesied from where they were in the camp, when the spirit came upon them. When a young man ran and told Moses, that the elders were prophesying, Joshua implored Moses to stop them but Moses in his reply said: "Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!" (Numbers 11:25-29) The point Moses was making was that persons endowed with the Holy Spirit would be given to the doing of righteousness, making the task of administering them to be an easy one.

Having been told that he would not reach the promised land, Moses prayed God to "set a man over the congregation, ... which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd". God granted his request and commanded Moses saying: "...Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient". (Numbers 27:16-20) By virtue of the spirit given him, Joshua was able to lead the natural Jews and complete the journey to the Promised Land.

Other leaders God chose later and gave His spirit by which they were able to lead His people out of captivity include such men as Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson. - Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29;13:25; 14:6.

## Gifts

By the spirit of God, several men and women in time of old were sufficiently equipped or endowed with skills which they put to use to the glory of God. One of such persons was a man called Bezaleel. The Bible says: "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship." - Exodus 31:1-3.

Also, God gave His Spirit of wisdom to those who made Aaron's garments and they were able to make them "for glory and for beauty". (Exodus 28:2, 3) Emphasizing the power of the spirit in equipping the people of God with various skills to glorify His work, St. Paul stated: "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the

Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.” -1 Corinthians 12:4-12. See also Romans 12:4-8.

## **Anointing Spirit**

Through the Holy Spirit, God Almighty communicated directly with the prophets of old enabling them to see and understand spiritual things and to testify to the truth of His word. David the prophet stated: “The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and His word was in my tongue.” (2 Samuel 23:2) And in the book of Micah it is stated: “But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.” Micah 3:8.

An interesting incident that illustrates the transformation that occurs in the lives of ordinary people when they are empowered by the Holy Spirit was when Elijah was translated and his servant Elisha was commissioned by God to continue the work. The Bible shows that when Elijah was taken up by the whirlwind, the Holy Spirit fell on Elisha. From then on, Elisha started demonstrating the power of God. The Bible says that “when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him”. (2 Kings 2: 9-15) What the sons of the prophets meant was that God Almighty had empowered Elisha to do His work as He had used Elijah.

Right from ancient times, God Almighty had purposed to send Jesus Christ to this earth and to endow him with His Holy Spirit to enable him proclaim the truth and righteousness of God as had never been done by any man. Thus, in Isaiah 11:2 it is stated that: “...the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD”. The works Jesus Christ would do by the power of God are spelt out in greater detail in Isaiah 61:1-3, which says: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God ...” When Jesus Christ went into the Synagogue in Nazareth, he was given the book of the prophet Isaiah from where he read this particular prophecy and affirmed that it referred to him. He stated: “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears”. (Luke 4:16-21) The anointing of Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit took place at the time of His baptism in River Jordan when it descended on him in the form of a dove. (Matthew 3:16,17) In the words of Apostle John, the Holy Spirit was given to Jesus Christ “without measure”. - John 3:34

When his earthly ministry was coming to an end, Jesus Christ encouraged his immediate disciples, the apostles with the promise to send them the Holy Spirit, which he called the Comforter, or the Spirit of truth. In John 14:26 it is written: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:16-18; 16:13) That the Holy Spirit is personified, does not mean that it is a person. Personification is just a literary device that ascribes human characteristics to a non-living object. The point is made clearer in chapter 15 verse 26 where Jesus Christ, just before his death told the apostles: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me."

Restating his promise to the apostles, Jesus Christ told them: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit) is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) This promise of Jesus Christ to the 12 apostles fulfilled on the day of Pentecost following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which descended on the apostles as cloven tongues of fire. - Acts 2:1-41.

The gift of anointing of the Holy Spirit enables those of the apostles' class to be taught and directed by God in spirit. They need not go to seminaries to learn the Bible. (Isaiah 54:13; Ezekiel 3:1-3; Galatians 1:11-14; Revelation 10:8-11) Apostle John stated: "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." - 1 John 2:27

### **"Other Sheep"**

However, it is not only the apostles who have the spirit of God. While the apostles, known as the "Little Flock" have the spirit of anointing, the vast majority of the worshippers of God who constitute the "Other Sheep", (John 10:16), also have the spirit of God, though not that of anointing. One who has the spirit of God will show what St. Paul called the fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5:22,23 and Ephesians 5:9. These are marks of true discipleship which practically demonstrates that such a person is a true Christian. It could therefore be understood why David the prophet prayed: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." - Psalm 51:10, 11.

At any rate, no one can serve God without having His spirit, hence St. Paul said: "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Romans 8:9) As our Lord Jesus Christ said, God will not fail to give the Holy Spirit to those who call on him, day and night. Luke 11:13.

It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that people are able to accept the truth as to be converted to the true faith. (Job 32:8) The case of Lydia, a seller of purple, "whose heart the Lord opened" to accept the truth preached by St. Paul at Philippi, is very striking. (Acts 16:12-15) Hence St. Paul stated: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." - 1 Corinthians 2:14.



## **Sin against the Holy Spirit**

During his earthly ministry, Jesus Christ spoke of sin against the Holy Spirit when he stated: "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit) shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." (Matthew 12:31, 32) Another rendition of the same episode in the account of Mark reads thus: "Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit." - Mark 3:28-30. Sin against the Holy Spirit is deliberate opposition to the work of God by one who has already received the knowledge of the truth. It is wilful or deliberate sin which Apostle John said was "sin unto death". (1 John 5:15, 16) Such will not receive forgiveness. On this score St. Paul stated: "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" - Hebrews 10:26-29. See also Hebrews 6:4-6; 2 Peter 2:20-22.

What has been stated in this sermon is the truth about the Holy Spirit. We believe those who have read it with open minds will appreciate the points made for their blessings and salvation in the end by the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **The Doctrine of Ancestral Curses - the Bible view**

### **Vol. 3 No. 25**

The belief that people's misfortunes are due to curses they inherited from their forefathers is fast gaining popularity among a growing number of churches in Africa and other parts of the world. Consequently, millions of professed Christians are flocking to pastors for deliverance from perceived "ancestral curses". Since Christians are to be guided by the words of God in the Holy Bible and not by the precepts of men, we must seek the guidance of the Scriptures in order to be on safe grounds on all issues of doctrine.

Writing on the issue of ancestral curses, Mr. Opoky Onyinah, stated in the "Cyberjournal For Pentecostal-Charismatic Research", published in the internet, that ancestral curse is "the belief that the consequences of the sins committed by the progenitors are recurrent in their family lines". He quoted leading advocates of this doctrine such as Dickason, Kraft and Hagin, as asserting that virtually all Africans inherit curses because their forefathers served demons or fallen angels who, after they were expelled from heaven, inhabited rivers, seas, mountains, rocks, trees and possessed human beings.

A booklet entitled 371 Personal Deliverance Prayers written by Evangelist Paul G. O. Moses, contains prayers against lineage curses, premature deaths in the family, divorces, poverty, accidents, frequent breakdown of marriages, abnormal behaviour, etc. It is said that at present, several churches include "deliverance" programmes in their activities "since failure to do so amounts to losing members to churches that include such activities".

Mr. Sunday Agang, writing in Christianity Today magazine, published on the net, stated that during a typical mass deliverance service, people are asked to form queues at which time some pastors sell special canes "that can slay demons".

This belief in ancestral curses has become quite widespread. It would be recalled that due to their belief in ancestral curses, five youths from Malawi, in early September this year, threw themselves into a fire after saying their night prayers. It was a bizarre case of mass suicide. Their father told a local newspaper that when he noticed his children's strange behaviours recently, he complained to local authorities that the children had established a strange church in his house and that they commenced their prayers around 10.00 p.m. each day. He had tried stopping them without success. On that fateful night, the youths, in the course of praying, made fire with some household items which they had soaked in petrol. At a stage they took off their clothes and jumped into the fire holding copies of the Bible. Three of them died on the spot but two were rescued and taken to a local hospital.

The young men were said to have acted on the advice of a local pastor who told them that their parents were responsible for their joblessness and their not getting married. He advised them to burn the items in their home because that was where the parents hid their magic. The village head, blamed the churches, whom he said were misleading the people for this horrible incident. He promised to summon the religious

leaders in the area so that they could explain “what type of worshipping this is”. The Guardian Thursday September 16, 2010, page 68.

The belief in ancestral curses is so prevalent that church leaders have devised elaborate prayers for their followers to overcome its hold on them. Dr. Opal Reddin of the Central Bible College, Springfield, Missouri, in his work *The false theory of generational curses*, believers are advised not only to reject and cancel all demonic working that has been passed on to them by ancestors but to command every familiar spirit that is in or around them ‘to go to the pit and to remain there until the Day of Judgement’ .

We must point out that no human being has any power to command a spirit to do anything, much more to command the spirit to go into the deep. Spirit creatures are far more powerful than human beings and only God can punish or destroy them. (Psalm 103:20; Matthew 8:29) The best one can do is to pray to God through Jesus Christ for protection from the devil and his agents. See Hebrews 2:14,15; John 8:31,32,36.

### **Misapplied Texts**

Writing in the book *How to cast out demons and break curses* Bill Suritzky, reputed to be a “worldwide evangelist” made reference to Exodus 20:1-5 which states among other things, “...Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.” See also Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; etc.

This text in no way supports the belief in ancestral curses. What it means is that it is the children who do iniquity like their fathers, and show hatred for God by not keeping His commandments that He punishes. This is clearly signified by the expression “of them that hate me”. Logically therefore, if the children do not follow the evil ways of their parents, God will not punish them. Children whose parents were working contrary to the will of God should therefore be taught to turn to righteousness so as to be blessed by God rather than being told they are suffering for their parents' sins. What we should understand is that God will never punish children for the sins of their parents because that will be contrary to divine justice. The Bible says: “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” - Deuteronomy 32:4.

Writing on this point, Dr. Reddin, stated: “To be a believer is to be blessed, and all curse is revoked. No one can bless whom God has cursed, and no one can curse whom God has blessed”. Stanley Horton, a theologian, responding to the question as to whether a Christian needs to do something about breaking a generational curse, replied, among other things, thus: “The word hate in the Hebrew is a participle indicating characteristic or continuous action. Thus, the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who keep on hating God reap a cumulative effect of God's judgement. On the other hand, those who turn from hatred of God and choose to love Him reap something far greater. They become part of a line that reaps the benefits of God's love

on a thousand generations of godly people who preceded them. Those loving God will not suffer any judgement or curse from what their parents or ancestors did.”

Another text some cite to support the doctrine of ancestral curses is the belief among the Jews of old that “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?” (Ezekiel 18:2) In other words, they believed that the sins of their fathers were visited upon the children, independent of the moral conduct of the latter. It is important to note that God rebuked the Jews for such belief as He does not deal with men in that way. Hence in verses 3 and 4 God stated: “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” (See also verse 20)

The matter is further clarified in the succeeding verses: “If a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right ... he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD. ..Now, lo, if he beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like, ... he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live. (Ezekiel 18: 5-9, 14-17) The passage continues in verse 19 thus: “ Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live”.

Furthermore, the law of God in Deuteronomy 24:16 says: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither the children for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin". If God Almighty says children cannot inherit the sins of their parents, who are human beings to propagate a contrary doctrine? It is therefore obvious that the belief in ancestral curses is certainly not from God.

## **Examples**

It was because of the understanding that children should not be punished for the sins of their fathers that King Amaziah, while dealing with those who killed his father, Joash, did not kill their children. - 2 Kings 14:5,6.

To show that each person bears responsibility for his own actions, God accepted Ruth the Moabitess into the congregation of Israel, such that King David and our Lord Jesus Christ came from her lineage, even though God had declared that: "No Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation" - Deuteronomy 23:3

Another point to note is that some difficulties people face today are not of their own making but are due to the oppression of the devil. A case in point is that of the man born blind as recorded in the book of St. John. When the disciples of Jesus Christ asked him whether he was in that state because of his sin or that of his parents, Jesus said no, showing that it was the devil that put him in that condition but God allowed it because He would later manifest His grace on him. - John 9:1-3. See also 1 Peter 5:6-9.

However, granted that the devil frequently interferes in the affairs of men, it should be pointed out that the doctrine of ancestral curses is thriving because a number of people do not want to take responsibility for their wrong actions. Rather they always want to place the blame elsewhere. For instance, some people are lazy, they waste money on personal pleasures and neglect their basic needs and they fail to plan for their future. But instead of examining themselves and putting their houses in order, by working hard, living according to their means, saving for the future with faith in God, they cover up their mistakes by blaming their woes on ancestral curses. The Bible says: "The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason."- Proverbs 26:13,15,16.

### **Freedom of Christ**

Those who have come to Christ must understand that they have been freed from enslavement to superstitions and fears and had been delivered into what St. Paul called "the glorious liberty of the children of God". They should therefore not allow themselves to be brought again into bondage through belief in ancestral curses. (Romans 8:21; Galatians 5:18; 1 Corinthians 2:18) Jesus Christ stated: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, 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." (John 8:31,32) And in verse 36 he stated "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Those who believe they are under the protection of God and still fear ancestral curses as to be easily deceived into spending large sums of money for prayers to break such so-called curses are guilty of faithlessness. St. Paul warned: "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" (Galatians 4:8, 9) Indeed, true Christians must "refuse profane and old wives' fables" and false teachers who through covetousness shall with feigned words seek to make merchandise of them. 1 Timothy 4:7; 4:4; 2 Peter 2:1-3.

From all that had been said in this sermon, it is clear that those who love the truth and desire the salvation of God must reject the doctrine of ancestral curses. Rather, they should give themselves to righteousness and look to God always Who has promised to guide and protect His children and to reward everyman according to his works. - Jeremiah 17: 10; 32:18,19; Matthew 16:27.